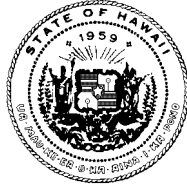


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'ŌKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'ŌKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'ŌKELE

March 9, 2024

TO: The Honorable Senator Glenn Wakai, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety & Intergovernmental and Military Affairs

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 2701 HD2 – RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES.**

Hearing: March 11, 2024, 3:00 p.m.
Conference Room 225, State Capitol & Video Conference

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this measure, provides comments, and defers to the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA), the Office of Language Access (OLA), and the Office of Community Services (OCS). DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace budget priorities requested in the executive budget.

PURPOSE: This bill appropriates funds to establish Limited English Proficiency Language Access Coordinator positions within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD2)

The Committee on Water & Land (HD1) amended the measure by:

- (1) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000, to encourage further discussion; and
- (2) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

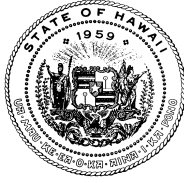
The Committee on Finance (HD2) amended the measure by:

- (1) Changing the number of Limited English Proficiency Language Access Coordinator positions to be established to an unspecified number; and
- (2) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

We learned during the COVID-19 pandemic response and again during the Maui Wildfire response that information needs to be available in real-time in multiple languages. Hawaii's rich and diverse multiethnic resident and visitor populations require that all emergency management information be translated, and interpreters made available during all stages of an emergency management incident, starting with preparation. During multiple emergency management incidents in the past few years, the leadership of the Office of Language Access and committed community providers have provided most of the language assistance services in the immediate aftermath and have had to cobble together resources and strategies to meet the needs of impacted residents. The Office of Community Services also funded a multilingual access line for Maui residents who needed interpreters.

Additional resources are needed for HIEMA, OLA, OCS, and community providers to maintain and build capacity for a robust communication strategy in the face of emergencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS**

1177 Alakea Street, Room B-100
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
Phone: (808) 586-8730 / Fax: (808) 586-8733
doh.ola@doh.hawaii.gov

In reply, please refer to:
File: 24-010

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107 HD2
RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES**

SENATOR GLENN WAKAI, CHAIR
SENATOR BRANDON J.C. ELEFANTE, VICE CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND
INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Hearing Date: 3/11/2024

Room Number: Conf. Room 225 &
Videoconference

- 1 **Fiscal Implications:** This measure may impact the priorities identified in the Governor's
- 2 Executive Supplemental Budget Request.
- 3 **Agency's Position:** The Office of Language Access (OLA) supports this measure, provided the
- 4 measure's passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities in the Governor's Executive
- 5 Supplemental Budget Request and defers to the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-
- 6 EMA) on implementation and resource needs.
- 7 **Purpose and Justification:** The purpose of this measure is to appropriate funds to establish the
- 8 position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within HI-EMA and declares that
- 9 the general fund expenditure ceiling is exceeded.
- 10 The Maui wildfires serve as a significant reminder to all of us that disasters and emergency
- 11 events can occur at any time with little or no warning. They also highlight the need for language
- 12 access within our diverse community in the state.
- 13 Hawaii is one of the most culturally diverse states and has one of the highest proportions of non-
- 14 English speakers in the nation. Many of these non-English speakers are immigrants and migrants
- 15 with limited English proficiency (LEP). According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018-2022
- 16 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, approximately 25.73%, or 351,542, of

1 Hawaii's residents aged 5 years and older speak a language other than English at home. Of these,
2 150,743, or 11.06%, indicated that they speak English "less than very well."

3 English proficiency, or the lack thereof, significantly impacts people's safety and wellness,
4 putting them at risk in situations where they are unable to understand written or verbal warnings
5 about dangerous conditions, impending severe weather, appropriate responses to emergency
6 sirens/warnings, and communication with authorities. Therefore, prominently identifying the
7 language access component as a key element in planning and public-facing activities is essential.

8 HI-EMA, as the coordinating agency for emergencies between federal and local agencies, is
9 tasked with a great responsibility in planning for and responding to both natural and human-
10 caused emergencies. Having a dedicated Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator
11 who understands the organizational structure and has expertise in emergency management can
12 enhance and expedite the communication of critical information to persons with LEP.

