

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
KA 'OIHANA PONO LIMAHANA

February 17, 2026

To: The Honorable Jackson D. Sayama, Chair,
The Honorable Mike Lee, Vice Chair, and
Members of the House Committee on Labor

Date: Tuesday, February 17, 2026
Time: 9:00 a.m.
Place: Conference Room 309, State Capitol

From: Jade T. Butay, Director
Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR)

Re: H.B. 2005 HD1 RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

The DLIR **supports** this measure provided it does not conflict with the priorities identified in the Governor's Executive Supplemental Budget. DLIR will defer to the University of Hawaii (UH) as the lead agency on internal implementation matters and bill language should the measure continue through the legislative process.

This measure creates a structured pathway to address the need for language interpreters by offering training and paid internship opportunities. These initiatives will help develop bilingual workers to meet the State's language access and workforce needs.

DLIR's Hele Imua program provides residents, including students, with internship opportunities in both public and private sectors. DLIR is prepared to collaborate with UH to offer eligible students work-based learning and workplace exposure through the proposed language access education and workforce development program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Labor
February 17, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.

By

Debora Halbert
Vice President for Academic Strategy
University of Hawai'i System

HB 2005 HD1 – RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

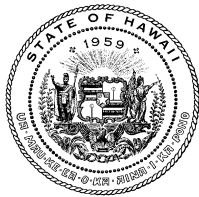
Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports HB 2005 HD1 – Relating to Language Access. The University of Hawai'i (UH) applauds the efforts of the legislature to build on the success of the Department of Education's Seal of Biliteracy program while striving to address language accessibility issues by creating a mechanism to develop a cadre of qualified translators and interpreters. This program would help recognize and deploy the oftentimes untapped talents of many UH students and community members.

If the intent of this measure is to provide broad community access to interpreter training and certification, we would like to offer the following context and suggestions for your consideration:

- 1) UH Mānoa has the most competitive admissions requirements and the highest tuition and fees in the UH System. While HB 2005 HD1 states that the program in question shall be administered by the SEED Office at UH Mānoa, which is not an academic unit, we would also like to point out that Kapi'olani Community College (Kapi'olani CC) possesses expertise and capacity in the area of interpreter training and certification. Kapi'olani CC has developed a series of non-credit interpreter training courses, including versions focusing on the court system and medical settings. Kapi'olani CC has offered its Medical Interpreting course to two Department of Education high schools (Pearl City and Konawaena) with online components. Additionally, Kapi'olani CC is in the process of (a) developing multi-course, non-credit stackable pathways in this area and (b) moving these offerings into fully online formats.
- 2) It is currently unclear whether the bill calls for a credit-based program or a non-credit based credential. Non-credit classes, including those offered through UH Mānoa's Outreach College, are typically far less expensive than credit-based coursework, and those wishing to enroll in such classes are not subject to college admissions requirements. Of course, it is possible to establish an initiative that provides both credit-based and non-credit opportunities, but it would still be helpful to clarify that point in the measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of measure HB 2005 HD1. This legislative effort to expand the pool of trained translators and interpreters in the workforce to serve our multilingual communities is commendable, as is the opportunity to leverage UH's many excellent language programs.



**STATE HEALTH PLANNING
AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO

JOSH GREEN, MD
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII

KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOHN C. (JACK) LEWIN, MD
ADMINISTRATOR

February 18, 2026

TO: HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR
Representative Jackson Sayama, Chair
Representative Mike Lee, Vice Chair
And Honorable Members

FROM: John C. (Jack) Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA, and Sr. Advisor to
Governor Josh Green, MD on Healthcare Innovation

RE: **HB2005 -- RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS**

HEARING: Tuesday, February 17, 2026 @ 9:00 am; Conference Room 309

POSITION: SUPPORT with COMMENTS

Testimony:

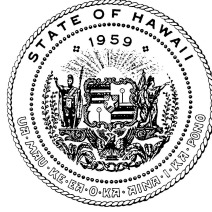
SHPDA supports HB 2005 with comments. This bill is intended to strengthen language access statewide by creating a structured, workforce-focused pathway to train and recognize qualified translators and interpreters in Hawai'i. By establishing the Language Access Education and Workforce Development Program at the University of Hawai'i, combined with ethics and bestpractices training, public-service focused instruction, and internship opportunities through the DLIR Hele Imua program, this bill seeks to build a culturally informed bilingual workforce that improves equitable access to critical services like education, health care, social services, law, agriculture, and government.

HB 2005 strengthens Hawai'i's capacity to serve a multilingual population by creating a consistent, statewide pipeline of trained and recognized translators and interpreters. By offering standardized instruction, ethical guidelines, and hands-on internship experience, the program improves the quality and reliability of language services across key service areas. It also supports workforce development by turning biliteracy into meaningful career opportunities for local students and community members.

Thank you for hearing HB 2005. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

HB 2005 testimony of SHPDA (2026), continued.

-- Jack Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA



**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS**

1177 Alakea Street, Room B-100
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
Phone: (808) 586-8730 / Fax: (808) 586-8733
doh.ola@doh.hawaii.gov

February 17, 2026
Time: 9:00 AM
ROOM 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
COMMITTEE ON LABOR

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT
HB2005, RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

Testifier: May Mizuno, Executive Director, Office of Language Access

Purpose: Establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i.

Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, members of the committee on Labor, good morning. My name is May Mizuno, executive director of the Office of Language Access.

The Office of Language Access (OLA) submits this testimony in strong support of HB2005 - Relating to Language Access to establish language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawaii. This bill would help to provide career experience and opportunities for multilingual students, such as those who obtain Seal of Biliteracy from HIDOE.

