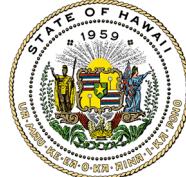


JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



STEPHEN F. LOGAN  
MAJOR GENERAL  
ADJUTANT GENERAL  
KA 'AKUKANA KENELALA

JAMES DS. BARROS  
ADMINISTRATOR OF  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
KAHU HO'OMALU PÔULIA

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII  
**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**  
**KA 'OIHANA PILI KAUA**  
HAWAII EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
4204 DIAMOND HEAD ROAD  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96816-4420

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
HAWAII EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 1531  
RELATING TO EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
PUBLIC SAFETY

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS  
ADMINISTRATOR  
HAWAII EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

January 30, 2026

Aloha Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a testimony to **COMMENT** on House Bill 1531.

HIEMA recognizes the critical importance of accessibility during a state of emergency and already strives to meet the standards set forth in this bill as a matter of best practice to ensure the deaf and hard-of-hearing community receives critical information in real-time.

While HIEMA supports the intent of increasing accessibility, there are practical limitations to the mandates described below:

- During a rapid-onset emergency, the immediate availability of such specific, certified personnel at all times and locations may be limited by the existing pool of qualified professionals in the state.
- HIEMA does not have jurisdictional control over how private news media outlets format their broadcasts, which may lead to challenges in ensuring full compliance as written in the statute.

- House Bill 1531 would establish strict new requirements for the provision and display of certified ASL interpreters. It represents an unfunded mandate and does not currently provide a dedicated funding source for the associated costs of hiring, certifying, or providing technical support for these services. Without a corresponding appropriation, the financial burden of maintaining these requirements on a permanent basis during all emergency proclamations will impact existing county and state agencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 1531.

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



# DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

Ka 'Oihana Ho'oka'a'ike no ka Po'e Kīnānā

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1010 Richards Street, Rm. 118 • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813  
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V) • Fax (808) 586-8129 • (808) 204-2466 (VP)

January 30, 2026

## TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

### House Bill 1531 – Relating to Emergency Announcements

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 1531 – Relating to Emergency Announcements. This bill requires the Governor or mayor of a county to provide an American Sign Language interpreter during each official announcement broadcast via television or the Internet during a state of emergency. Requires the Governor or mayor of a county to ensure, to the fullest extent possible, that the American Sign Language interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands are visible during the broadcast. It also requires a news media outlet to display the American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture window during broadcasts of official emergency announcements.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing and rely on American Sign Language (ASL) did not receive equitable or effective communication during recent public emergencies, such as COVID-19, the Lahaina wildfires, and the tsunami warning. Significant communication barriers were reported, including the lack of qualified interpreters, interpreters being positioned too far from speakers, interpreters being partially obstructed or poorly lit, and television broadcasts failing to ensure interpreters were clearly visible on screen.

As a result, many individuals who rely on ASL were unable to access critical, time-sensitive information necessary to protect their health and safety.

We respectfully request that a minimum size for the picture-in-picture be established by amending Section 1 to read:

(b) A news media outlet that broadcasts or rebroadcasts a live official emergency announcement by an elected official or head of an emergency agency via television or the Internet shall display the American Sign Language interpreter in a clearly visible on-screen picture-in-picture window for the entire duration of the announcement. The picture-in-picture window shall be at least one-quarter (1/4) the size of the primary video and large enough to clearly see the interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands. The interpreter shall not be blocked or covered by captions, graphics, or other on-screen text, which must be repositioned if necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kristine Pagano*

KRISTINE PAGANO  
Acting Executive Director



Testimony of Chris Leonard  
President – Hawai‘i Association of Broadcasters, Inc.

Re: HB1531: House Committee on Public Safety - 1/30/2026 – 11:00am

**In support of HB1531 if amended**

Aloha Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto and committee members. My name is Chris Leonard and I serve as the President of the Hawai‘i Association of Broadcasters. Our organization represents over 100 free, over-the-air television and radio broadcasters across the State of Hawai‘i. We fully support the intent of HB1531 and appreciate the effort to increase accessibility for all members of our community. However, we would like to share some practical application concerns with the current language in Section (b).

