PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY

SUPPORTING HOUSE BILL 1928 - RELATING TO A RIGHT TO PARENT FOR BLIND PERSONS

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Representative John M. Mizuno, Chair

Representative Bertrand Kobayashi, Vice Chair

Tuesday, February 6, 2018

8:30 AM

Conference Room 329

State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street

To the House Committee on Health & Human Services:

Mahalo for taking the time to hear this bill, which addresses one of the most pressing civil rights issues of today in Hawaii. In our state, blind people do not currently have the right to parent children, and I respectfully request that this right be established. I am extremely grateful to Chair Mizuno for introducing this bill, demonstrating a commitment to civil rights and protecting families in Hawaii.

When new parents meet their new baby in the delivery room, it is always a powerful emotional experience. For blind parents, there are extra emotions, which are not inherent consequences of blindness. Blind parents in Hawaii face the reality that their child can legally be taken away from them at birth and placed in the care of the state, simply because they are blind.

When parents take their children to a doctor’s office for a regular checkup or maybe a sick visit, the results of the visit can always create emotions. For blind parents in Hawaii, these visits often entail interrogation from allied health professionals and social workers, who often do not believe that a blind parent can raise a child safely and effectively. A sighted parent has the privilege of being able to leave when it’s time to go, but a blind parent must face the gatekeeper, who might not let them leave.

Adoption and foster care programs are also potential ways of building a family. For blind prospective parents in Hawaii, blindness can be used to deny them the opportunity to serve as foster parents or adopt a child. The parents and children alike can benefit from having an ohana if we let them.

In family law proceedings, for blind parents in Hawaii, courts can determine that a blind parent is unfit for custody rights without proving anything beyond blindness. A sighted parent has an unfair and baseless advantage over a blind parent in a process which is supposed to be fair. This judgment is flawed. Custody decisions should be carefully examined in many dimensions, but eyesight is irrelevant.

Daily lives of sighted people do not require them to understand how blind people function, but this should not lead to prejudiced assumptions about what blind people can and cannot do. Blind people have been raising children forever, and I respectfully ask you to give them/us the right to continue.

Sincerely,

Name

Address