



## 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

February 14, 2024

### TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

#### Senate Bill 3290 – Relating to American Sign Language

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 3290 – Relating to American Sign Language.

This bill requires the Disability and Communication Access Board and Department of Human Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to convene a working group to study the state of American Sign Language (ASL) in Hawaii. It also requires the Department of Health to assist the working group in the preparation of a report to submit to the Legislature.

The impetus behind this bill is concern with the low number of certified ASL interpreters in Hawaii. It is vital to have members of the deaf community appointed to the working group to have their perspective. Therefore, we suggest the following amendments to section 2 of the bill.

(a) The disability and communication access board and the department of human services division of vocational rehabilitation shall convene a working group to:

- (1) Study the state of American Sign Language Interpreting in Hawaii; and
- (2) Investigate and study any means, methods, processes, or systems that might improve the provision of American Sign Language services in the State.

(b) The working group's membership shall include the following members:

- (1) A representative from the disability and communication access board, who shall serve as co-chairperson of the working group;
- (2) A representative from the department of human services division of vocational rehabilitation, who shall serve as co-chairperson of the working group;
- (3) A representative from the department of education;
- (4) A member of the deaf and blind task force;
- (5) A professor from the university of Hawaii who teaches American Sign Language;
- (6) An individual who currently serves as an American Sign Language interpreter, who shall be invited by the co-chairpersons of the working group; ~~and~~
- (7) Two deaf individuals who shall be invited by the co-chairpersons of the working group; and
- (8) Additional representatives invited by the co-chairpersons of the working group.

Thank you for considering our position.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW  
Executive Director



# **HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION** **KOMIKINA PONO KIWILA O HAWAI‘I**

830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 411, HONOLULU, HI 96813 · PHONE: (808) 586-8636 · FAX: (808) 586-8655 · TDD: (808) 586-8692

Wednesday, February 14, 2024

1:00pm

Conference Room 225 & Videoconference  
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

To: The Honorable Joy. A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
The Honorable Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

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

## **Re: S.B. 3290**

**The Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) supports the intent and offers these comments on S.B. 3290**, which Requires the Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) and Department of Human Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DHHS) to convene a working group to study the state of American Sign Language in Hawai‘i.

The HCRC has enforcement jurisdiction over Hawai‘i’s laws prohibiting discrimination in employment (Chapter 378, Part I, HRS), housing (Chapter 515, HRS), public accommodations (Chapter 489, HRS), and access to state and state-funded services (section 368-1.5, HRS). The HCRC carries out the Hawai‘i constitutional mandate that no person shall be discriminated against in the exercise of their civil rights. Art. I, Sec. 5.

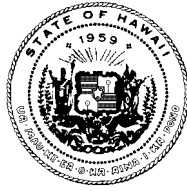
The HCRC has long supported the recognition of the use of American Sign Language (ASL) for individuals in the Deaf Community or individuals who are hard of hearing as its own autonomous language, similar to spoken languages based on ancestry. This measure creates a working group to study

the state of ASL in Hawai'i, and investigate means to improve the provision of ASL in our state.

Membership in this working group would include individuals with knowledge of the needs of the Deaf Community through experience of working with this Community.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 3290 and provide these comments.

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 12, 2024

To: The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 3290 – RELATING TO AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE.**

Hearing: Wednesday, February 14, 2024, 1:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 225, State Capitol & Video Conference

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this measure and the critical service that American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters provide to deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, and hearing individuals. DHS defers to the Disability Access & Communication Board and the Department of Health regarding necessary resources to convene and retain a consultant to assist with the necessary study and investigation required by this report. While a representative from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) will participate in the working group, DVR does not currently have available resources to fund a study or investigation.

**PURPOSE:** This bill requires the Disability and Communication Access Board and Department of Human Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to convene a working group to (1) Study the State of American Sign Language in Hawaii; and (2) Investigate and study any means, methods, processes, or systems that might improve the provision of American Sign Language services in the State. The bill also requires the working group, with the assistance of the Department of Health, to submit a report of its findings and

February 12, 2024

Page 2

recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the legislature no later than December 31, 2024. The working group shall be dissolved on June 30, 2025.

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

**SB-3290**

Submitted on: 2/10/2024 11:00:56 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/14/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Louis Erteschik	Testifying for Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is true that there exists a shortage of ASL interpreters and this measure is a step in the right direction.