For two decades, our office has monitored the implementation of HRS 321C, and the single greatest barrier to compliance remains the critical shortage of qualified, local interpreters.

Professional training in ethics and standards is essential for public service. Relying on untrained "family interpreters" significantly increases the risk of medical errors, legal appeals, and privacy violations. This program ensures the "Meaningful Access" is also competent access, providing instruction in the best practices necessary for high-stakes interpretation.

HB2005 addresses a critical and long-standing challenge faced by the State: the shortage of trained, culturally competent translators and interpreters able to serve Hawaii's linguistically diverse communities, and language access is foundational to equity, civil rights compliance, and public trust.

This bill will bridge the existing gap between the Department of Education's Seal of Biliteracy and the professional workforce. By providing structured, statewide training pathway, we ensure that students' linguistic skills are converted into professional credentials that the State desperately needs, creating meaningful post-secondary career opportunities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.



February 15, 2026

Position: **Support of HB2005 HD1**, Relating to Language Access

To: Representative Jackson D. Sayama, Chair
Representative Mike Lee, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Labor

From: Llasmin Chaîne, LSW, Executive Director, Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women

Re: Testimony in Support of HB2005 HD1, Relating to Language Access

Hearing: Tuesday, February 17, 2026, 9:00 a.m.
Conference Room 309, State Capitol

The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women **supports HB2005 HD1**, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawaii. As an agency dedicated to advancing gender equity and improving the well-being of women and girls, the Commission recognizes that **language access is a critical component in ensuring equal opportunity and full participation in society**, particularly for immigrant communities.

Women from immigrant backgrounds often face unique barriers in accessing education, employment, and essential services due to language limitations. **By creating a structured program for language access education and workforce development, this bill addresses systemic barriers and inequities that disproportionately affect women.**

Establishing this program at the University of Hawaii leverages the institution's capacity to provide culturally competent education and training. It also **supports the development of a workforce better equipped to serve Hawaii's diverse multilingual population**. Research and best practices indicate that targeted language access initiatives improve socioeconomic outcomes and reduce disparities in health, education, and employment, areas central to the Commission's mission.

Ongoing evaluation and community engagement will be vital to maximize the program's effectiveness and to address evolving needs. We appreciate the Legislature's attention to this issue and urge continued support for initiatives that advance language access and workforce equity in Hawaii.

We respectfully **urge this Committee to pass HB2005 HD1**. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

HB-2005-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 2:47:00 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
amy agbayani	The Legal Clinic	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

My name is Amy Agbayani, President of The Legal Clinic Hawai'i, a non-profit community organization providing legal representation and assistance to low-income immigrants and families and emeritus director of UH Manoa student diversity services

I strongly endorse HB2005 for it will increase language access, meet academic educational objectives, develop workforce and career opportunities needed in our community. Our constitution and our community must acknowledge the contributions, rights, responsibilities of all people in our community My testimony in support of this bill is informed by being an immigrant myself and working with immigrant communities, DOE, UH, government agencies and community groups.

Our state population is diverse, with 18% foreign-born population who come from many countries including Canada and Mexico. The majority of immigrants are from Asia and the Pacific; and 50% of immigrants are from the Philippines. Hawai'i immigrants contribute billions to the state GDP--paying taxes, creating businesses, staffing essential jobs--while often being paid very low wages and lacking access to social benefits.

Hawai'i has one of the highest per-capita rates of limited English proficient persons ("LEP persons") in the nation. Of the State's population, 348,139 persons (or around 1 in 4) speak a language other than English at home and 161,055 residents or 1 in 9 speak English "less than very well," and counted as limited English proficient speakers (LEP). Languages spoken by Hawai'i foreign born communities include Ilokano, Tagalog, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Samoan, Tonga, Micronesian, Pohnpeian, Marshallese and Chuukese. Communicating in the languages they understand is critical to their ability to access services and resources. Foreign-born residents and Hawai'i residents from the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands experience severe barriers to active participation in the community. LEP are a disadvantaged and vulnerable sector of the community with limited access to information and resources. Many have no information on government services, have limited English proficiency, experience prejudice, cultural misunderstanding and unable to receive government and community resources. We have talented students and faculty to support Hawai'i and the immigrant community that is under attack.

This bill will help the state develop workers to assist LEP in our state receive services to meet equal access mandates. Government, private companies and non-profit organizations need persons who are qualified to provide language access. For example, my own organization, The

Legal Clinic depends on services of lawyers and other staff who can communicate with clients detained at the Federal Detention Center. Translators and interpreters were needed after the fires in Lahaina, a community with 30% foreign-born, 40% Filipino and a significant percentage LEP.

UH and DOE have significant students who can speak or are learning to speak languages in addition to English who may be interested and eligible for this program. UH has faculty and student services to implement a Language Access Education and Workforce development program but needs additional resources to provide training for students from any of the campuses. UH already has experience working effectively with internships from the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. This program provides a pathway to jobs and careers to serve our state.

I commend the DOE for providing not only instruction to teach English as a second language to foreign born children, but to programs to certify competence in English and 'Olelo Hawai'i and English and a foreign or community language (e.g. Spanish, Ilokano, Japanese). In addition, UH offers numerous classes, including four-year and graduate level courses in various languages. These students at UH campuses will be eligible to increase their language skills and obtain training, internships and other educational opportunities in translation and interpretation. Students participants in the language education and workforce development program can be from any campus, any academic major and become qualified to work with limited English proficient persons. Many occupations and professionals can benefit from having these bilingual skills and training (Health care professionals, Lawyers, Social Workers, Emergency responders, Police, tourism staff), a major. Both government and private organizations need trained bilingual workers to serve the large number of LEP.

