

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

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'OKELE

February 8, 2024

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

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 2781– RELATING TO EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT.**

Hearing: February 8, 2024, 3:01 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).

**PURPOSE:** This bill appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency. Declares that the general fund expenditure ceiling is exceeded.

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

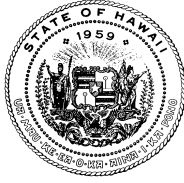
February 8, 2024

Page 2

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  
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In reply, please refer to:  
File: 24-006

**Testimony COMMENTING of SB2781  
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: 2/9/2024

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) appreciates the intent of this measure
- 4 and defers to the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) as it may impact their
- 5 organizational structure and needs. OLA respectfully offers the following comments.
  
- 6 **Purpose and Justification:** The purpose of this measure is to appropriate funds to establish the
- 7 position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within HI-EMA and declares that
- 8 the general fund expenditure ceiling is exceeded.
  
- 9 The Maui wildfires serve as a significant reminder to all of us that disasters and emergency
- 10 events can occur at any time with little or no warning. They also highlight the need for language
- 11 access within our diverse community in the state.
  
- 12 Hawaii is one of the most culturally diverse states and has one of the highest proportions of non-
- 13 English speakers in the nation. Many of these non-English speakers are immigrants and migrants
- 14 with limited English proficiency (LEP). According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018-2022
- 15 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."

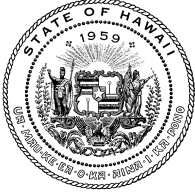
3 English proficiency, or the lack thereof, significantly impacts people's safety and wellness,  
4 putting them at risk in situations where they are unable to understand written or verbal warnings  
5 about dangerous conditions, impending severe weather, appropriate responses to emergency  
6 sirens/warnings, 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 Nevertheless, OLA respectfully defers to HI-EMA on implementation and resource needs.

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

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



**STATE HEALTH PLANNING  
AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII  
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII

**KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH**  
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH  
KA LUNA HO'ŌKELE

**John C. (Jack) Lewin, M.D.**  
ADMINISTRATOR

1177 Alakea St., #402, Honolulu, HI 96813 Phone: 587-0788 Fax: 587-0783 www.shpda.org

**Committee on Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs**

**S.B. 2781 Relating to Disaster Services**

**Testimony of John C. (Jack) Lewin, M.D.**  
**SHPDA Administrator**

**Friday, February 9, 2024**  
**3:01 a.m.**

1 **Agency's Position: Support**

2 **Fiscal Implications:** None

3 **Purpose and Justification:** SHPDA has observed that in the aftermath of the Maui wildfires  
4 that the lack of a language proficiency coordinator is greatly need in the Hawai'i Emergency  
5 Management Agency to adequately address the needs of the many immigrants and citizens  
6 who lack English proficiency and were unable to access needed services. SB 2781  
7 establishes a position of a Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator for the agency.

8 One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency, and these  
9 individuals often encounter disproportionate risks before, during, and after disasters. The risks  
10 include an inability to understand evacuation orders and information from emergency relief  
11 providers, which prevents access to emergency medical care, shelter, and other necessary  
12 services. This is unacceptable, and SHPDA believes the Coordinator position is sorely needed  
13 and, if created, will reduce disaster remediation costs as well as the personal and family  
14 hardships suffered by those affected.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB2781  
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: February 9, 2024

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

I am writing in support of SB2781, 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 in support of this bill because first hand seeing the impact during and after the wildfire in Lahaina. It is a basic need that has not been addressed. There's a lack of representation of people whose first language is not english. From not being able to understand simple evacuation procedures and trying to get housing and everything in between it has been so difficult to get their needs meant. I have step up in order to help my people but that is not the answer. We need professionals and we needed them 6 months ago.

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,  
Stephanie Villalobos.



## TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SB 2781 RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

February 9, 2024

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**

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.

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.