February 14, 2024

Testimony of Eleanor Macdonald  
Submitted to the Senate Health & Human Services (HHS) Committee

Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair  
Honorable Senator Henry Aquino, Vice Chair

Re: SB 3290, RELATING TO AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Dear Chairperson San Buenaventura, Vice-Chair Aquino and Members,

I would like to whole heartedly support SB 3290, Relating to American Sign Language.

This critical legislation will provide the necessary funds to the Disability & Communication Access Board (DCAB) and the Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to set up a working group to study why there is a shortage of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters throughout the State of Hawaii especially on the neighbor islands and develop recommendations to rectify this situation.

People who are deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind very often wait 3-4 weeks to schedule medical procedures or other appointments in the community because they are unable to secure an ASL interpreter, computer assisted real time captioner (CART) or a tactile interpreter (ASL interpreter familiar with touch modalities). Some hospitals contract with on-line interpreter services with mainland signers who are not aware of local landmarks, Hawaiian names and the local system of signs unique to these islands.

While a legal mandate is not necessary to study this dire shortage of ASL interpreters, I worry that without providing additional funds to cover the cost of ASL interpreters or closed captioners the working group could not include individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing and/or deaf-blind. The end users of this health and safety service could not be included in this working group without such funding. I suggest the sum of \$30,000 be considered for this purpose.

Please pass this important legislation with an effective date for January 1, 2025 to set up the working group.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Eleanor Macdonald





**SB-3290**

Submitted on: 2/12/2024 2:18:30 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/14/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Sherry Shimizu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Senator San Buenaventura (Chair), Senator Aquino (Vice Chair) and Members of the Health and Human Services:

I am writing to strongly support SB 3290 to set up a working group to be run by DCAB and HDVR to study why Hawaii has such a shortage of ASL interpreters on all of the islands and what can be done to increase the number of interpreters. On Oahu, where I live, we only have 20 ASL interpreters as explained by Justin Tokioka that completed their DCAB's Hawaii State Sign Language Interpreter Credentials and this is not enough when I have to visit the doctor, realtor, lawyer or other personal business. The neighboring islands are in even more dire straits with only 4 on Maui, 3 on the Big Island and none in Kauai, while 4 are out of state and does video remote interpreting or interpret when they visit Hawaii.

As you can understand, just a total of 31 DCAB Hawaii State Sign Language Interpreter Credentials for approximately 13,097 to 32,016 Severe Hearing Loss (Deaf and Hard of Hearing) from Oahu, Big Island, Maui and Kauai according to the 2011 Hearing Loss Statistics based on Gallaudet Research Institute, we badly need more ASL interpreters. I also felt the urgency for future needs after Kapi'olani Community College has stopped their ASL / English Interpreter Education Program. Having interpreters are crucial in emergencies and have been the decisive between life and death for Deaf people.

Thank you for your support and sincerely,

Sherry Shimizu

Pearl City, Oahu

**SB-3290**

Submitted on: 2/11/2024 3:15:41 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/14/2024 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Cheryl Shimizu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Cheryl Shimizu and I am a resident of Pearl City. I support of Senate Bill 3290.

I'm writing to give my full support for the Senate Bill 3290 relating to recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

Here are the reasons for my testimony as follows: (you can change , remove or modify with your own words)

**BETTER INTEGRATION IN EDUCATION:** Teaching ASL in public schools helps to give deaf, deaf-blind (DB) and hard-of-hearing (HH) students more opportunities for interactions with hearing classmates. Deaf and HH people proficient in ASL may be interested in becoming ASL teachers since ASL is the third most popular foreign language class taught in schools and universities.

**BETTER AWARENESS:** ASL is used by a significant large number of people in the USA, and to recognize it as an official language would bring better understanding, greater acknowledge and deeper respect for their linguistic heritage. ASL promotes the validation of an identity as a human which will increase public awareness and better understanding of Deaf, DB and HH Community and their needs to be involved in the public and education.

**BETTER MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS:** ASL promotes better awareness of and sensitivity to the Deaf, DB and HH community. Learning ASL will develop a strong appreciation for Deaf, DB and HH culture, and can promote understanding and acceptance of the language among others. ASL promotes cultural preservation by demonstrating a unique and distinct language with its own history, culture, and traditions as well to preserve their important aspect of Deaf Education and Human/Mental Health services.

