
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that one in five Hawaii
2 residents has a disability, and many require functional or
3 access support before, during, and after disasters. These
4 individuals often encounter disproportionate risks, including
5 difficulty evacuating without proper supports; lack of
6 accessible transportation; barriers to receiving emergency
7 alerts and evacuation orders in formats that they can
8 understand; and obstacles in accessing shelters, emergency
9 medical care, and post-disaster relief programs, such as
10 housing, food, and financial assistance.

11 The legislature further finds that in the immediate
12 aftermath of the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfires, many
13 individuals with disabilities faced significant impediments to
14 accessing emergency shelters and services. Shelters often
15 lacked physical accessibility, disability-trained staff, and
16 coordinated resources to address medical and functional needs.
17 Nonprofit organizations and community members stepped in to fill



1 these gaps; however, the lack of a planned, coordinated response
2 by state and county agencies highlighted systemic inequities in
3 disaster preparedness and response for individuals with
4 disabilities.

5 The legislature additionally finds that although the
6 legislature passed Act 210, Session Laws of Hawaii 2024, to
7 establish a limited English proficiency language access
8 coordinator within the Hawaii emergency management agency, that
9 position addresses only the needs of limited English proficient
10 individuals under state and federal language access laws.
11 Importantly, American Sign Language does not fall under the
12 language access law, as American Sign Language is not a foreign
13 language but a distinct language of the deaf community. The
14 rights of individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or
15 have other disabilities fall within the scope of the Americans
16 with Disabilities Act, not language access statutes.

17 Accordingly, there remains a critical gap in disaster
18 services planning and response for individuals with
19 disabilities, including those who use American Sign Language and
20 those with access and functional needs. A disability
21 integration specialist position, serving as the State's



1 emergency management specialist within the Hawaii emergency
2 management agency, is necessary to ensure compliance with the
3 Americans with Disabilities Act and related federal and state
4 disability laws, coordinate disability-related planning, and
5 guarantee accessible disaster services for all individuals with
6 disabilities.

7 Furthermore, the legislature finds that section 308 of the
8 Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act
9 (Stafford Act, P.L. 93-288, as amended) requires entities
10 receiving Federal Emergency Management Agency funding to ensure
11 equitable access to disaster services for individuals with
12 disabilities. Federal Emergency Management Agency guidance also
13 requires disability integration throughout emergency management,
14 emphasizing planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and
15 mitigation.

16 Therefore, the purpose of this Act is to:

17 (1) Add disability-related planning, preparedness,
18 response, recovery, and mitigation to the designated
19 functions of the Hawaii emergency management agency;
20 and



1 (2) Appropriate funds to the Hawaii emergency management
2 agency for the establishment of a disability
3 integration specialist, who shall serve as the
4 emergency management specialist and provide
5 programming support for disability community projects
6 that promote accessibility, inclusion, and equity in
7 disaster management.

8 SECTION 2. Section 127A-3, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
9 amended to read as follows:

10 **"§127A-3 Hawaii emergency management agency.** (a) There
11 is established within the department of defense the Hawaii
12 emergency management agency. The adjutant general shall serve
13 as the director of Hawaii emergency management and, subject to
14 the direction and control of the governor, shall oversee the
15 agency.

16 (b) There shall be an administrator of emergency
17 management who shall be appointed, and may be removed, by the
18 director, and who shall have at least three years of experience
19 leading emergency management efforts at the local, state, or
20 federal level. The administrator of emergency management shall
21 be the civilian head of and responsible for the day-to-day



1 operations of the agency. The administrator of emergency
2 management shall report to the director. The administrator of
3 emergency management shall, in the absence of the director, have
4 all the duties and responsibilities of the director, and shall
5 report directly to the governor. The administrator of emergency
6 management shall not be subject to chapter 76.

7 (c) The administrator may, from funds allotted therefor,
8 employ technical, clerical, administrative, and other personnel
9 and make such expenditures as may be necessary.

10 (d) The administrator shall coordinate the activities of
11 the agency with all county emergency management agencies, other
12 state agencies, other states, or federal agencies involved in
13 emergency management activities, and all organizations for
14 emergency management within the State, whether public or
15 private, and shall maintain liaison and cooperate with all
16 county emergency management agencies, other state agencies,
17 other states, or federal agencies involved in emergency
18 management activities as provided in this chapter.