PACIFIC GATEWAY CENTER

February 8, 2024

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB2781  
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: February 9, 2024

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

I am writing in support of SB2781, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency. Pacific Gateway Center appreciated meeting you, Vice Chair Elefante, at Language Access Lobby Day on 2/1/23.

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 SB2781 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 SB2781.

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 vertical stroke for the letter 'J'.

Matthew Johnson  
Executive Director

**SB-2781**

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 8:16:48 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/9/2024 3:01:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Terrina Wong	Testifying for Pacific Gateway Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As Director of Social Services at Pacific Gateway Center, I strongly support SB2781 as a key step towards ensuring a coordinated effort to provide language access to 1 out of 5 in our community who are foreign-born and need access to communications from trusted sources. The well being of our entire community must be inclusive and as mandated by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. We need an implementation checklist, a protocol that can be initiated, facilitated, and executed by a Language Access Coordinator within HiEMA to ensure our local government communicates effectively in ways that are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

Covid-19 and the Maui fires have taught us important lessons on critical gaps in the system that excludes immigrants and the limited English proficient in receiving timely and accurate communications in language. We deal each day with their loss, confusion, anxiety, loss of confidence in our community as a result. They are a vital part of our community and we can do much better. SB2781 is a step in the right direction.

Mahalo.

Terrina Wong

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB2781  
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: February 9, 2024

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

I am writing in support of SB2781, 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.

Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Center realized during the Pandemic that our COFA community and other limited English speakers from the Pacific Island community were not able to receive information on a timely basis. Again, during the Maui wildfire disaster, we are faced with the same situation with families needing interpretation and assistance to navigate and access services. We have been sending COFA interpreters to Maui since September to address the need identified, however, having someone to coordinate language access services from the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will provide assistance to families in a timelier manner during a disaster.

Waipahu Safe Haven Center fully supports SB2781 and look forward to its passage.

Thank you for your consideration,

Barbara Tom,

Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Center

**SB-2781**

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 10:23:35 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/9/2024 3:01:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ethan Higa	Testifying for Pacific Gateway Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Ethan Higa and I am the Deputy Director of Immigration Legal Services at Pacific Gateway Center.

I strongly support SB2781 as a means to ensure that all Hawai'i residents, including Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals, have multilingual accessibility to State information, especially in times of disaster.

We live in a state where 1 of 5 people are born outside of the US. During the initial Covid-19 and Maui fire responses, critical gaps in our system revealed that immigrants and the LEP are excluded in receiving timely and accurate communications in their own languages. At Pacific Gateway Center, we deal with many LEPs who come to us feeling lost, anxious, confused, misinformed, and unsure of what to believe. I believe the Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator would reduce confusion, elevate collaboration, ensure consistency of messaging, and effectively provide the cultural and linguistic bridge from the government to the limited English speaking residents of our home. This coordinator would be instrumental in ensuring the execution of a comprehensive implementation checklist and protocol to communicate effectively in culturally appropriate ways in languages people understand.

Lastly, having a dedicated Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator will enhance our ability to comply with legal requirements, including federal and state laws such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which mandates that recipients of federal funds provide language assistance services to individuals with limited English proficiency.

Immigrants and LEPs are a vital part of our community and we need to make sure that they are not left behind in accessing life-saving services. SB2781 positively moves language access in the right direction.

Mahalo,



**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB2781  
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: February 9, 2024

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

The Hawaii Coalition for Immigrant Rights (HCIR) fully supports SB2781, 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.

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

**SB-2781**

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 2:58:23 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/9/2024 3:01:00 PM

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

Comments:

**HAWAI'I STATE LEGISLATURE**

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS**

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of SB2781**

**February 9, 2024 | 3:01 PM**

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

FilCom CARES was established to provide equitable access to health care for Filipinos and other vulnerable groups during the pandemic. We recognize the importance of language access to government services and resources.

FilCom CARES strongly supports SB2781, which would establish a limited English language access coordinator within 20 the Hawai'i emergency management agency.

Thank you for your consideration of this measure.

