

HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 411 HONOLULU, HI 96813 · PHONE: 586-8636 FAX: 586-8655 TDD: 568-8692

February 24, 2021
Videoconference, 9:45 a.m.

To: The Honorable Karl Rhoads, Chair
The Honorable Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: Liann Ebesugawa, Chair
and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

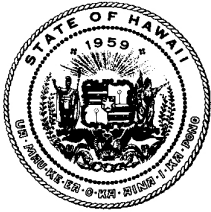
Re: S.B. No. 537

The Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) has enforcement jurisdiction over Hawai‘i’s laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and access to state and state funded services. The HCRC carries out the Hawai‘i constitutional mandate that no person shall be discriminated against in the exercise of their civil rights. Art. I, Sec. 5.

S.B. No. 537 would add a new section to Chapter 1 of the Hawai‘i Revised Statutes which would recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary and cultural heritage. Just as is the case with languages that are characteristic of ancestry or national origin, ASL is a language that is closely tied to culture and identity.

Over 40 US states recognize ASL to varying degrees, from a foreign language for school credits to the official language of that state's deaf population, with several enacting legislation similar to S.B. No. 537.

It is important to recognize that ASL is a distinct language and not just translated English, but a language with its own culture. **The HCRC supports S.B. No. 537.**



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
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February 24, 2021

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Senate Bill 537 – Relating to American Sign Language

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 537 relating to American Sign Language (ASL), which recognizes ASL as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

ASL is the primary language of many persons who are deaf or hard of hearing in the United States, including residents of Hawaii, and is often their preferred method of communicating effectively. Even though it has been in existence for over 200 years, recognition of ASL as a full-fledged language did not take place until 1960. Beforehand, ASL was erroneously viewed as a pantomime and a poor substitute for spoken speech. Today, over a dozen states have fully recognized ASL under state law. Despite this, stigmas and misperceptions associated with ASL persist. Recognizing ASL will go a long way in creating more equitable access, including in employment, public awareness, and civic participation. We strongly urge that you move this bill forward.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director

SB-537

Submitted on: 2/22/2021 8:10:07 PM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2021 9:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Vesta Morris	Testifying for MAUI DEAF FRIENDS	Support	No

Comments:

February 24, 2021

The Honorable Karl Rhoad

Chair

Senate Committee on Judiciary

Hawaii State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street, Room 204

Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Re: Chair Rhoads and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

ALOHA, My name is Vesta Morris, and I support Senate Bill 537 - Relating to American Sign Language (ASL) which recognizes ASL as a fully developed, autonomus, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

I am Deaf and have been using ASL my whole life. I attended and graduated from the Hawaii School for the Deaf and Blind (HSDB) . ASL is my native language and is how many Deaf people communicate and have our own culture. I am also a president of the Maui Deaf Friends. I helped Maui Deaf community people to learn social and enjoyed their own independent living.

I urge you to recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a natural language that has its own syntax, grammar, and cultural heritage in Hawaii by passing this bill.

Mahalo for the opportunity to tesify.

Respectfully,

Vesta Morris, President

Maui Deaf Friends

SB-537

Submitted on: 2/20/2021 9:21:55 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2021 9:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Eva Momosea	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha Chair Rhoads and the committees,

My name is Eva Silva-Ewan. I live in Honolulu. I am in support of this bill. American Sign Language should be recognized in Hawaii so we can enjoy the language other than English.

I am a Native Hawaiian. Hawaiian is recognized as an official language in Hawaii. When I attend to Native Hawaiian events that are spoken in Hawaiian, I have hard time obtaining an ASL interpreter that can translate from Hawaiian to American Sign Language and American Sign Language to Hawaiian.

Passing this bill is one step ahead in making changes and expand training programs where Native Hawaiian Culture and Language can be appreciated through American Sign Language.

Please pass this bill.

Mahalo,

Eva Silva-Ewan

SB-537

Submitted on: 2/20/2021 9:25:27 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2021 9:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Dane Silva-Ewan	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Dear Chair Rhoads and the committees,

My name is Dane Silva-Ewan. I am 14 years old. I live in Honolulu. I support this bill.

Dane Silva-Ewan

Honolulu, HI

SB-537

Submitted on: 2/20/2021 9:32:57 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2021 9:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Darlene Ewan	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Dear Chair Rhoads and the committees,

My name is Darlene Ewan. I live in Honolulu. I support this bill as it has significant impact to the state. American Sign Language has impact on Tourism, Education, Health, Human Services, and many State agencies. In fact, ASL is used everyday for different purposes.