As written, HB1531 would require television and internet broadcasters to display an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter in a picture-in-picture window for the full duration of any live official announcement. While the goal is admirable, meeting this requirement would necessitate a two-camera setup and larger on-site crews—resources that many broadcasters, particularly smaller local outlets, simply do not have available. The likely unintended consequence is that fewer media outlets would carry these press conferences, resulting in reduced public access rather than increased accessibility.

A potential solution would be for the Governor’s Office and Mayor’s Offices to provide either a standardized pool feed that already includes the picture-in-picture ASL interpreter or provide real-time captioning at the source. Either approach would ensure accessibility while removing the technical and staffing burden from individual broadcasters, making compliance achievable for all outlets.

Mahalo for considering these concerns and for your work in advancing accessibility in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher S. Leonard".

Christopher S. Leonard  
President – Hawai‘i Association of Broadcasters



# 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

Friday, January 30, 2026, 11:00 a.m.  
Conference Room 411 & Videoconference  
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

To:

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY  
Rep. Della Au Belatti, Chair  
Rep. Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

From: Marcus L. Kawatachi,  
Executive Director  
Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission

**Re: H.B. 1531 Relating to Emergency Announcements**  
**Comments Only**

The Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission (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. 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 (HRS § 368-1.5).

H.B. 1531 Requires the Governor or mayor of a county to provide an American Sign Language interpreter during each official announcement broadcast via television or the Internet during a state of emergency. Requires the Governor or mayor of a county to ensure, to the fullest extent possible, that the American Sign Language interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands are visible during the broadcast. Requires a news media

outlet to display the American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture window during broadcasts of official emergency announcements.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB1531, which relates to ensuring accessible emergency communications for Hawai'i residents.

Our Commission has not had the opportunity to provide an official position on this matter, and our office does not have regulatory authority over emergency broadcast requirements or the implementation of American Sign Language interpretation. Thus, we offer comments only and defer to the agencies with the appropriate authority.

We want to highlight the critical importance of accessibility in all public communications, particularly during emergencies. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have other communication disabilities rely on clear, timely, and accessible information to make informed decisions that protect their health and safety. Ensuring that emergency announcements are delivered in formats that reach all members of our community strengthens public trust and supports equitable access to essential information.

We appreciate the Legislature's continued attention to the needs of persons with disabilities and the broader goal of improving statewide communication accessibility.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

**HB-1531**

Submitted on: 1/27/2026 7:17:05 PM  
Testimony for PBS on 1/30/2026 11:00:00 AM

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

**Comments:**

ASL is almost always the best practice for effective communication when it comes to this population. This is particularly true in the case of emergencies as set forth herein.

**Testimony of Katie Pickman**

**General Manager of Hawaii News Now**

**Re: HB1531: House Committee on Public Safety – 1/30/2026, 11:00 a.m.**

**Testimony in support of HB1531, only with amendments**

Aloha Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and members of the Committee.

My name is Katie Pickman, and I serve as the General Manager of Hawaii News Now.

I appreciate the intent of HB1531 and the Legislature's continued focus on ensuring that critical government information is accessible to all members of our community. Expanding access, especially during emergencies and official announcements, is an important and shared goal.

I would like to raise a concern regarding the practical application of Section (b) as currently written. The bill would require television and internet broadcasters to display an American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture format for the full duration of any live official announcement. Implementing this requirement would necessitate additional cameras, technical infrastructure, and additional staffing at live events, resources that are not consistently available, particularly during breaking news or emergency situations.

The unintended result may be that fewer broadcasters are able to carry these announcements live, which could ultimately reduce public access to timely information.

A possible solution would be for the Governor's Office and Mayor's Offices to provide a standardized feed that already includes a picture-in-picture ASL interpreter, or to supply real-time captioning at the source. Either option would preserve accessibility while allowing broadcasters of all sizes to continue providing broad public coverage.

Mahalo for considering these comments and for your commitment to improving accessibility across Hawai'i.

Sincerely,



Katie Pickman

Hawaii News Now

**HB-1531**

Submitted on: 1/29/2026 10:19:56 AM  
Testimony for PBS on 1/30/2026 11:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jason Hagiwara	Island News (KITV/KIKU)	Comments	Written Testimony Only

**Comments:**

As a leader for KITV and a board member for the Hawaii Association of Broadcasters, I wanted to share my thoughts on HB1531.