I respectfully urge the Committee approve this bill because it help the state meet community eeds, mandates for language access and supports DOE UH educational and workforce development objectives.

February 15, 2026

Rep. Jackson D. Sayama, Chair

Rep. Mike Lee, Vice Chair

Committee Members

Committee on Labor

RE: Testimony in Support of HB2005

My name is Barbara Tom, and I am the Director of the Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Center. Through our work serving immigrant and migrant families in Waipahu and surrounding communities, we have witnessed firsthand the serious challenges caused by the lack of adequate language access in Hawai‘i.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many limited English proficient residents—particularly from Pacific Islander, Micronesian, and Filipino communities—did not receive timely or understandable information about testing sites, wrap around services, health services, and emergency assistance. We saw these same gaps again during the Maui fire disaster, where families speaking Pacific Island languages and multiple Filipino dialects struggled to navigate relief services due to the absence of qualified interpreters and translated resources. These experiences demonstrated how language barriers can directly impact health, safety, and recovery outcomes.

Hawai‘i continues to face a shortage of trained and qualified language access professionals across community, education, and health systems. For this reason, we strongly support HB2005. At Waipahu High School, we work closely with students who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy and are multilingual. These students represent an untapped and highly capable workforce that can help bridge critical language gaps in our communities.

Creating education and workforce development pathways at the university level—including formal training, certification, and paid internships—will strengthen the interpreter workforce, expand language access services statewide, and provide meaningful career opportunities for bilingual students. Investing in this pipeline will not only improve equity in public services but also empower local youth to serve their own communities.

Mahalo for your consideration and for supporting HB2005.

Barbara Tom

Director

Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Center



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB2005, HD1 - RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

House Committee on Labor
Rep. Jackson D. Sayama, Chair
Rep. Mike Lee, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 17, 2026 | Conference Room 309 | Letter Date: February 16, 2026

Dear Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

The Legal Clinic (TLC) strongly supports HB2005, HD1 which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i. TLC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing immigrant justice in Hawai'i through immigration legal services, community education, and policy advocacy. Ensuring equitable access to justice and public services for individuals with limited English proficiency is central to our mission and to the well-being of the communities we serve.

Language barriers remain a significant obstacle for many immigrants and migrants in Hawai'i. Limited access to qualified interpretation and translation services can prevent individuals from understanding their legal rights, accessing public safety protections, and meaningfully engaging with government agencies. These barriers often result in delayed or denied access to critical services, misunderstandings in legal proceedings, and reduced trust in public institutions.

HB2005, HD1 offers a sustainable solution to these challenges. Research and national best practices consistently demonstrate that increased language access improves outcomes in legal and public safety settings. Accurate and culturally competent interpretation reduces miscommunication, promotes procedural fairness, and supports due process. Strengthening language access also enhances public safety by encouraging individuals to report crimes and cooperate with investigations without fear that language barriers will prevent them from being understood or treated fairly.

HB2005, HD1's focus on workforce development is well-aligned with community needs. Collaboration with public service agencies and community organizations will help ensure that training reflects real-world service demands. At TLC, much of our legal services work depends on third-party interpreters, and we anticipate continued demand for these language services in the years ahead. We particularly encourage recruitment and training of interpreters with specialized knowledge of legal terminology and understanding of the unique and often sensitive circumstances faced by immigrants, refugees, and survivors of crime navigating the legal system.

HB2005, HD1 represents an important investment in fairness, access to justice, and the effectiveness of Hawai'i's public service systems. We appreciate the Legislature's commitment to language access and look forward to supporting the successful implementation of this important initiative.

Sincerely,

Christina Sablan
Community & Policy Advocate



To: The Honorable Jackson D. Sayama, Chair
The Honorable Mike Lee, Vice Chair
House Committee on Labor

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President
Mike Nguyen, Director of Public Policy
Maria Rallojay, Public Policy Specialist

Hearing: Tuesday, February 17, 2026, 9:00am, Conference Room 309

RE: **HB2005 HD1 Relating to Language Access**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support** of **HB2005 HD1**. This measure establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i.

AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan founded by Hawai'i's Community Health Centers and the Queen Emma Clinics. We serve over 66,000 Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dual-eligible residents on all islands. Since 1994, AlohaCare has partnered with providers, government entities, and community-based organizations to meet the evolving needs of our safety net community as Hawai'i's only health plan focused solely on Medicaid-eligible individuals. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for equitable access to quality, whole-person care for all.

AlohaCare's commitment to whole-person care and health equity includes addressing various social determinants of health. With half our members mainly speaking languages other than English, we understand that language can be a barrier to receiving care. We appreciate the intent of this measure to address this barrier by growing a trained, culturally competent workforce.

With the upcoming implementation of community engagement requirements for various federal programs, such as Medicaid, this measure is also a smart workforce development investment that simultaneously strengthens language access across public systems and expands meaningful career pathways for bilingual residents.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support** of **HB2005 HD1**.

HB-2005-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:20:04 AM

Testimony for LAB on 2/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Matthew B. Johnson	Pacific Gateway Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Pacific Gateway Center

In SUPPORT of HB2005 HD1

Committee on Labor

Representative Jackson D. Sayama, Chair

Representative Mike Lee, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Feb 17, 2026

Dear Chair Jackson D. Sayama, Vice Chair Mike Lee, and members of the Committee on Labor,

My name is Matthew Johnson, and I am the Executive Director for Pacific Gateway Center. I submit this testimony in support of HB2005 HD1, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i and appropriates funds to support the program.