Please pass this important bill.

Mahalo,

Darlene Ewan

SB-537

Submitted on: 2/20/2021 5:38:40 PM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2021 9:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Amanda Shaw	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha Committee,

I write in strong support of this measure. Adopting ASL as an official language will make a huge difference to our deaf communities. I come from a family with deaf relatives and enabling wider access to signing resources would make a big difference to people like my cousin and her children and help to normalize this language as part of our daily lives.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Amanda

Dr. Amanda Shaw, PhD

Waimanalo, HI 96795

TO: Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair

Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Judiciary

RE: SB 537, Relating to American Sign Language.

FROM: Mariah Maniulit, Thompson School of Social Work Graduate Student

DATE: February 24, 2021 at 9:45 am via Video Conference

Good morning Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and members of the Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Mariah Maniulit and I am currently a Masters of Social Work Candidate at University of Hawai`i's School of Social Work. Today, I declare this testimony in **support** of SB537.

According to a study reviewed by the Comprehensive Service Center for People who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deaf-Blind, one in a thousand individuals is born deaf. To add on to that statistic, our growing aging community is also faced with issues with hearing as a symptom of the aging process. The recognition of American Sign Language (ASL) as a “fully developed, autonomous, natural language” within the public will allow for more resources to be applied in this language as well as an indirect acknowledgement of this community. Working within the Gerontological community, it is found that American Sign Language is becoming an effective form of communication between care providers and older adults as well.

I appreciate your time and consideration with this testimony in support of SB537 as well as your thoughtful attention to the safety and wellbeing of the deaf and blind community.

Respectfully,
Mariah Maniulit
Masters of Social Work Candidate
(808)-398-7417

P.O. Box 4777
Kaneohe, HI 96744

February 24, 2021

The Honorable Karl Rhoads
Chair
Senate Committee on Judiciary
Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street, Room 204
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Re: Support of Senate Bill 537 - Relating to American Sign Language (ASL)

Dear Chair Rhoads and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

As a member of the Deaf and Blind Task Force, person who is hard of hearing, credentialed ASL Interpreter, and disability advocate, who has worked with the Deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind population since 1979, I support SB 537 – Relating to American Sign Language. Any spoken language is basically what we learn from our parents and environment and is how we communicate with others around us. Experts in linguistics define language as having its own syntax, grammar, vocabulary. Additionally, experts in anthropology also define language as providing a cultural basis for a group of people.

In light of what these experts tell us, American Sign Language (ASL) meets all of these criteria and much more. ASL is similar to spoken languages in that it is not static, but changes over time with new ideas and technology. For example, when I first learned ASL, there was no sign for COVID-19, because it had not been identified at that time. Now with the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a sign developed for it. It was ASL, but with signs for concepts that matched specific things of importance in that region. Having lived in several different places on the Mainland, I have seen many variations of ASL, comparable to dialects of American English spoken around the country. Here in Hawaii, there is also a Hawaiian Sign Language (used by a few older Deaf people), that is being taught by more experienced Deaf people who grew up in Hawaii. However, if we don't preserve that, it may vanish.

Please recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a natural language with its own syntax, grammar, and cultural heritage in Hawaii by passing this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,



Debra L. Jackson, M.S.
Member
Deaf and Blind Task Force

SB-537

Submitted on: 2/22/2021 5:34:26 PM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2021 9:45:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Cheryl Mizusawa	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

February 24, 2021

The Honorable Karl Rhoads

Chair

Senate Committee on Judiciary

Hawaii State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street, Room 204

Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Re: Support of Senate Bill 537 - Relating to American Sign Language

Dear Chair Rhoads and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Cheryl (Mizusawa) Shimizu, and I support Senate Bill 537 - Relating to American Sign Language (ASL) which recognizes ASL as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

I am Deaf and have been using ASL my whole life. I attended and graduated from the Hawaii School for the Deaf and the Blind. ASL is my native language and is how many Deaf people communicate and have our own culture. I am also a volunteer teacher at Lanakila Health Center. They have senior citizens there who are interested in learning ASL so they can communicate with Deaf people in the community.

I urge you to recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a natural language that has its own syntax, grammar, and cultural heritage in Hawaii by passing this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Cheryl (Mizusawa) Shimizu

Deaf Advocate