Sincerely,

Agnes Malate, PhD

Co-chair, FilCom CARES



**SB-2781**

Submitted on: 2/5/2024 9:29:33 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/9/2024 3:01:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Gerald Ohta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support important resource.

**SB-2781**

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 10:39:42 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/9/2024 3:01:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Thaddeus Pham	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

As a public health professional and concerned citizen, I write in **STRONG SUPPORT** of SB2781, 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 considering this important bill to better protect and serve all communities in Hawai'i.

Thaddeus Pham (he/him)

February 8, 2024

Senate Committee on Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs  
Sen. Glenn Wakai, Chair  
Sen. Brandon J.c. Elefante

Re: Testimony in Strong Support of SB 2781 - Relating to Disaster Services

Dear Chair Wakai, Vice-Chair Elefante and members of the committee:

My name is Eric Arquero, a resident of Lahaina, Maui. My counterparts and I are organizers of Kaibigan ng Lahaina a Filipino-based organization striving to bring equity and resources to our Filipino and immigrant community.

the Lahaina wildfire placed extreme challenges for our community, which is magnified for our community members who's first language is not English. Immediately after the fires I volunteered at the Red Cross shelter at War Memorial in Kahului which housed over 300 displaced Lahaina residents. The rush to bring needed resources was plentiful, but one of the missing resources that was direly needed were language translators. If not for organizations like Maui Economic Opportunity (MEO), many of the displaced victims would have been left trying to navigate relief and recovery efforts. Even now as we've settled into recovery assistance from FEMA and charitable organizations, many immigrants shy away from seeking the available help due to limited language access. In fact, our latino community on Maui use a WhatsApp to communicate with each other in Spanish to not just create community but to share pertinent information.

Language access in disaster situations would be an incredible gain for our community and the State of Hawaii as well. I ask that you prioritize this important measure so that language access is not an afterthought in disaster response but so that emergency agencies can be prepared to provide notices in the wide-array of languages that make up our communities. This would instill dignity for people to act responsibility and integrity in the system to acknowledge those who may be the most vulnerable to life-saving information.

While this bill relates to one position in HiEMA, it would make a world of difference to know that disaster response is readily available for all our community members. Mahalo for the chance to submit testimony in support of this needed legislation.

Eric Arquero  
earquero47@icloud.com

**SB-2781**

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 2:45:31 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/9/2024 3:01:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
wilfredo tungol	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Senator Aquino and Members of the Committee:

My name is Wilfredo Tungol and I am submitting this testimony in **strong support** this bill SB2781. Our recent experience with the Maui wildfire reinforces the need to have a limited english proficiency coordinator to be part of the HIEMA. The victims of the Maui wildfire include many limited english proficiency (LEP) population such as Filipinos, Tongans, Hispanics and Micronesians.

It is important that the LEP population be given warnings that they can understand 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 time to find a translator or interpreter.

Please pass this important bill.

Mahalo,

Wilfredo Tungol, Esq.

Pearl City, HI



**LATE**

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB2781 - 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: February 9, 2024 | Conference Room 225 | Letter Date: February 8, 2024

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

I am writing to urge Members of this Committee to support and pass SB2781, which will appropriate funds to establish a new position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator with the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA).

At The Legal Clinic, a nonprofit organization that provides no-cost legal services on immigration matters to low-income Hawai'i residents, we come into regular contact with immigrants who speak little or no English. Our staff involve qualified translators and interpreters to ensure that clients understand all the details of their immigration status, court cases, and government requirements for citizenship applications, visas, and the other services we offer.

It is even more immediately 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. The recent fires in Maui made evident how important clear communication is during a crisis. In Lahaina, one third or more of displaced residents are believed to be immigrants. Even now, in the ongoing aftermath, many residents have been unable or unwilling to seek assistance, with language barriers playing a significant role.

Nearly one in five residents in Hawai'i is foreign-born. They do not necessarily start out speaking English, and while many become proficient in time, there may be years in which they struggle to understand the dominant language around them. 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. Those who are less than proficient in English experience reduced workforce participation (33% less for those not speaking English at all), limited occupational choices (primarily food service, building cleaning/maintenance, kupuna care, etc.), and much reduced income even with comparable education and experience. They are more vulnerable to exploitation, loss, and family disruption.