Founded in 1973, Pacific Gateway Center (PGC) is a Hawaii-based nonprofit dedicated to empowering immigrants, refugees, and other underserved communities to achieve economic self-sufficiency and integration. Originally established to support Southeast Asian refugees, PGC has

expanded over the past five decades to provide workforce development, small business support, agriculture programs, and social services to individuals from more than 100 countries. Central to this mission is ensuring meaningful language access, which allows clients to fully understand their rights, access critical services, pursue employment and business opportunities, and engage confidently in their communities. Without culturally and linguistically appropriate support, many newcomers face significant barriers to success, making language access essential to advancing equity, economic mobility, and long-term stability for immigrant families.

HB2005 HD1 is a forward-looking investment in Hawai‘i’s people and capacity. Hawai‘i’s linguistic diversity is one of our greatest strengths, yet across the state there is a significant unmet need for qualified bilingual assistance, interpretation, and translation—especially in healthcare, education, legal services, emergency response, and social services. When language services are missing or handled informally, families can face delays, misunderstandings, and serious harm.

This bill creates a structured pathway to build Hawai‘i’s language access workforce from within our communities. It supports multilingual students—including recipients of the HDOE Seal of Biliteracy—by creating training opportunities, career experience, and professional pathways to become trained, qualified interpreters/translators and bilingual professionals. Importantly, being bilingual is not the same as being professionally trained to interpret or translate—professional language access requires specialized skills, confidentiality standards, and ethics. Establishing a statewide program helps ensure language access is competent, ethical, and consistent.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee PASS HB2005 HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Matthew B. Johnson

Pacific Gateway Center



www.hicir.org | Instagram @hicir
hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com

**Testimony of Liza Ryan-Gill
In SUPPORT of HB2005 HD1**

Representative Sayama, Chair
Representative Lee, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Feb 17th, 2026, 9am Room 309

Dear Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the Committee on Labor,

My name is **Liza Ryan-Gill**, testifying on behalf of the **Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights (HCIR)**. HCIR is a coalition of **30+ immigrant-serving and immigrant-led organizations** across the pae ‘āina working to advance policies that protect immigrant and migrant communities and strengthen Hawai‘i as a place where all families can thrive.

We strongly support **HB2005 HD1**, which would establish a **statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i**. This bill meets a clear statewide need and builds the talent pipeline Hawai‘i has been missing for far too long.

Hawai‘i’s language needs are real—and measurable

Hawai‘i is one of the most linguistically diverse states in the nation. In the most recent pooled ACS-based tabulations used for Hawai‘i, an estimated **342,396 people (age 5+) speak a language other than English at home**.

And our Limited English Proficient (LEP) community is not small or abstract—it is made up of our neighbors, kupuna, workers, and parents in our schools. State data drawing on **2019–2023 ACS (PUMS) tabulations** identifies the top LEP languages in Hawai‘i by number of speakers, including:

- **‘Ilokano (34,269)**
- **Japanese (17,683)**
- **Tagalog (16,238)**
- **Korean (9,223)**
- **Cantonese (6,991)**



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hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com

- Spanish (6,471)
- Vietnamese (6,265)
- Chuukese (5,279)
- Mandarin (4,312)
- Samoan (3,002)
- ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (2,470)
- Marshallese (2,192)

These numbers underscore what service providers already know: language access is not an “extra.” It is necessary infrastructure for equitable education, healthcare, housing, disaster response, and public benefits.

Language access is also the law in Hawai‘i

Hawai‘i has a statewide language access framework under **HRS Chapter 321C**, which requires state agencies and covered entities to plan for and deliver language access services.

But a legal requirement does not implement itself. Agencies cannot meet these obligations without a stable, trained, culturally competent workforce of interpreters, translators, and bilingual staff.

When language access fails, people get left behind—especially during disasters

The consequences of language gaps become most visible during emergencies. In the Hawai‘i Department of Health’s **Maui wildfires Rapid Needs Assessment**, the report notes that **the survey forms were not translated into other languages**, and interpretation had to be requested as-needed.

That detail reflects a larger, recurring issue we see across systems: when language access capacity is not built in ahead of time, families experience delays, confusion, and missed opportunities for help—at the exact moment they need clarity and dignity.

HB2005 HD1 grows local talent—and keeps it in Hawai‘i



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hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com

HB2005 HD1 is forward-thinking because it builds a **Hawai‘i-based pipeline** rather than relying on ad-hoc contracting or out-of-state support.

- **Connecting training to the DOE Seal of Biliteracy** is a practical strategy that values what Hawai‘i students already have: multilingual skills rooted in family and community. The Seal recognizes proficiency in English and Hawaiian, or either official language plus an additional language (including ASL).
- Pairing classroom learning with paid, structured experience—such as through the **Hele Imua internship program**—helps students actually finish programs and enter the workforce in public-serving roles, including healthcare, education, legal services, and social services.

Hawai‘i already faces workforce shortages—HB2005 is part of the solution

Even in specialized interpreting, shortages are documented and severe. For example, reporting on American Sign Language access in Hawai‘i has highlighted gaps across neighbor islands and limited availability of credentialed interpreters in multiple counties. HB2005 offers a scalable model to address shortages across languages—not just in one sector, but statewide.

Conclusion

Language access is how our elders understand medical instructions, how parents participate in their child’s education, how workers navigate workplace rights, and how families recover after disasters. It is also how government earns trust—especially in a state where immigrants are essential to our economy and our communities.