As written, the bill would require television and internet broadcasters to display an ASL interpreter as a picture-in-picture with the video of the speaker, for the duration of the announcement. This bill would require each station to staff at least two cameras for the event if we had to do this on our own. The staffing for most media companies wouldn't make resource sense to send two cameras. With the bill's requirements, the likely unintended consequence is that fewer outlets would carry these press conferences, resulting in less awareness, not more.

A potential solution would be for the city or state governments to standardize the video shooting with the picture-in-picture ASL interpreter. These feeds can be shared with all media outlets making compliance with the intent of the law achievable and ensure maximum reach.

Mahalo for reading my thoughts on this bill. If you would like to discuss this further, please feel free to reach out



**KHON TESTIMONY SUBMITTED RE: HB1531**  
**TO: House Committee on Public Safety**  
**DATE: January 30, 2026**

Aloha Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kristina Lockwood, and I am Vice President and General Manager of KHON2, a Nexstar Media Inc. television station serving the State of Hawai‘i. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB1531.

Broadcasters in Hawai‘i already comply with federal accessibility requirements, including the provision of real-time closed captioning for live and emergency programming. These federal standards govern how accessibility is delivered across broadcast and digital platforms.

While Section (a) of HB1531 appropriately places responsibility on the originating government official to provide an American Sign Language interpreter during live emergency press conferences, Section (b) raises serious operational, technical, and public safety concerns.

As drafted, Section (b) applies not only to live broadcasts, but to any broadcast or rebroadcast of an official announcement via television or the Internet. In practice, broadcasters frequently receive emergency press conferences via third-party streaming platforms that do not allow downstream modification or insertion of a picture-in-picture interpreter. In those cases, compliance with Section (b) would be technically impossible unless the interpreter is included in the original feed.

Additionally, the rebroadcast requirement would apply to edited clips, excerpts, and news packages used in later newscasts or digital coverage. Requiring a picture-in-picture interpreter for partial or excerpted use of video is operationally unworkable and would significantly disrupt standard news production practices.

Most concerning, Section (b) risks discouraging broadcasters from carrying emergency announcements altogether due to the risk of noncompliance. Any policy that reduces or delays dissemination of emergency information presents a direct public safety concern.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that Section (b) be removed from HB1531. Broadcasters should remain governed by existing federal accessibility standards, and emergency



**KHON TESTIMONY SUBMITTED RE: HB1531**

announcements should be encouraged to reach the widest possible audience without technical or legal barriers.

Mahalo for your consideration and for your continued focus on public safety.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristina Lockwood".

Kristina Lockwood  
KHON2 Vice President & General Manager

HB-1531

Submitted on: 1/28/2026 9:44:04 PM  
Testimony for PBS on 1/30/2026 11:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gerald Isobe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**My name is Gerald Isobe, born and raised in Hawaii. Since birth, I have been profoundly deaf. I strongly support HB1531. During a state of emergency, every second counts. This legislation will help retirees like me, to stay more alert and informed by requiring a visible ASL interpreter for all official broadcasts via television or internet in the timely manner. Please include live captioning for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Please make it a requirement that the ASL interpreter is interpreting during the live official broadcast and do not block the captioning for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Please support this bill to improve live emergency accessibility for**

# **Hawaii's Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.**

To: Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair  
Representative Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair  
Committee on Public Safety

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: January 29, 2026

RE: House Bill 1531  
Measure Title: RELATING TO EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS.  
Report Title: Emergency; Official Announcements; Broadcast Media; American Sign Language; Sign Language Interpreter

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 1531. Thank you for introducing this bill.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

**HB-1531**

Submitted on: 1/27/2026 4:28:57 PM  
Testimony for PBS on 1/30/2026 11:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nancy D Moser	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

**Comments:**

I support HB1531.

**HB-1531**

Submitted on: 1/29/2026 10:41:53 AM  
Testimony for PBS on 1/30/2026 11:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Beth Amaro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

**Comments:**

This legislation is extremely important to ensure that ALL residents and visitors who need to receive communications from the state and county during emergencies have access to this messaging.

Unless an American Sign Language interpreter is provided, potentially thousands of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing will have no access to this critical communication: potentially leaving them and the great community at risk for catastrophic consequences.

Please move this bill forward so that this critical health and safety matter can find resolution before the next emergency occurs.

Thank you,

Beth Amaro, Līhu‘e, Kauai

**HB-1531**

Submitted on: 1/29/2026 8:36:04 AM  
Testimony for PBS on 1/30/2026 11:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Blazak	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support