Improved language access is a broad goal and federal mandate that has already been acknowledged in State government, but little implemented. SB2781 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 our state's residents will benefit.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to the successful passage of SB2781!

Respectfully,

Bettina Mok  
Executive Director  
The Legal Clinic  
director@tlchawaii.org

**LATE**



**LANGUAGE SERVICES HAWAII**

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107  
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

PSM COMMITTEE

Senator Glenn Wakai, Chair

Senator Brandon Elefante, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024

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

My name is Suzanne Zeng, and I am President of Language Services Hawaii, a Hawaii company who provides interpreters and translators to hospitals, courts, various state agencies, and private firms. Allow me to give a bit of background to why I support this bill for a Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator position in the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency.

After the Maui wildfires, I found myself in zoom meetings almost daily with mostly non-profits who were reaching out to help the victims as soon as they could. The biggest issue we came across were the immigrants who needed help but did not understand English well enough to know what to do and where to go. Many lost their passports and other important documents that allowed them to be here and travel. Many were undocumented and did not know where to turn. The lack of English proficiency prevented many of the victims in seeking for the help they deserved. The worst part is Language Access seemed to be an afterthought to state agencies trying to help on the ground. Bilingual volunteers came to assist, but there was a lack of coordination among the agencies, and volunteers did not have the proper training to interpret for larger meetings, such as for the DOE meeting with parents, or at Mayoral meetings. Non-profits and the state's Office of Language Access used their own budgets to pay for professional interpreters when the various state agencies failed to provide them, even though by law, they were under obligation to do so.

Two months after the fires, my company won the contract with FEMA to provide interpreting services. During our discussions, they asked me what languages I thought were needed for this recovery. I expected government officials to have known this by then, since it had been two

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months. If it wasn't for my meetings with the non-profits and the Hawaii Coalition for Immigrant Rights, I would have not known either. We provided Spanish, Ilokano, Tagalog, Tongan, Marshallese, Pohnpeian, Vietnamese, and Chuukese. Our interpreters worked with HiEma at the Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) to keep a daily count of the number of people the interpreters assisted and in what languages.

The following data shows the number of people the interpreters assisted in their respective languages during the hours shown in the week ending November 4, 2023. This is almost THREE months after the fires occurred. Many of these victims started coming in after they heard there were speakers of their languages at the DRC. Please note that we did not supply interpreters in most of these languages and three language interpreters were there only twice a week.

Weekly Total	Today's Date:	Week ending 11/4/2023									Location:	Lahaina DRC	Who Completed Form:	Total
		8:00 am to 9:00 am	9:00 am to 10:00 am	10:00 am to 11:00 am	11:00 am to 12:00 pm	12:00 pm to 1:00 pm	1:00 pm to 2:00 pm	2:00 pm to 3:00 pm	3:00 pm to 4:00 pm	4:00 pm to 5:00 pm				
Spanish	2	9	18	21	20	24	18	15	11	3	141			
Tagalog	19	27	26	17	9	25	14	16	4	0	157			
Ilokano	0	43	71	72	39	79	75	70	13	0	462			
Tongan	1	5	8	21	13	12	10	14	2	1	87			
Hawaiian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Samoan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Chuukese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Marshallese	0	1	2	0	4	9	7	1	0	0	24			
Vietnamese	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4			
Pohnpeian	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	4			
Japanese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Madarin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Cantonese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Portuguese	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2			
ASL	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	5			
<b>Total -----&gt;</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>886</b>			

Two weeks after this, we had a total of 478 encounters and 330 encounters the week after that.

The importance of having a language plan for limited English speakers during and after a disaster cannot be understated. I have heard so many stories from Limited English speakers of the problems they encountered during this disaster due to a lack of language access. We need a better coordinated approach so this does not happen again. This is why I am asking you to

support this bill to fund a Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator position within HiEMA to study and design a language access strategy for any future emergencies.