HB2005 HD1 is a smart investment in **workforce development, equity, and effective public service delivery**. HCIR urges the Committee to **pass HB2005 HD1**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Liza Ryan Gill

Executive Director

Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights

Aloha House of Representative Members,

My name is Billy Mitchell III. I am a student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. I am writing this testimony to stand in support of HB 2005. A Bill for an Act Relating to Language Access creates opportunities to continue learning, which, in many respects, every human has the right to do. At times, people coming to Oahu due to disasters in their home communities may face language barriers. This forced relocation at times leaves foreigners in a difficult position, not knowing where or what to do.

This tough position may stem from a lack of funding for programs that teach migrants and immigrants the local languages. Even though the continent has much conflict in turmoil due to ICE, protestors, and immigrants, we must be sure to stand in support of people who have been forced to leave their homelands. One way to stand in support is allocate funding to programs and services that can promote and include language services.

This, in turn, can offer people who have been struggling to adapt to living in Hawai'i an opportunity. Providing language services gives migrants and immigrants the opportunity to gain a foothold in their new environment. Another interesting idea is to include other languages besides English. Included Native Hawaiian and many other languages. This can help create a community with a higher bilingual percentage, which, of course, is amazing.

I am a student studying social work, and I believe that this bill fosters social work qualities and values because it provides additional resources to populations that have faced unexpected hardship. Including resources that are responsive and support individuals and families facing troubled times is an essential step toward addressing

conflicts. I appreciate you all for taking the time to review my written testimony, and I hope you all have a lovely day.

Mahalo,

Billy J. Mitchell III

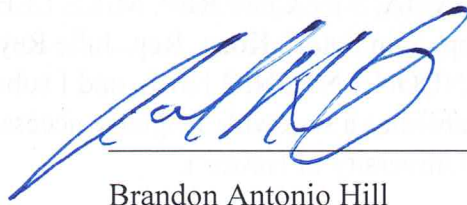
Aloha e Chair REP. JACKSON D. SAYAMA, Vice Chair REP. MIKE LEE, and Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, Rep. Jeanne Kapela, Rep. Sam Satoru Kong, Rep. Julie Reyes Oda of the Committee on Labor. My name is BRANDON ANTONIO HILL, and I submit this testimony in support of HB 2005 HD1, a bill that establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i.

I currently serve the State of Hawai'i as the Limited English Proficiency Specialist at the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA), and my embrace for language access as a professional art form stems from my time in service to the United States Navy and Hawai'i Air National Guard as an Electronics Technician and Mandarin Chinese and Korean military linguist. After 21 years of service in both the Intelligence Community (IC) and the Advanced Electronics Computer Field (AECF), I attest that there is no stronger framework for sound and equitable decision making than well-sourced information and stable lines of communication. Bills such as HB 2005 HD1 will reinforce a decades long trend in professionalizing human mediums of multilingual communication in support of the stability and security of our communities.

I support the idea that the relationship between human populations and their supporting institutions should be one of mutual benefit, and a meaningful working relationship between the two must be had so as not to lose sight of any inevitable changes to be encountered by either party. Even the slightest oversight may render long-term losses in service or even the development of gross misconceptions across parties leading to loss opportunities of reconciliation. For those willing to participate in the program, HB2005 HD1 will afford qualified members of communities yet another educational public service to assist in fortifying what could otherwise be a very fragile relationship between our limited English proficient (LEP) community members and institutions of service within the State.

The 20th and 21st centuries have seen significant improvements in efforts towards the validation of language proficiency for public service as a measure of trust. With the Foreign Service Institute's (FSI) 1958 policy to validate United States Government (USG) employees' language proficiency through testing, the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) support to the IC, and now the Seals of Biliteracy's support to the broader workforce, further transparency in communication gaps being closed through testing to the benefit of service providers, limited or non-English speakers and multilinguals alike has been realized. It is my hope that HB2005 HD1 will gradually put at ease the fears often associated with professional interpreting and translation through the presence of neighbors who have learned how to perform these skills professionally, and that these individuals will promote the proper execution of these skills for the sake of our communities that may need them.

In consideration of this bill, please envision staff who work in the background to keep the lights on, our mobile networks running and clean water flowing around us, and then place a LEP before a resource who only needs to speak one word to gain access to services — we will have people who can help make the lives of so many much better after the passing of this bill. Thank you for your time.



15 Feb 2026

Brandon Antonio Hill

HIEMA Limited English Proficiency Specialist

HB-2005-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:20:26 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ana Flores-Garcia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB2005

Representative Sayama, Chair.

Representative Lee, Vice Chair.

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

My name is Ana Flores, a Manoa resident and I am writing in strong support of HB2005.

Limited English proficiency can prevent individuals from fully understanding their rights and accessing essential government services, including law enforcement and the courts. Strong language access programs are critical to ensuring fairness and effective administration of justice.

As a multilingual speaker myself, I have experienced firsthand how language can open doors—educationally, professionally, and personally. Those opportunities have shaped my life, and now, as a mother raising two bilingual children, I hope those same doors remain open for them. Their language skills are not a barrier; they are an asset that deserves recognition, support, and investment.

In my previous role as the director of a nonprofit organization supporting first-generation students in their journey to higher education, I saw clear patterns of success. Students who were bilingual often demonstrated stronger academic resilience, adaptability, and confidence. When their language abilities were valued rather than discouraged, they were more likely to persist, succeed, and give back to their communities.

Maintaining one's mother tongue is especially important. Numerous studies show that bilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and long-term academic achievement. Preserving a child's first language also strengthens family bonds, cultural identity, and mental well-being. When systems encourage bilingualism instead of assimilation at the cost of language loss, communities thrive.