**BETTER LEARNING CAPABILITIES:** ASL promotes younger population a better listener with more diverse and to boost the individual to become easier to learn another new language. Research has shown that using ASL actually increases a child's verbal skills. Using ASL can actually help to facilitate and encourage language development. ASL provides children with earlier access to other languages.

**BETTER ACCESS:** ASL interpreting helps deaf, DB and HH people to communicate with a wide range of hearing people: including students in mainstream schools, deaf schools or universities and deaf, DB and HH residents and business people in the community. ASL improves the quality of family communication for hearing people with deaf, DB or HH family members. ASL is also used by hearing children of deaf/DB/HH parents, hearing siblings and hearing relatives, hearing adults who are becoming deaf/DB/HH and learning ASL from other deaf individuals, and a growing population of hearing second-language students learning ASL in their school classrooms. ASL provides full equal access to everyday communication for all in the public, employment and the human and mental health services.

**BETTER CAREER OPPORTUNITIES:** A career path opens to bilingual hearing professionals is interpretation. Demand for ASL interpreters is on the rise: great need to increase the availability of qualified ASL interpreters in the community and mainstream programs in schools and colleges/universities. ASL interpreters are in demand include hospitals, courts, governmental agencies, community services, human and mental health services, local, county and state legislatures.

**POWERFUL BENEFITS:** ASL helps to 1) create a stronger bond between parents and children, 2) improve spatial reasoning, 3) enhance ability to interpret body language, 4) get a better reaction times and peripheral vision, and 5) have a long-term cognitive benefit of learning sig language.

**STRONG BRIDGE:** ASL promotes a strong bridge between the hearing population and the deaf, DB and HH population. ASL is not universal as deaf, DB and HH people from different countries speak different sign languages yet they could understand each other through their natural gestures.

I, as a deaf individual, support this Bill because it would give Deaf, DB and HH people FULL equal access to the everyday communication in the world.

Thank you for your consideration of supporting this Bill.

Sincerely yours and mahalo,

Cheryl Shimizu



**LATE**

**JAN L. FRIED • American Sign Language/English Interpreter**

---

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

14 February 24

The Senate

Thirty-third Legislature, 2024, State of Hawai'i

Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator San Buenaventura, Chair

Senator Aquino, Vice Chair

Hearing: 14 February 2024 at 1:00PM, Conference Room 225

**Testimony in Opposition to SB3290 -Relating to American Sign Language**

*Aloha* Senators San Buenaventura and Aquino and HHS Committee Members,

I am an American Sign Language/English interpreter and a professor of American Sign Language/English Interpreter Education and American Sign Language—I strongly encourage you to not support this bill.

This saddens me because we are in dire need of more qualified ASL/English interpreters in Hawai'i.

However, we do not need another study. Since the last study, the *reasons why* we have a shortage of interpreters have not changed.

What we do need is:

- More ASL classes offered in K-12 schools. A few students who are fluent in ASL have received the Seal of Biliteracy. If high school students become competent in ASL, they can become Early College students, take advanced ASL classes within the UH System and then study interpreting. There are plenty of ASL classes offered at several of the UH System campuses. However, since ASL is part of the World Languages program, the HODOE needs to add more ASL classes to schools throughout the state.
- To actively advocate to support the reapproval of the ASL/English Interpreter Education program at UH-Kapi'olani Community College. It has been on hiatus for the last several years. Although it serves a low incidence population, the demand for qualified interpreters remains unabated. Without a program in Hawai'i, there is not a pool of entry-level interpreters ready to replace those who retire, pass away, leave Hawai'i for personal reasons or because they can no longer afford to live here. There has been a change in KCC Administrators which has caused a change in the level of commitment to the Deaf Community and support for the Interpreter Education Program. The KCC administration must be strongly encouraged to relaunch the program so we once again have a pipeline to educate and train interpreters who will be ready to take the credentialing exams and interpret in Hawai'i.
- Interpreter Education programs nationally tend to be smallish programs and appear to be "under-enrolled" compared to programs that are in higher demand. Interpreting is a very challenging area of study with a tremendous impact on those who benefit from interpreting services. The proposed version of the Interpreter Education program meets the parameters of a certificate program offered for credit and can be sustainable. This can only happen through yours and the community's support.

I appreciate this opportunity to encourage the committees to oppose SB3290, but support the other ways we can increase the number of interpreters. Your actions will have a profound and positive impact.

Respectfully,

Jan L. Fried

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