13 OLA is committed to continuing collaboration with HI-EMA and all state language access
14 coordinators in implementing language access obligations to ensure meaningful access for all
15 persons with LEP in our state.

16 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



KENNETH S. HARA
DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
KA 'OIHANA PILI KAUA
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
4204 DIAMOND HEAD ROAD
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96816-4420



STATE OF HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2107 HD2
RELATING TO EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC SAFETY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

MARCH 11, 2024

Aloha Chair Wakai, Vice-Chair Elefante, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express our **SUPPORT** of HB 2107 HD2.

The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency **fully supports** HB 2107 HD2 as a crucial measure to enhance our state's preparedness and response capabilities. Language barriers can significantly impede effective communication during emergencies, potentially putting lives at risk and hindering the delivery of essential services.

The devastating wildfire on Maui underscored the importance of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their language proficiency, have access to timely and accurate information during crises. By formalizing and expanding the language services provided by the Office of Language Access (OLA), this bill will help to streamline communication efforts and ensure that critical information is effectively disseminated to all members of our community.

I urge legislatures to prioritize the passage of this bill to better equip HI-EMA with the necessary tools and resources to effectively communicate with and support all members of our community during emergencies. This proactive measure will undoubtedly enhance our ability to protect and serve all residents and visitors of Hawai'i in times of crisis.

HI-EMA supports HB 2107 HD2 with the following conditions:

- Request that the position be a non-civil service position, which would allow for immediate hire and flexibility, ensuring that language services can be quickly mobilized to support emergency response efforts.
- This bill does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive budget.

We value the collaboration with OLA and recognize the importance of their services in ensuring effective and inclusive messaging for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2107 HD2.

James Barros: james.barros@hawaii.gov; 808-733-4300

HB-2107-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/11/2024 11:39:30 AM

Testimony for PSM on 3/11/2024 3:00:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angelina Mercado	Testifying for Hawaii State Coalition Against Domestic Violence	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

On behalf of HSCADV and our 28 member programs statewide, I write to support HB2107 which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. **During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance.** The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.

Sincerely,
Angelina Mercado, Executive Director



TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF H.B. 2107, HD2 RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

To: Charr Glen Wakai, Vice Chair Brandon J.C. Elefante, and Members of the Committee

From: The Hawai'i Friends of Civil Rights
Co-Chairs Amy Agbayani and Pat McManaman

The Hawai'i Friends of Civil Rights works to achieve equity, justice, inclusion, uphold civil rights, and eliminate discrimination. We stand in **Strong Support of HB2107, HD2.**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) advises that well-conceived and effectively delivered emergency messages can help ensure public safety, protect property, facilitate response efforts, elicit cooperation, instill public confidence, and help families reunite. FEMA also advises that all public messaging and communication should be accessible to populations with access and functional needs and populations with limited English proficiency (LEP).

Yet, in the face of well-established federal, state, and regulatory guidance and laws, the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HiEMA) failed to provide critical language access resources for Lahaina's LEP residents following the issuance of the emergency declaration. Tragically, the State's latest failure mirrors its failures during the COVID-19 emergency.

The law couldn't be clearer. Section 308 of the Stafford Act requires entities receiving funding from FEMA to create a language access plan that: 1) identifies LEP populations, 2) incorporates those populations into the disaster management planning process, 3) ensures that these populations can access disaster relief information, and 4) develops and maintains a database identifying qualified language access assistance programs that could be activated in an emergency. FEMA also provides guidance, training, and funding to assist state and local government emergency management agencies with these compliance issues.

A language access coordinator will help to assure that in any future disaster, HiEMA will: 1) have a plan in place, 2) provide interpreters on the ground as needed, 3) translate vital information related to the disaster and, in collaboration with the Governor who is charged with

coordinating the public release of information during emergencies, establish websites or other information portals that include English and translated vital information. Other agencies providing supplemental support materials, such as the Departments of Human Services, Health, and Labor would also post their translated documents to the same website as directed by the Governor.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this critically important measure.



TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB 2107 hd2 RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

March 11, 2024

The Hawai'i Friends of Civil Rights
Co-Chairs Amy Agbayani and Pat McManaman

Aloha

The Hawai'i Friends of Civil Rights works to achieve equity, justice, inclusion, uphold civil rights, and eliminate discrimination. We stand in **Strong Support of HB2107 hd2**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) advises that well-conceived and effectively delivered emergency messages can help ensure public safety, protect property, facilitate response efforts, elicit cooperation, instill public confidence, and help families reunite. FEMA also advises that all public messaging and communication should be accessible to populations with access and function needs and populations with Limited English proficiency (LEP). Yet, in the face of well-established federal, state, and regulatory guidance and laws, the State failed to provide critical language access resources for Lahania's LEP residents following the issuance of the emergency declaration. Tragically, the State's latest failure mirrors its failures during the COVID-19 emergency.

The law couldn't be clearer. Section 308 of the Stafford Act requires entities receiving funding from FEMA to create a language access plan that: 1) identifies LEP populations, 2) incorporates those populations into the disaster management planning process, 3) ensures that these populations can access disaster relief information, and 4) develops and maintains a database identifying qualified language access assistance programs that could be activated in an emergency. FEMA also provides guidance, training, and funding to assist state and local government emergency management agencies with these compliance issues.

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information portals that include English and translated vital information. Other agencies providing supplemental support materials, such as the Departments of Human Services, Health, and Labor would also post their translated documents to the same website as directed by the Governor.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this critically important measure.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES**

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY
AFFAIRS

Senator Glenn Wakai, Chair

Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: March 11, 2024

Dear Chair Wakai, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Coalition for Immigrant Rights (HCIR) **fully supports HB2107**, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance.

Establishing a Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator position within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency is not just a proactive step; it's a smart investment for Hawaii. While upfront costs may be associated with funding this position, the long-term benefits outweigh them. Without a designated coordinator, the state may find itself scrambling to secure interpreters and translate materials in multiple languages during a crisis, which can be time-consuming and expensive. Additionally, the lack of proper language support can lead to misunderstandings, delayed response efforts, and even legal liabilities.

By investing in a Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator now, Hawaii can save significant resources for the future. This coordinator can develop comprehensive language access plans, establish partnerships with language service providers, and ensure that essential information is readily available in multiple languages before disasters. This proactive approach



enhances the state's emergency preparedness and response capabilities and minimizes the financial burden associated with ad-hoc language assistance efforts.

Providing equal access to emergency services and resources for individuals with limited English proficiency is not just a matter of compliance; it's a matter of equity and safety. Prioritizing language access can better protect our communities and LEP population and ensure that everyone has the information and support they need to stay safe during emergencies.

Following the Maui wildfire, HCIR convened a Maui Emergency Response call with over 80 participants from immigrant-and-migrant-led organizations, community groups established as a response to the wildfire, and state and federal agencies to support and advocate for immigrant, migrant, and limited-English proficient survivors affected by the disaster. The meeting underscored the pressing need for language access. In response, an ad hoc committee was formed to work with various organizations to improve language access practices in response and recovery and ensure the community we are serving has equal access to navigating the available resources and assistance.

Before the Maui Wildfire, HCIR, Pacific Gateway Center, and other immigrant service providers collaborated to launch the Assisting Immigrants Deserving Equity (AIDE) cohort within the Office of Community Services-funded Immigrant Resource Center as part of our commitment to expand access and enhance support for the immigrant community in Hawai'i. When the Maui Wildfire occurred, we recognized an urgent need to redirect our efforts toward assisting the immigrant community in Maui. HCIR organized and conducted training sessions to establish a multilingual hotline. This hotline served as an effort for an equitable opportunity for recovery for individuals seeking assistance and resources in their native languages.

The absence of language interpreters and in-language public-facing materials after the Maui Wildfire was unnecessary. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic, proactive, and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Thank you for your support and consideration,

Maria Rallojaj

Policy and Communications Coordinator



PACIFIC GATEWAY CENTER

March 10, 2024

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES**

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Senator Glenn Wakai, Chair

Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: March 11, 2024, 3:00 PM

Dear Chair Wakai, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB2107, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Pacific Gateway Center is the designated Immigrant Resource Center for Maui (including Moloka'i and Lana'i), Kauai, and O'ahu. Inherent in this role is our commitment to alleviate barriers to language access that ensures our limited-English proficient community has equitable access to programs, services and opportunities. Our Hawaii Language Bank provides interpreters and translators to the community.