Sincerely,



Suzanne M Zeng,  
President



Nadezna Ortega  
Executive Director  
Tagnawa  
[tagnawaformaui@gmail.com](mailto:tagnawaformaui@gmail.com)

February 8, 2024

Subject: Testimony in Support of SB2781 - Limited English Language Access Coordinator for Disaster Services

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

I am writing on behalf of Tagnawa, a grassroots nonprofit organization committed to supporting Filipino survivors of the Lahaina fires. We wholeheartedly endorse and strongly advocate for the passage of SB2781, a crucial piece of legislation that addresses the critical need for language access coordination in disaster services.

The devastating impact of the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire highlighted the gaps in our emergency response system, especially concerning limited English proficient individuals. Tagnawa's disaster relief efforts revealed that the standard one-size-fits-all model of disaster assistance did not work. Many survivors fell through the cracks. We found that many of our Filipino community members were immigrants, many of whom were recent immigrants, elderly, with limited English proficiency. Hence, they had difficulty accessing emergency resources and services immediately after the fires.

The absence of language interpreters at shelters and the lack of remote interpretation options underscored the pressing need for a coordinated response. Fortunately, the community stepped in to bridge this gap. Our organization, Tagnawa, was on the ground talking to Filipino survivors, providing interpretation and translation assistance, and linking the Filipino community with the resources and services they needed.

SB2781, which proposes the appropriation of funds to establish a limited English language access coordinator within the Hawai'i emergency management agency, is a significant step toward rectifying these issues. This coordinator will play a pivotal role in ensuring that limited English proficient populations are seamlessly integrated into disaster management planning processes. It aligns with section 308 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act, emphasizing the importance of identifying and assisting these populations during emergencies.

Our organization recognizes the challenges faced by state and county agencies in coordinating disaster relief efforts, and we believe that a dedicated coordinator will enhance communication and streamline support for affected individuals. By appropriating funds for this position, SB2781 acknowledges the public interest and addresses the pressing needs of our diverse communities.

In conclusion, we urge you to support and pass SB2781 to establish a limited English language access coordinator within the Hawaii emergency management agency. This vital step will

contribute to a more inclusive, effective, and empathetic disaster response system, ensuring that no member of our community is left behind during times of crisis.

Thank you for your time, attention, and commitment to the well-being of our communities.

Sincerely,

Nadezna Ortega  
Executive Director  
Tagnawa

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 SENATE BILL 2781,  
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

FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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

Thank you for the opportunity to express our **OPPOSITION** to SB 2781.

Following the devastating wildfire on Maui, it became evident that disseminating information to all affected individuals was critical. Many victims, particularly those whose first language is not English, struggled to understand the situation and access available resources. In response, the state worked alongside the Office of Language Services (OLA) to ensure that language barriers were addressed and services were provided to those in need.

The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) acknowledges the existence of language barriers and has actively collaborated with OLA to effectively communicate our messaging. Therefore, HI-EMA opposes SB 2781 as it appears to be redundant. The current services offered by OLA have proven to be a valuable tool in reaching and supporting the diverse communities in Hawai'i whose first language is not English.

HI-EMA opposes SB 2781 as we believe that the services currently provided by OLA adequately address the communication needs of non-English speaking individuals in our state. 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 Senate Bill 2781.

James Barros: [james.barros@hawaii.gov](mailto:james.barros@hawaii.gov); 808-733-4300

**LATE**



HAWAII ALLIANCE OF  
PACIFIC ISLANDERS

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB2781**

**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: February 9, 2024

Dear Senator Glenn Wakai, Chair, Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is Crystal Kionia, I am the Executive Director for the Hawaii Alliance of Pacific Islanders or HAPI, and I am writing IN SUPPORT of SB2781, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency. Declares that the general fund expenditure ceiling is exceeded.

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.

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

Sincerely,

Crystal Kionia