



HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

KOMIKINA PONO KĪWILA O HAWAI‘I

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

Wednesday, February 15, 2023
Rm. 325, 2:00 p.m.

To: The Honorable David A. Tarnas Chair
The Honorable Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs

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

Re: H.B. No. 834, H.D.1

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.

H.B. No. 834 , H.D.1, 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 U.S. 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 H.B. No. 834, H.D.1.

It is important to recognize that ASL is a distinct language and not just translated English, but a language with its own culture and identity. **The HCRC supports H.B. No. 834, H.D.1.**



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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February 15, 2023

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

House Bill 834 HD1 – Relating to American Sign Language

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 834 HD1 – Relating to American Sign Language.

American Sign Language is a complex visual-spatial language that is a linguistically complete and natural language. With signing, the brain processes linguistic information through the eyes. The shape, placement, and movement of the hands, as well as facial expressions and body movements, all play important parts in conveying information. American Sign Language is the backbone of American Deaf Culture.

Pursuant to the goal of increasing the number of competent sign language interpreters in the State, DCAB issues the Hawaii State Sign Language Interpreter Credential (HSSLIC) to interpreters who pass the Hawaii Quality Assurance System (HQAS) test or who possess a valid credential issued by an entity recognized by DCAB. Sign language interpreters interpret between two distinct languages – a sign language and a spoken language – by conveying equivalent and conceptually correct messages from one language to another. House Bill 834 HD 1 would recognize that American Sign Language is a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director

HB-834-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/13/2023 7:28:30 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/15/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louis Erteschik	Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We are in support.

HB-834-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/13/2023 3:51:08 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/15/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ed Chevy	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha! My name is Ed Chevy. I am Deaf citizen of the United States of America. I totally support HB834 (Relating to ASL). I would like to testify in ASL with a sign language interpreter to explain why ASL is extremely important for the Deaf Americans. I grew up in a Deraf family and I had 100% access to communication. Communciation is power. The power is ASL. I attended a Deaf school, Deaf college, and involved in a Deaf community. I believe very important for us because language is born on the face and sign language is vital in the 21st century. Mahalo nui

E!

HB-834-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/14/2023 10:57:12 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/15/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Juanita Kawamoto Brown	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Please support this bill.

mahalo nui loa,

Juanita Mahienaena Brown Kawamoto

February 15, 2023

Submitted to the Hawaii State Senate
COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Honorable Representative David A. Tarnas Chair
Honorable Representative Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair

Re: HB 834 HD1, RELATING TO AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Dear Chairperson Tarnas, Vice Chair Takayama and Members,

I would like to enthusiastically support HB 834 HD1, Relating to American Sign Language.

This legislation is very important to acknowledge American Sign Language (ASL) as a bonafide language equal to all spoken languages of other cultures. I first learned ASL in 1975 as a counselor for the Hawaii Division of Vocational Rehabilitation assigned to work with Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind people with disabilities. It took me perhaps five (5) years to converse in ASL with individuals and families using ASL. I realized that ASL is an effective way of communicating clear and effective concepts and feelings.

While American Sign Language is a visual language it has its own grammar, syntax and structure with specific use of space. Like accents of spoken languages, ASL has a Hawaiian Deaf/hard of hearing signing culture shared by the local community with nuances specific to where individuals grew up.

I heartily support HB 834 HD1 to recognize ASL as a fully developed language which is long overdue. Kindly pass this important bill.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Eleanor Macdonald, M.Ed., CRC (ret.)
District 13

HB-834-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/14/2023 10:39:16 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/15/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eileen Chiwa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Eileen Chiwa and I am Deaf. I frequently use American Sign Language, known as "ASL" to communicate with the Deaf as well as with the Deaf Community. Therefore, I support ASL as the official language.

ASL is very essential since the Deaf as well as the Deaf Community can communicate and understand each other. Every foreign language (English, Japanese, Spanish, French, etc.) has its own, like how it is spoken and written and is used by people who can hear; but ASL has its own visual language, using just hand signs, facial expressions and body movements. And it is widely used by the Deaf as well as the Deaf Community. It is even used by some people who can hear but are stroke victims.

Please support American Sign Language as the official language of, for and by the Deaf. Thank you very much for your attention to my testimony.

HB-834-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/14/2023 1:03:27 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/15/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lisa Tom	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, as a Deaf advocate would like to enthusiastically support HB834 HD1, Relating to American Sign Language (ASL) as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage because it will build a bridge between 2 worlds with equal rights in communication, education and work place for all individuals as a member of a large society.

ASL will provide a better full accessibility to everyday communication and educational services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind individuals in the Public and the Government institutions. It is also applying to people with disabilities and general for different communication needs. ASL demonstrates a unique and distinct language with its own history, culture, education and tradition as well to preserve the important aspect of their Deaf America culture and Deaf education. ASL will increase public awareness and better understanding of Deaf Community and their needs to be involved in the Public and education.

We need your legislative support to recognize ASL as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own distinct grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Lisa Tom

JAN L. FRIED • American Sign Language/English Interpreter

• RID Certified-IC, CI, CT • Educator • Consultant •

14 February 2023

The House of Representatives
Thirty-Second Legislature, 2023, State of Hawai'i
Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs
Rep. David Tarnas Chair
Rep. Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair

Hearing: 15 February 2023 at 2:00PM, Conference Room 325

Testimony in Support of HB834, HDI-Relating to American Sign Language

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair and JHA Committee Members,

I am an American Sign Language/English interpreter and a professor of American Sign Language—it is without hesitation that I support the formal recognition of American Sign Language (ASL) as a complete and living language. Like *all* the other languages widely used and recognized in Hawai'i, ASL has its own grammar, vocabulary, vibrant literature, and long-standing cultural heritage. In 1965 linguistic bodies officially accepted that ASL met all the standards of a language. Hawai'i should too.