Our first-hand experiences with the immigrant community, coupled with valuable lessons learned following Covid-19 and the Maui fires, inform us that having a designated **point of contact** within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency to coordinate multiple language needs shifts the injustice that the linguistically vulnerable confront in need for accurate communications in times of emergencies.

Compliance obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, directs agencies to ensure meaningful access to information and provide language assistance services. Having an LEP Coordinator within HiEMA could lead to a coordinated, system-wide response with a protocol among public and private community stakeholders disseminating timely access to good and trusted information in times of disasters.

I strongly urge you to pass HB 2107 that assures all Hawai'i residents, including Limited English Proficiency individuals, have multilingual accessibility to State information.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to the successful passage of HB2107.

Mahalo for your support and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "M".

Matthew Johnson
Executive Director

HB-2107-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/10/2024 3:03:43 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/11/2024 3:00:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Agnes Malate	Testifying for FilCom CARES	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TO: Chair Glenn Wakai

Vice Chair Brandon Elefante

Members of the Senate Committee on Public Safety

and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs

FR: Agnes Malate, PhD

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2107

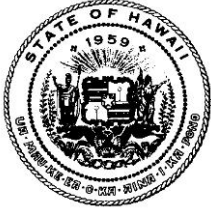
I am the Co-chair of FilCom CARES and am writing in strong support of HB 2107 to establish Limited English Proficiency Language Access Coordinator position within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA).

In the initial months when it became apparent that Filipinos were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, a group of over 25 Filipino leaders united to do something about it and collaborated to form FilCom CARES, a project of the Filipino Community Center (FilCom). FilCom CARES was the leading entity proactively working to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Filipino population in Hawai'i and continues to "grow a stronger and healthier Filipino community in Hawai'i through collaborative partnerships". Since November 2020, Filcom CARES has worked with the State DOH, community- and faith-based organizations, and University of Hawai'i at Mānoa faculty, staff, and students on Hawai'i, Kaula'i Maui, Molokai, and O'ahu islands on initiatives to assist Filipinos and other underserved communities through outreach and education, development of culturally and linguistically appropriate materials, dissemination of COVID-19 and other health and social services information on social media and traditional media, and establishment of channels of communication with government and community partners.

In the wake of the Maui wildfire, FilCom CARES helped in securing funding for multilingual community navigators to assist those impacted by the wildfire to seek assistance. Providing

information in languages that can be understood to those with limited English proficiency is critical to accessing government services and resources, especially in times of crises.

FilCom CARES urge you to pass HB 2107. Thank you for your consideration of this measures.



LATE

DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V) • TTY (808) 586-8162 • Fax (808) 586-8129

March 11, 2024

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

House Bill 2107 HD2 – Relating to Disaster Services

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) offers comments on House Bill 2107 HD2 – Relating to Disaster Services.

This bill would establish and fund limited English proficiency access coordinator positions within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency.

Effective communication is of the utmost importance during an emergency for deaf persons who communicate in American Sign Language (ASL). Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires effective communication for persons with disabilities. The title II ADA regulations state that “[a] public entity shall take appropriate steps to ensure that communications with applicants, participants, members of the public, and companions with disabilities are as effective as communications with others” (28 CFR 35.160)(a)(1)).

Therefore, DCAB requests the establishment and funding of an American Sign Language access coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency. This will help to ensure persons with hearing disabilities are provided emergency information in a timely manner.

Thank you for considering our position.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director

HB-2107-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/10/2024 4:20:31 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/11/2024 3:00:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bettina Mok	Testifying for The Legal Clinic	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee Chairs and Members:

HB2107 offers an important and unprecedented opportunity for Hawai'i to serve its significant multilingual community during and after emergencies, and to prevent further injustices which have plagued our limited English-speaking populations (LEPs) during recent disasters.