HB2005's focus on workforce development is especially critical. Our state needs trained interpreters and culturally competent professionals in sensitive settings such as police

encounters, courtrooms, schools, and other protected areas. Investing in this workforce not only improves public safety and access to justice—it signals that Hawai'i values linguistic diversity as a strength.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support HB2005. This measure moves us closer to a more equitable, inclusive, and effective system for all who call Hawai'i home.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Ana Flores
anaflores.mpa@gmail.com

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2005
RELATING TO Language Access
COMMITTEE ON LABOR**

Representative Jackson D. Sayama, Chair
Representative Mike Lee, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 17, 2026

Dear Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the Committee on Labor,

My name is Dina Yoshimi, and I submit this testimony in support of HB 2005, a bill that establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i.

I have been a faculty member at the University of Hawai'i Manoa for 33 years, and have been the Director of the Hawai'i Language Roadmap Initiative since its inception in September 2013. The Roadmap played a key role in supporting the creation of the Seal of Biliteracy, and has subsequently provided educational and workforce development opportunities for Seal of Biliteracy candidates and high school bilinguals across the state, including training in career skills for participating in a multilingual workforce. Today I am testifying as an individual and do not represent the University of Hawai'i.

The linguistic heritage of our bilingual students as well as the hard-earned proficiency of our students who commit the hours required to master an additional language is an invaluable asset to the state. The DOE has provided the Seal of Biliteracy as a meaningful and valuable recognition of these students' abilities. The recognition is meaningful in that it is the only way our state communicates to bilinguals and proficient learners that their linguistic talent is worth celebrating and maintaining. The recognition is valuable in that employers who see the Seal of Biliteracy on a resume know that the student has demonstrated proficiency in English and an additional language at least at a functional level of fluency. (Without a Seal of Biliteracy, the claim is based on the applicant's subjective judgment of their own abilities.) I know a number of students who have been hired for their language skills in the local workforce based on their status as Seal of Biliteracy recipients.

The state needs a program to nurture this growing pool of talent. There are now thousands of students who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy, and hundreds more who have earned the internationally-recognized Global Seal of Biliteracy. The program proposed by this bill provides a welcome opportunity for these individuals to continue to develop their skills to serve the multilingual needs of the state. As the language of the bill identifies, language

access is not a luxury—it is a fundamental requirement for ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, and emergency government programs. In a state as diverse as Hawaii, our multilingual population is one of our greatest strengths; however, this strength can only be realized when we bridge the communication gap with a trained, culturally competent workforce.

HB2005 provides a structural framework to address the shortage of qualified interpreters and translators. The bill's emphasis on the Department of Education's Seal of Biliteracy is a practical way to keep local talent in the islands. It transforms a student's existing linguistic skills into a marketable professional asset, providing a clear bridge from high school to a career in public service or healthcare.

The integration with the Hele Imua internship program through the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations ensures that participants receive hands-on experience in public service settings, including agriculture and social services, while potentially receiving the financial support necessary to complete their education.

Ensuring that every resident can understand their doctor, participate in their child's education, and navigate the legal system is a matter of statewide concern and constitutional duty. This bill creates a "win-win" scenario: it strengthens our workforce development and ensures that our most vulnerable non-English speaking residents are treated with the dignity and clarity they deserve.

I urge you to support this measure. Thank you for your time and consideration.

HB-2005-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 11:13:20 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emily Lam	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and members of the Committee on Higher Education,

I am writing in support of HB 2005, which seeks to establish a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i.

As one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse states in the nation, Hawai‘i has a responsibility to ensure that all residents—regardless of their proficiency in English—can navigate state systems effectively. My support is based on the following points:

There is currently a significant and unmet need for professional language services, including bilingual assistance, interpreting, and translation, across nearly all state agencies. Without these services, individuals with limited English proficiency are effectively barred from, or face extreme difficulty accessing, critical state-provided services. This includes essential areas such as healthcare, legal services, education, employment, tax assistance, and social services.

Hawai‘i’s State Language Access Law (HRS 321C) already mandates the timely provision of meaningful and competent language services. While state agencies are required to implement Language Access Plans, the reality is that the demand for these services often outstrips the supply of qualified professionals. To fulfill the spirit of the law, we must invest in the workforce that makes these services possible.

While the Hawai‘i State Department of Education's Seal of Biliteracy successfully recognizes the value of multilingualism, there is currently no established pathway for these recipients or other bilingual residents to transition into the workforce as qualified interpreters and translators.

It is a common misconception that being bilingual is enough to be an interpreter. Professional interpreting and translating require specialized training beyond language fluency, including mastery of ethical standards, confidentiality protocols, and technical terminology. Without formal training, untrained individuals may inadvertently introduce bias, subjectivity, or breaches of confidentiality, potentially leading to dangerous or legally compromised outcomes in settings such as healthcare or the courtroom.

HB 2005 addresses these gaps by supporting a statewide program to establish a regular curriculum and standards. This benefits the state in two key ways:

1. It raises awareness that interpreting and translating are specialized professional skills that require specific education.
2. It provides a workforce development pipeline for our bilingual community members to become qualified professionals, ensuring that interactions with the state are safe, effective, and equitable.

By supporting HB 2005, we ensure that the State of Hawai'i can live up to its commitment to language access and provide all residents with the "meaningful access" promised under the law.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass HB 2005. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**Testimony of Terrina Wong
In SUPPORT of HB2005**

Representative Garrett, Chair
Representative Lee, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Feb 17th, 2026

Dear Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the Committee on Labor

My name is Terrina Wong and I submit this testimony in support of HB 2005, a bill that establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i.

