



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the Joint
House & Senate Committees on Human Services
October 23, 2009 @ 2:00 p.m.

by
John Morton
Vice President for Community Colleges, University of Hawai'i

Joint Informational Briefing for the Purpose of Reviewing Services for Individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deaf-Blind Under the Department of Human Services

Chairs Mizuno, Chun Oakland, Vice Chairs Brower, Ihara, and Members of the Committees:

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

On behalf of Kapi'olani Community College (Kapi'olani) and the programs that serve the majority of deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind individuals from Hawai'i who attend college, we are in favor of restoring positions within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)-Deaf Services Section (DSS). Kapi'olani has enjoyed a positive and long-standing relationship with DSS and our students have received phenomenal support from them. Diminishing the number of the service providers housed within DSS will diminish the number of services that unit provides. People will not be better served by these actions and the results could be disastrous. Therefore to avoid these consequences and continue the Section's success, it must be maintained with a *full*, qualified staff and supervisor. We believe it is imperative to ensure that all the deaf services' positions be reinstated and remain fully funded for the following reasons.

Communication and Expertise

Deaf and deaf-blind people have unique communication needs. The current DSS supervisor and staff recognize these needs and are able to successfully provide complete access to their services through direct communication. The DSS staffs are deaf and hard-of-hearing people who are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL), understand the deaf culture and are members of the deaf community themselves. They are flexible communicators who are capable of matching the varied linguistic needs of their deaf, deaf-blind and hard-of-hearing clients. And, they are equally effective working with deaf clients and hearing employers.

Unlike other DVR units, the DSS supervisor maintains a full caseload and continuously provides direct services. There is no other supervisor in Hawai'i who is neither as highly qualified nor has served deaf, deaf-blind and hard-of-hearing clients for as many years

as she. It would be inappropriate and fiscally irresponsible to move a supervisor or staff members from other sections to DSS who are not fluent in ASL or experienced working with deaf clients. Such a move would necessitate regularly hiring professional ASL/English interpreters and that would be quite costly. Also, given the unabated shortage of qualified interpreters, clients may end up unserved because they will be unable to communicate with the DVR staff.

Client Success

The DSS supervisor and staff were selected because of their understanding of deaf community members and belief in their clients' potential, whether they are transitioning to college or preparing for work. Kapi'olani students and other DSS clients have thrived for these reasons. Unfortunately funding cuts are already affecting students, hindering their ability to be successful and putting their educational and career goals in jeopardy. An Order of Selection has been imposed resulting in the denial of students who are qualified to enter Gallaudet University or continue to attend Kapi'olani. Without full funding and the support of qualified DSS staff, the long-range effects may be people who are under-employed and possibly unemployable.

Given the above justifications, we appeal to your collective wisdom to restore the funding for these crucial positions within DVR's Deaf Services Section, maintain its viability and success serving people who are deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing.

Mahalo nui loa.

Jan L. Fried, Professor and Coordinator
American Sign Language/Interpreter Education Program
Kapi'olani Community College