Not only would this be a game-changer for Hawai'i and the numerous nonprofits that have scrambled to fulfill this role during disasters, but it would be lifted as a model strategy on a national platform. A HIEMA language access coordinator could work with community service providers and faith-based groups year round to establish emergency response processes and resources for multilingual communities.

It is critical before, during, and after a disaster that all residents be enabled to understand the nature of the crisis, evacuation orders, and how to access essential food, shelter, and emergency medical care. According to statistics from the State's own Bureau of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (2016 report), 84% of foreign-born Hawai'i residents speak another language in their homes. Nearly one in five residents in Hawai'i is foreign-born.

HB2107 offers an opportunity for this Committee to be in the forefront of efforts in Hawai'i to address language barriers, and to ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies. The safety and security of all of our state's residents will benefit.

Thank you.



Testimony of **Lahaina Strong**
Before the Senate Committee on
Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs

In Consideration of House Bill No. 2107 HD2
RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES

To Chair Wakai, Vice Chair Elefante, and the honorable members of the committee,

We are writing on behalf of Lahaina Strong, an organization that was initially formed in 2018 following the Hurricane Lane fire in Lahaina and re-energized last year after the devastating Lahaina fires on August 8. Lahaina Strong has been at the forefront of relief and advocacy efforts, including initiating the "Fishing for Housing" camp, which has been in operation for over 17 weeks along Kaanapali Beach, highlighting the need for dignified housing for Lahaina fire victims. Our organization is the largest grassroots, Lahaina-based community organization, with over 20,000 supporters, engaged in emphasizing the importance of local voices and community-driven solutions.

Lahaina Strong stands in support of HB2107 HD2, which aims to address the critical issue of language access during emergencies, particularly for limited English proficient individuals in Hawaii.

Hawaii is home to a significant population of limited English-proficient individuals, comprising approximately one out of every nine residents. This diversity is what makes our state culturally unique with generational representation from multiple Pacific islands. These individuals face unique challenges during disasters, including difficulties understanding evacuation orders, accessing emergency medical care, and obtaining vital information from relief providers. Furthermore, the aftermath of disasters often presents additional barriers to accessing essential services and relief programs.

The need for improved language access was starkly highlighted during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire, where the absence of language interpreters at shelters left many

individuals without the support and information they desperately needed. It was only through the tireless efforts of Hawaii's professional and community interpreters, as well as the flexibility of non-profit organizations, that these needs were partially met.

The recent census data reveals that nearly half of Lahaina's residents are of Filipino descent. With such a significant portion of the community possibly facing language barriers, the lack of translation support during the wildfire aftermath was unacceptable. This omission placed wildfire survivors at an extreme disadvantage when trying to access vital assistance and support services.

By appropriating funds to establish limited English proficiency language access coordinators within the Hawaii emergency management agency, HB2107 HB2 takes a proactive step towards addressing these critical gaps in our emergency preparedness and response efforts.

Lahaina Strong stands in support of HB2107 HB2, in the hopes it will prioritize the establishment of language access coordinators within the Hawaii emergency management agency. By doing so, we can ensure that all residents, regardless of language proficiency, have equal access to lifesaving information and services during times of crisis.

Mahalo for your attention and commitment to the well-being of our community.

Sincerely,

Jordan Ruidas, Courtney Lazo, Pa'ele Kiakona

Lahaina Strong

KAIBIGAN NG LAHAINA

LATE



March 11, 2024

Sen. Glenn Wakai, Chair

Sen. Brandon J.C. Elefante, Vice-Chair

Members of the Senate Committee on Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs

Re: H.B. 2107 H.D. 2 – Relating to Disaster Services

Dear Chair Wakai, Vice-Chair Elefante and Members of the Committee on Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs,

Kaibigan ng Lahaina is a community organization established after the August 8, 2023, Lahaina Wildfires with the mission to promote and facilitate the relief, recovery and revitalization of the Filipino community in Lahaina. We would like to offer testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of H.B. 2107.