I recently retired as the Deputy Director of Immigration and Social Services at Pacific Gateway Center. I served as Chair of the Language Access Advisory Council of the Office of Language Access and as a presenter to Waipahu High School’s Multilingual Marauders under the tutelage of its teacher, Jeremiah Brown. I also served on many ad hoc language access committees during Covid-19 and the Maui Wildfires. I was authorized to conduct immigration legal services as an Accredited Representative with the Department of Justice for Pacific Gateway Center since 2018 to ensure access to justice for low-income immigrants. In such a role, language access is critical.

I am testifying as an individual and do not represent the University of Hawaii and I am pleased to offer this testimony on behalf of myself as an civically-engaged and concerned individual citizen for the well-being of our community.

As the language of the bill identifies, language access is not a luxury—it is foundational to social justice to ensure equitable access to programs, services and opportunities in education, healthcare, legal services, and emergency government programs. In a state as diverse as Hawaii, our multilingual population is one of our greatest strengths; however, this strength can only be realized when we bridge the communication gap with a trained, culturally competent workforce.

The norms of our State inherently value our multilingual, multicultural community. However, we also recognize that the 1 out of 5 foreign-born residents in Hawaii are disproportionately at-risk and we must find ways to ensure our community who speaks English “less than very well” have access to good and trusted information.

HB2005 provides a structural framework to address the shortage of qualified interpreters and translators. We must learn from the pandemic and the Maui wildfires that have taught us we were not able to satisfactorily meet the needs of the limited English proficient due to the shortage of qualified interpreters and translators. The bill’s emphasis on the Department of Education’s Seal of Biliteracy is a practical way to keep local talent in the islands. It transforms a student’s existing linguistic skills that honor their heritage languages into a marketable professional asset, providing a clear bridge from high school to a career in public service or healthcare.

The integration with the Hele Imua internship program through the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations ensures that participants receive hands-on experience in public service settings, including agriculture and social services, while potentially receiving the financial support necessary to complete their education.

Ensuring that every resident can understand their doctor, participate in their child's education, and navigate the legal system is a matter of statewide concern and constitutional duty. This bill creates a "win-win" scenario: it strengthens our workforce development and ensures that our most vulnerable non-English speaking residents are treated with the dignity and clarity they deserve.

I urge you to support this measure. Our methods of communication of critical information must be accessible and equitable to all Hawaii residents. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Terrina Wong

HB-2005-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:53:50 AM

Testimony for LAB on 2/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jeffrey Miguel Acido	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing in strong support of HB 2005. This bill would benefit many of students who are bilingual and have taken the seal of biliteracy in their respective high schools.

Currently, I am the Coordinator for Philippine Studies and Ilokano language program at Leeward Community College. As well as teaching classes at Waipahu High School. Many of my students are multilingual speaking english and Ilokano, Japanese, Samoan, Korean among others.

This bill would generate jobs and the necessary skill of trasnlation, needed primarily in the field of health and education.

Agyamanak for your consideration,

Dr. Jeffrey Miguel Acido

Testimony in Support of HB2005 HD1- Relating to Language Access

Representative Jackson D. Sayama, Chair
Representative Mike Lee, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Feb 17, 2026

Dear Chair Jackson D. Sayama, Vice Chair Mike Lee, and members of the Committee on Labor,

My name is Jeremiah Brown, and I am the multilingual learners program coordinator at Waipahu High School. I am writing in strong support of HB2005 HD1, which establishes a statewide Language Access Education and Workforce Development Program at the University of Hawai'i.

In my role as an educator, I work closely with multilingual students and their families. I have also run student translator programs at my school. Through these experiences, I have seen firsthand both the incredible linguistic assets our students bring to their schools and communities and the real need for structured training, ethical guidance, and clear pathways into professional language access work.

A teacher at Kealekahe High School has also been running a student translator program for several years, demonstrating that there is a talent pool for this kind of work and that there are programs in place that can be built on to create a pipeline of students interested in this work.

In each of the past three years, over 100 students have graduated from Waipahu High School with the Seal of Biliteracy. These students demonstrate high levels of proficiency in English and at least one additional language, and many already serve informally as translators and interpreters for their families, attending doctor's appointments, helping fill out forms, and even file tax returns. While their willingness to help is admirable and often necessary, they shouldn't be placed in those roles as a qualified, trained interpreter or translator would be more appropriate.

HB2005 HD1 directly addresses this need, a need that was made clear during the pandemic and the aftermath of the Maui wildfires. By creating a structured, statewide program that builds on the Seal of Biliteracy and provides training and paid internship opportunities, this bill validates students' linguistic skills while also protecting the communities they serve. It transforms what is currently informal, uneven, and often uncompensated labor into a professional pathway that benefits both students and the State of Hawai'i.

This bill also sends the important message that students' home languages and cultural knowledge are strengths that are valued, needed, and worthy of investment. For many multilingual students, especially those from immigrant families, this recognition can be life-changing. It connects school success to meaningful career opportunities and directly supports Hawai'i's language access obligations across state agencies.

From my experience in schools, I can say with confidence that there is both student interest and workforce need for a program like the one proposed in HB2005 HD1. My school alone sends out dozens of multilingual graduates into the workforce every year. This bill builds on existing successes, such as the Seal of Biliteracy, and thoughtfully extends them into higher education and workforce development.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support HB2005 HD1. Mahalo for your time, your consideration, and your continued commitment to equity, access, and opportunity for Hawai'i's diverse communities.

Respectfully,

Jeremiah Brown
Multilingual Learners program coordinator
Waipahu High School

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee,

My name is Debra Andres Arellano, and I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2005. I submit this testimony drawing upon my 15 years of experience as an educator and a former board member of Kaibigan ng Lahaina, a culturally responsive disaster response organization founded after the Lahaina wildfires. I am currently an Instructor of Ilokano Language for UH Maui College, however, I am submitting this testimony today as a private citizen.

