

JAN 21 2026

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

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



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

4 The legislature additionally finds that while the
5 legislature passed Act 210, Session Laws of Hawaii 2024, to
6 establish a limited English proficiency language access
7 coordinator within the Hawaii emergency management agency, that
8 position addresses only the needs of limited English proficient
9 individuals under state and federal language access laws.

10 Importantly, American Sign Language (ASL) does not fall under
11 the language access law, as ASL is not a foreign language but a
12 distinct language of the deaf community. The rights of
13 individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or have other
14 disabilities arise under the Americans with Disabilities Act
15 (ADA), not language access statutes.

16 Accordingly, there remains a critical gap in disaster
17 services planning and response for individuals with
18 disabilities, including those who use ASL and those with access
19 and functional needs. A disability integration specialist,
20 serving as the State's emergency management specialist within
21 the Hawaii emergency management agency, is needed to ensure



1 compliance with the ADA and related federal and state disability
2 laws, coordinate disability-related planning, and guarantee
3 accessible disaster services for all individuals with
4 disabilities.

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

13 The purpose of this Act is to:

- 14 (1) Add disability-related planning, preparedness,
15 response, recovery, and mitigation to the designated
16 functions of the Hawaii emergency management agency;
17 and
18 (2) Appropriate funds to the Hawaii emergency management
19 agency for the establishment of a disability
20 integration specialist, serving as the emergency



1 management specialist, and programming support for
2 disability community projects.

3 SECTION 2. Section 127A-3, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
4 amended by amending subsection (e) to read as follows:

5 "(e) The agency shall perform emergency management
6 functions within the territorial limits of the State. In
7 performing its duties, the agency shall:

8 (1) Prepare a state comprehensive emergency management
9 plan, which shall be integrated into and coordinated
10 with the emergency management plans of the federal
11 government. The plan shall be integrated by a
12 continuous, integrated comprehensive emergency
13 management program. The plan shall contain provisions
14 to ensure that the State prepares for, mitigates
15 against, responds to, and recovers from emergencies
16 and minor, major, and catastrophic disasters. In
17 preparing and maintaining the plan, the agency shall
18 work closely with agencies and organizations with
19 emergency management responsibilities;



- 1 (2) Assign lead and support responsibilities to state
2 agencies and personnel for emergency management
3 functions and other support activities;
- 4 (3) Adopt standards and requirements for county emergency
5 management plans. The standards and requirements
6 shall ensure that county plans are coordinated and
7 consistent with the state comprehensive emergency
8 management plan;
- 9 (4) Make recommendations to the legislature, building code
10 organizations, and counties for zoning, building, and
11 other land use controls; and other preparedness,
12 prevention, and mitigation measures designed to
13 eliminate emergencies or reduce their impact;
- 14 (5) Anticipate trends and promote innovations that will
15 enhance the emergency management system;
- 16 (6) Institute statewide public awareness programs. This
17 shall include intensive public educational campaigns
18 on emergency preparedness issues, including but not
19 limited to the personal responsibility of individual
20 citizens to be self-sufficient for up to fourteen days
21 following a natural or human-caused disaster;



1 (7) Coordinate federal, state, and local emergency
2 management activities and take all other steps,
3 including the partial or full mobilization of
4 emergency management forces and organizations in
5 advance of an actual emergency, to ensure the
6 availability of adequately trained and equipped forces
7 of emergency management personnel before, during, and
8 after emergencies and disasters;

9 (8) Implement training programs to improve the ability of
10 state and local emergency management personnel to
11 prepare and implement emergency management plans and
12 programs. This shall include a continuous training
13 program for agencies and individuals that will be
14 called on to perform key roles in state and local
15 post-disaster response and recovery efforts and for
16 local government personnel on federal and state post-
17 disaster response and recovery strategies and
18 procedures;

19 (9) Adopt standards and requirements for state agency
20 emergency operating procedures and periodically review
21 emergency operating procedures of state agencies and



1 recommend revisions as needed to ensure consistency
2 with the state comprehensive emergency management plan
3 and program; ~~and~~

4 (10) Coordinate, in advance whenever possible, such
5 executive orders, proclamations, and rules for
6 issuance by the governor as are necessary or
7 appropriate for coping with emergencies and
8 disasters~~[+]~~; and

9 (11) Ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities
10 Act and related federal and state disability access
11 laws by integrating the needs of individuals with
12 disabilities and others with access and functional
13 needs into emergency planning, preparedness, response,
14 recovery, and mitigation activities. This shall
15 include the provision of auxiliary aids and services
16 to ensure effective communication in all phases of
17 disaster management, advising on accessibility
18 requirements for emergency shelters, evacuation
19 procedures, and disaster communications, and
20 interfacing with disability advocacy organizations,



1 service providers, and community members to strengthen
2 inclusive disaster preparedness and response."

3 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
4 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$200,000 or so much
5 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 as
6 follows:

7 (1) \$100,000 for the establishment of one full-time
8 equivalent (1.0 FTE) disability integration
9 specialist, serving as the emergency management
10 specialist, which shall be exempt from chapter 76,
11 Hawaii Revised Statutes, within the Hawaii emergency
12 management agency; and

13 (2) \$100,000 for programming support for disability
14 community projects, such as accessibility improvements
15 in emergency shelters, public service announcements in
16 accessible formats, training programs for shelter
17 staff, and other projects to enhance disaster
18 resilience for individuals with disabilities.

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



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

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

4

INTRODUCED BY: _____

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S.B. NO. 2385

Report Title:

HEMA; Disaster Services; Disability-Related Planning; Disability Integration Specialist and Programming; Appropriation

Description:

Amends the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency's functions to include ensuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and related federal and state disability access laws by integrating the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs into emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities. Appropriates funds to establish a Disability Integration Specialist and for programming support for disability community projects.

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