One of our tasks as an organization has been to identify challenges of the Lahaina Filipino community. While the devastation of the Lahaina fires has been apparent in a multitude of different ways, the challenges in our community to provide accurate and timely information to our limited English-speaking community members or have other language preferences have been one particular area of concern for us. As we now know that a high percentage of the lives lost on August 8, 2023 were of Filipino or other ethnic immigrant descent, and while there was very little communication on the day of to provide adequate warning about the severity of the disaster, we believe that if a similar incident shall occur in the future, that immediate and accessible information in Tagalog, Ilocano, Cebuano and also Spanish, Tongan, Samoan, Chuukese, Vietnamese, etc. would provide the necessary means to provide life-saving measures.

Additionally, the aftermath of the fires has caused for increased confusion and frustration about processes and expectations regarding relief and recovery efforts. Accounts immediately after the fires at congregate sheltering facilities like the War Memorial Gymnasium, brought forth images of confusion, despair and hopelessness in the faces of many of our immigrant community attempting to initiate relief assistance with the American Red Cross, FEMA and other entities attempting to provide support. These sentiments were addition to the trauma that they were experiencing just days after the fires. Even now, many of our community members fail to utilize available resources as reliable language access remains to be vacant or inconsistent at locations such as the Disaster Relief Center operated by FEMA and the County of Maui. As we move toward attempting to house FEMA non-eligible resident into intermediate housing through State of Hawaii and philanthropic agencies, we identify that Limited English language coordination will be a tangible necessity to serve these community members. The presence and priority of language access in wake and aftermath of disaster could potentially provide the necessary and equitable assistance to immigrant

communities facing immediate and imminent challenges due to a natural disaster. We appreciate the efforts that have come from smaller government and philanthropic agencies to respond to this need, however, we believe Limited English Language coordination at higher levels of government such the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Therefore, we vehemently support the intent of this measure and the essential appropriations to this measure asking for the passage of H.B. 2107.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this crucial measure.

Sincerely,

Debbie Andres-Arellano

Eric Arquero

Ryan Corpuz

Sieny Corpuz

Cindy Lulu

Tiffany Somera

Nestor Ugale, Jr.

Board Members for Kaibigan ng Lahaina

HB-2107-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/9/2024 2:31:15 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/11/2024 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gerald Ohta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Am in favor of language capable resources in all that HIEMA does.

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES**

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY
AFFAIRS

Senator Glenn Wakai, Chair

Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: March 11, 2024

Dear Chair Wakai, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in **support of HB2107**, which appropriates funds to establish the Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator position within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

As a first-generation immigrant, and with many of my family members also being first-generation and Limited English Proficient (LEP), I understand the challenges faced by individuals in our community during times of crisis. After the Lahaina fire, I found myself interpreting for my affected family members so that they could access the resources and assistance they needed. The dissemination of crucial information and updates was only available in English, creating significant barriers for our LEP communities.

It's imperative to recognize that one out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, individuals with LEP face disproportionate risks due to difficulties understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. Moreover, the aftermath of a disaster often brings additional hurdles for these individuals when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs.

The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire highlighted the critical need for a coordinated response to language access during emergencies. While Hawaii's professional and community interpreters stepped in admirably, demonstrating the community's resilience, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to addressing language barriers during crises.

In conclusion, I strongly support HB2107 and urge its passage to ensure that all community members, such as my family, can effectively receive critical information and access necessary resources during emergencies.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Maria Rallojaj

HB-2107-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/10/2024 10:40:14 AM

Testimony for PSM on 3/11/2024 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carolyn Eaton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Wakai, Vice Chair Elefante and members of the Committee,

My name is Carolyn Eaton and I am a resident of Honolulu. I strongly support this measure, introduced following the gap in support experienced by our community members less fluent in English after the tragic losses in the recent wildfires. This bill should strengthen and speed responses by the interpreters required for any who need them following emergencies. The full measure of assistance available after loss should be available to those who struggle to communicate in English.

Mahalo for your hard work and attention to such minorities among us.

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Dear Chair Wakai, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB2107, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

I am a public school teacher in the Hilo-Waiākea Complex. Every day I witness the challenges of folks who are multilingual learners with limited English proficiency. The day to day demands on my students are taxing enough on mental bandwidth, I cannot even imagine living through a disaster and trying to navigate the myriad of bureaucracies and paperwork. As a teacher of early adolescents I come to this with a special focus on our youth. I see the burden placed on our youth when, although they have limited English proficiency themselves, they are the most fluent in their family. And while not every family has the “luxury” of a child who can communicate for them, even if they do, is this who we want to saddle with this responsibility?