By recognizing ASL you:

- Acknowledge and validate its legion of users. According to numerous accounts, ASL is the 3rd or 4th most studied language in the US. Deaf Community members see themselves as part of a cultural and linguistic minority that has experienced historical linguistic and educational oppression nearly identical to that experienced by Kanaka Maoli who use 'Olelo Hawai'i.
- Recognize the right Deaf people have to communicate in a language that is the primary language of instruction at Schools for the Deaf (including the HI School for the Deaf and the Blind) and in programs supporting Deaf students. It is the predominant sign language used in the US, Canada and throughout the Pacific. Consistent access to information in a preferred language encourages people to participate and be included in all aspects of their lives. Representation matters.
- Add Hawai'i to the list of 45 other states that formally recognize ASL in their state laws. It is time. The HIDOE already includes ASL on its roster of World Languages and provides graduating high school seniors the opportunity to earn the Seal of Biliteracy in ASL. The University of Hawai'i System has offered ASL since the mid-1990's as one of the languages students can study to satisfy their language requirement for their degree.

I appreciate this opportunity to encourage the committees to support HB834, HDI. Your actions will have a profound and positive impact.

Respectfully,
Jan L. Fried

Jan L. Fried, CI and CT
Nationally Certified ASL/English Interpreter

Testimony of Fanny WT Yeh

Dear Rep. David Tarnas,

I am writing to give my full support for the Bill HB834 HD1 relating to recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

Here are the reasons for my testimony as follows:

- 1) Accessibility: ASL as an official language will provide a better full accessibility to everyday communication and educational services for Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing and DeafBlind individuals in the Public and the Government institutions.
- 2) Language Preservation: ASL as an official language will demonstrate an unique and distinct language with its own history, culture, education and tradition as well to preserve the important aspect of their Deaf America culture and Deaf education.
- 3) Validation of a Cultural Identity: ASL as an official language will lead a better self-confident identity for Deaf people as an independent individual in their linguistic and cultural minority.
- 4) Deaf Community: ASL as an official language will support Deaf Community and their rights to various services of accessibility and to obtain full information in a language they know and understand. ASL will bring better understanding, greater knowledge and deeper respect for their linguistic heritage.
- 5) Deaf Awareness: ASL as an official language will increase public awareness and better understanding of Deaf Community and their needs to be involved in the Public and education.

I, as a Deaf individual, support this Bill because it will build a bridge between 2 worlds with equal rights in education and communication for all individuals as a member of a large society.

Thanks for your full support for this Bill.

Sincerely yours and mahalo,

Fanny WT Yeh

Deaf dancer-director/artist/small business Phone (text): (808)-807-7851

PETER L. FRITZ

T-MOBILE IP RELAY: (808) 568-0077

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THE THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 2023

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Testimony on H.B. 834 HD1

Hearing: February 15, 2023

RELATING TO AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Takayama and members of the Committee, my name is Peter Fritz. I am an individual with a hearing disability and I am testifying **in support** of H.B. 834 HD1.

This bill recognizes American Sign Language as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

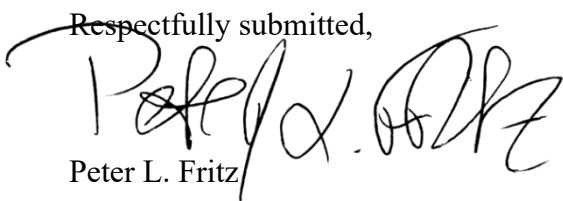
I offer the following reasons for my support of recognition of American Sign Language (ASL) as an official language:

1. **Support for the Deaf Community:** Recognizing ASL as an official language recognizes the Deaf community and their right to access services and information in a language they understand. ASL is used by a significant number of people in the state, and recognizing it as an official language would acknowledge and respect their linguistic heritage.
2. **Accessibility:** By recognizing ASL as an official language, the state can ensure that communication in public spaces and government institutions is accessible to the Deaf community.
3. **Validation of a cultural identity:** Recognizing ASL as an official language acknowledges the deaf community as a linguistic and cultural minority, and validates their identity.
4. **Cultural Preservation:** ASL is a unique and distinct language with its own history, culture, and traditions. Recognizing ASL as an official language helps preserve this important aspect of American culture.
5. **Increased Awareness:** Recognizing ASL as an official language can increase public awareness and understanding of the Deaf community and their needs, and foster a more inclusive society.

Overall, recognizing ASL as an official language can help support the rights and well-being of deaf and hard of hearing individuals and promote a more inclusive society. I have attached a list of states that have recognize ASL as an official language.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter L. Fritz", written over a horizontal line.

Peter L. Fritz

HB-834-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/14/2023 3:45:41 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/15/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dana Keawe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support.

HB-834-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/15/2023 1:19:22 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/15/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristine Pagano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this bill to add a new section to Chapter 1 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes which would recognize American Sign Language (ASL). Please change the Act effective date from June 30, 3000 to July 1, 2023. Deafness happens at any time from birth, accident, unforeseen health condition, and natural hearing loss from aging. ASL originated in the early 19th century, a natural and visual language that has its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary and cultural heritage that is communicated daily in education, news and events. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, parents and professionals use and communicate in ASL on a daily basis. Hawaii would be the first state to recognize ASL as an official language. Please support this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this late testimony.