As a former administrator, I can attest that our primary duty has always been to the families in our community. However, we have never been able to fully nurture our multilingual students in a way that allows them to support our community because we have never received the necessary support from the state through an established fund or pathway.

Throughout my career, I have seen an increase in Ilokano heritage learners gaining interest in learning their native language, but there is currently no clear avenue for gainful employment for these students once they reach proficiency. Since 2017, the HDOE has awarded the State Seal of Biliteracy to over 3,000 students, but there is still no established pathway for these graduates to transition into the workforce as qualified interpreters and translators. These students represent a "valuable pipeline," yet their linguistic wealth remains an underutilized resource.

HB 2005 provides the solution by establishing a language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawaii. This program will create meaningful career opportunities and develop a qualified bilingual workforce to serve Hawaii's diverse communities. By providing a structured curriculum and paid internship opportunities, this bill transforms a student's linguistic skills into a marketable professional asset.

The Lahaina wildfires underscored that language access is a fundamental requirement for equitable access to healthcare and emergency services. While we have language access laws, state agencies often struggle to provide services because the demand for qualified professionals far outstrips the current supply.

In addition, professional translation requires specialized training in ethics and technical standards that goes beyond mere bilingualism. I respectfully urge you to pass HB 2005 to invest in our heritage learners and fulfill our state's commitment to meaningful language access.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 2005 to invest in our local talent and fulfill our state's commitment to meaningful language access.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Debra Andres Arellano

Dear Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee on Labor,

My name Patricia Halagao, and I am writing in strong support of HB2005, which seeks to establish a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i.

I am a professor of Education and Co-Director of the Center for Philippine Studies at the University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa. I am testifying as an individual; I do not represent the University of Hawai‘i. I am also a former member of the Hawai‘i State Board of Education, where I spearheaded the adoption of the Seal of Biliteracy (Policy 105-15) and the Multilingualism for Equitable Education Policy (Policy 105-14) in 2016.

HB 2005 closely aligns with my professional work to uplift communities through education, language, and culture. As one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse states in the nation, Hawai‘i has a responsibility to ensure that all residents—regardless of English proficiency—can effectively navigate state systems. This requires meaningful access to language services, including bilingual assistance, interpretation, and translation, across state agencies. Such services are essential for accessing critical state-provided resources related to education, legal services, employment, healthcare, and agricultural assistance.

HB 2005 builds on the strengths and assets of Hawai‘i’s multilingual communities by enabling them to support one another. I strongly believe HB 2005 is especially effective because it addresses multiple needs simultaneously: it expands access to high-quality language services while also creating employment and career pathways. Professional interpreting and translation require specialized skills and rigorous training, and this bill ensures the establishment of a strong, standards-based training program to prepare qualified professionals.

Importantly, this program would create meaningful career experience and opportunities for our multilingual students, including those who earn the Seal of Biliteracy through the Hawai‘i Department of Education. I am proud to share that between 2017 and 2025, HIDOE has awarded the Seal of Biliteracy to over 3,000 students across more than 100 languages. Beyond the well-documented academic benefits of multilingualism, this workforce development program would allow our students to make even broader social impact and civic contributions.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support HB 2005. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia E. Halagao". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patricia Halagao

COMMITTEE ON LABOR
Rep. Jackson D. Sayama, Chair
Rep. Mike Lee, Vice Chair

HEARING:
Tuesday, February 17, 2026 at 9:00 AM
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 309
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2005, HD1 - RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Andrews and I am a long-term resident of Wailuku, Maui. I am also an attorney licensed in the state of Hawaii for over 25 years and a founding coalition member of El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui — The People in Action Maui. Earlier in my career I was also certified by the Japanese government in level one Japanese language interpretation. I am writing in **strong support of HB 2005, HB1**, Relating to Language Access, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawaii and appropriates funds.

Early in my career, I was the founding Program Manager of the Maui Economic Development Board's Women in Technology Project, where I worked on equity in STEM as a workforce development issue for many years, and wrote over ten peer-reviewed papers on best practices in the field. In that capacity, I identified barriers to workforce development, those elements in the training to workforce pipeline that led to shortages of skilled workers, especially in our neighbor island community. As a volunteer with El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui — The People in Action Maui, I have also witnessed how the unmet need for bilingual assistance impacts our community as a whole, with people unable to access legal services, health care resources, and social services as the result of lack of language access.

It is important to note that trained, qualified interpreters with appropriate skills, confidentiality standards, and ethics are very needed. I remember when I was a volunteer with the Family Court Monitoring Project some years ago, observing an interaction between the court and a Japanese national visitor, who was before the court on charges of domestic violence. A staff member of the hotel where he was staying served as his "interpreter" for the day. This was not appropriate, as she was not a trained or qualified interpreter for courtroom work. I witnessed the court ask a question of the accused, and the hotel staff providing the accused the question on behalf of the court. I also witnessed the accused make extremely inappropriate statements in Japanese, berating the court and also making statements that, essentially, the victim deserved it, and that the whole thing of being in court was nonsense. I then witnessed the hotel staff give a completely different interpretation than what the man said. She was very polite, apologetic, and deferential. I hoped that the court picked up on the man's body language, tone, and facial expression and recognized that the interpretation was inaccurate.

This experience of witnessing such inaccurate and inappropriate interpretation in front of a family court judge in a case of domestic violence was shocking to me. I hope that it highlights for the Committee the importance of the goals of HB 2005, HD1 to provide professionally trained interpreters. I request that you support language access and **vote in support of HB 2005, HD1**.

Mahalo for all you do for your constituents and community,

Christine Andrews, JD
Wailuku, Maui