19 (e) The agency shall perform emergency management
20 functions within the territorial limits of the State. In
21 performing its duties, the agency shall:



- 1 (1) Prepare a state comprehensive emergency management
2 plan, which shall be integrated into and coordinated
3 with the emergency management plans of the federal
4 government. The plan shall be integrated by a
5 continuous, integrated comprehensive emergency
6 management program. The plan shall contain provisions
7 to ensure that the State prepares for, mitigates
8 against, responds to, and recovers from emergencies
9 and minor, major, and catastrophic disasters. In
10 preparing and maintaining the plan, the agency shall
11 work closely with agencies and organizations with
12 emergency management responsibilities;
- 13 (2) Assign lead and support responsibilities to state
14 agencies and personnel for emergency management
15 functions and other support activities;
- 16 (3) Adopt standards and requirements for county emergency
17 management plans. The standards and requirements
18 shall ensure that county plans are coordinated and
19 consistent with the state comprehensive emergency
20 management plan;



1 (4) Make recommendations to the legislature, building code
2 organizations, and counties for zoning, building, and
3 other land use controls; and other preparedness,
4 prevention, and mitigation measures designed to
5 eliminate emergencies or reduce their impact;

6 (5) Anticipate trends and promote innovations that will
7 enhance the emergency management system;

8 (6) Institute statewide public awareness programs. This
9 shall include intensive public educational campaigns
10 on emergency preparedness issues, including but not
11 limited to the personal responsibility of individual
12 citizens to be self-sufficient for up to fourteen days
13 following a natural or human-caused disaster;

14 (7) Coordinate federal, state, and local emergency
15 management activities and take all other steps,
16 including the partial or full mobilization of
17 emergency management forces and organizations in
18 advance of an actual emergency, to ensure the
19 availability of adequately trained and equipped forces
20 of emergency management personnel before, during, and
21 after emergencies and disasters;



1 (8) Implement training programs to improve the ability of
2 state and local emergency management personnel to
3 prepare and implement emergency management plans and
4 programs. This shall include a continuous training
5 program for agencies and individuals that will be
6 called on to perform key roles in state and local
7 post-disaster response and recovery efforts and for
8 local government personnel on federal and state post-
9 disaster response and recovery strategies and
10 procedures;

11 (9) Adopt standards and requirements for state agency
12 emergency operating procedures and periodically review
13 emergency operating procedures of state agencies and
14 recommend revisions as needed to ensure consistency
15 with the state comprehensive emergency management plan
16 and program; ~~and~~

17 (10) Coordinate, in advance whenever possible, such
18 executive orders, proclamations, and rules for
19 issuance by the governor as are necessary or
20 appropriate for coping with emergencies and
21 disasters~~[=]~~; and



1 (11) Ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities
2 Act and related federal and state disability access
3 laws by integrating the needs of individuals with
4 disabilities and others with access and functional
5 needs into emergency planning, preparedness, response,
6 recovery, and mitigation activities, including
7 providing auxiliary aids and services to ensure
8 effective communication in all phases of disaster
9 management; advising on accessibility requirements for
10 emergency shelters, evacuation procedures, and
11 disaster communications; and interfacing with
12 disability advocacy organizations, service providers,
13 and community members to strengthen inclusive disaster
14 preparedness and response."

15 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
16 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$200,000 or so much
17 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027, to be
18 allocated as follows:

19 (1) \$100,000 for the establishment of one full-time
20 equivalent (1.0 FTE) disability integration specialist
21 position, which shall serve as the emergency



management specialist and which shall be exempt from chapter 76, Hawaii Revised Statutes, within the Hawaii emergency management agency; and

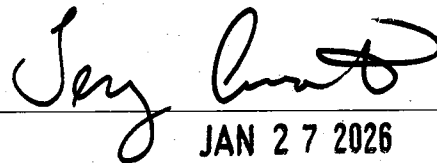
(2) \$100,000 for programming support for disability community projects, such as accessibility improvements in emergency shelters, public service announcements in accessible formats, training programs for shelter staff, and other projects to enhance disaster resilience for individuals with disabilities.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the Hawaii emergency management agency for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 4. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

INTRODUCED BY:


JAN 27 2026



H.B. NO. 2443

Report Title:

Disaster Services; Appropriation

Description:

Integrates the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs into emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities. Establishes a Disability Integration Specialist position, to be located in the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, who shall provide programming support for disability community projects that promote accessibility, inclusion, and equity in disaster management. Appropriates funds.

The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.