My students are currently involved in a global digital exchange with displaced Ukrainian students now living in Poland and Germany. Most of these displaced Ukrainian students have more language proficiency in their host country than their parents. My students were saddened to learn of the extreme stress of trying to navigate adolescence, a new normal, and being the spokesperson for their family when trying to navigate social service programs. My students are angered by the injustice of services with no real access due to language barriers. If my 12-14

year old students can understand this, I think we all can. HIEMA needs a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator. It is their kuleana.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to the successful passage of SB2781.

Thank you for your support and consideration,
Denise Mazurik

HB-2107-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/10/2024 12:27:14 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/11/2024 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
wilfredo tungol	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Senator Wakai and members of PSM committee:

My name is Wilfredo Tungol and I am submitting this testimony in **strong support** of this bill HB 2107 which will fund a language access coordinator within HIEMA. Our recent experience with the Maui wildfire reinforces the need to have a limited english proficiency (LEP) coordinator to be part of HIEMA. The victims of the Maui wildfire include many LEP populations such as Filipinos, Hispanics and Micronesians.

Coordination for relief for the wildfire victims can also be eased with an LEP coordinator. More importantly, the LEP population must be given warnings in their native language, be it written or spoken. Time is of the essence in most of these emergencies and the LEP individuals in such a situation will not have the time to find a translator or interpreter.

Please pass this important measure.

Mahalo,

/s/

Wilfredo Tungol, Esq.

Pearl City, HI

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Dear Chair Wakai, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB2107, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

Every state agency and state-supported entity in Hawai'i has an obligation to create and execute an effective language access plan. When they fail to do so (cf. the State Judiciary prior to its current court interpreter program, and the current federal oversight of the DLIR) individuals with Limited English proficiency or **no** English proficiency suffer unjustly: They die needlessly, they lose their homes, their livelihood, their sense of well-being, and their hope. Without sufficient English proficiency, they do not receive the support services and legal protections afforded others. This discriminatory outcome is a blatant and easily avoidable violation of the civil rights of Hawai'i's residents.

The full and appropriate care of our neighbors must not fall on the shoulders of bilingual volunteers who are asked to step up on a daily basis to fill in the gaps that the state continues to ignore. In a state where legislators are sworn to act in the spirit of aloha, it is shameful that any agency should be lacking in resources to fulfill their responsibility to uphold the civil rights, and even the very existence and well-being, of Hawai'i residents who lack nothing more than sufficient English proficiency to access essential, life-saving information and services.

In a disaster, information saves lives. In disaster recovery, access to services provides survivors with the only path to food, shelter, healthcare, employment, and support for their efforts to regain their footing in life. The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency must receive funding to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator so that they can provide immediate, accurate and effectively-communicated life-saving information during and in the aftermath of natural disasters other emergencies.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to the successful passage of SB2781, legislation with life-saving power.

Thank you for your support and consideration,
Dina R. Yoshimi

HB-2107-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/10/2024 9:17:36 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/11/2024 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tamara Paltin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am testifying in strong support for HB2107, it is essential to uphold the Hawaii State constitution that serves all persons residing in the state. After the Maui wildfires, interpreters were not present at the shelters, nor was any provision made to offer remote interpretation. In the absence of a plan from HIEMA and MEMA, Hawaii's professional and community interpreters stepped in. Non-profits had to adjust their budgets and obligations to meet the needs of the Maui community and contribute to provide needed services. The state should learn from this experience and plan accordingly to better respond to future disasters within the pae aina.

Mahalo for your commitment and service to our communities,

Tamara Paltin

HB-2107-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/11/2024 12:08:29 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/11/2024 3:00:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lily Gavagan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Funds need to be appropriated to establish Limited English Proficiency Language Access Coordinator positions within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency to offer interpretation services.

HB-2107-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/11/2024 10:08:21 AM

Testimony for PSM on 3/11/2024 3:00:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nanea Lo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

I look forward to the successful passage of SB2781.

me ke aloha 'āina,

Nanea Lo, Mō'ili'ili, O'ahu