

JAN 28 2026

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the foreign-born
2 population in Hawaii is two hundred sixty thousand and makes up
3 eighteen per cent of the State's total population, which is
4 higher than the fourteen per cent of the population of the
5 United States that is foreign-born. Immigrants to Hawaii arrive
6 from many countries, including China, Japan, Korea, Mexico,
7 Vietnam, and the Philippines, and contribute billions to the
8 State's economic output by paying taxes, establishing new
9 businesses, and staffing essential jobs. However, many
10 immigrants are paid below poverty rates and lack access to
11 social benefits.

12 The legislature further finds that around twenty-five per
13 cent of the State's population speak a language other than
14 English at home and over ten per cent have limited English
15 proficiency. Among these other languages are Ilokano, Tagalog,
16 Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Samoan, Tongan, and Micronesian
17 languages, including Pohnpeian, Marshallese, and Chuukese.



1 Without access to services and resources in these languages,
2 many residents of Hawaii face significant barriers to
3 participation in the community.

4 The legislature further finds that the Hawaii emergency
5 management agency has one language coordinator and needs
6 additional bilingual resources to communicate with residents
7 with limited English proficiency, especially during emergencies.
8 Additionally, bilingual resources are essential for the state to
9 comply with federal and state mandates, such as the Civil Rights
10 Act of 1964 and Presidential Executive Order 13166 of August 11,
11 2000, to provide language access as a condition to receive
12 grants, contracts, and other partnerships. In 2006, the State
13 established the Office of Language Access to affirm its
14 commitment to civil rights and comprehensive access to services
15 regardless of national origin.

16 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to provide the
17 Hawaii emergency management agency with resources to meet the
18 language access needs of residents with limited English
19 proficiency and reaffirm its commitment to civil rights. These
20 resources will increase the Hawaii emergency management agency's
21 capacity to serve immigrants and other residents with limited



1 English proficiency by providing bilingual resources and
2 services.

3 SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general
4 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
5 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for
6 the Hawaii emergency management agency to expand access to
7 bilingual resources and services.

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

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

11

INTRODUCED BY: Carol F. Luna



S.B. NO. 3239

Report Title:

Hawaii Emergency Management Agency; Limited English Proficiency;
Language Access; Appropriation

Description:

Appropriates funds for the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency to increase access to bilingual resources and services for residents with limited English proficiency.

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

