

**HB-2443-HD-1**

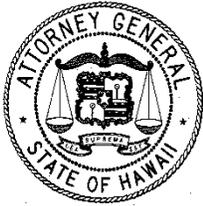
Submitted on: 2/24/2026 6:08:13 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 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:

An obvious rule of thumb to remember is that if a natural or other disaster occurs, while it clearly impacts a large segment of the population, it will have an even greater impact on people with disabilities. This is always true and we certainly experienced it during the Maui wildfires. The preamble language in the Bill appropriately recounts some of the problems encountered such as lack of accessible shelters and the gaps that existed in the planning and response efforts. Mandating the inclusion of planning for the needs of those with a disability as well as designating a specific position to be responsible for making sure that occurs is clearly a very necessary thing to do.



**TESTIMONY OF  
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA  
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026**

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**ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:**

H.B. NO. 2443, H.D. 1, RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES.

**BEFORE THE:**

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

**DATE:** Friday, February 27, 2026                      **TIME:** 10:00 a.m.

**LOCATION:** State Capitol, Room 308

**TESTIFIER(S):** Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or  
Ryan Endo, Deputy Attorney General

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Chair Todd and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

This bill seeks to ensure equitable access to disaster services for individuals with disabilities by establishing a disability integration specialist position within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA). The specialist would promote accessibility, inclusion, and equity for individuals with disabilities in emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation efforts. The bill allows HIEMA to hire the disability integration specialist without regard to Hawaii's civil service law, chapter 76, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS).

Section 76-16(b), HRS, sets forth positions that are exempt from chapter 76, HRS. Under section 76-16(b)(17)(A), HRS, any civil service exemption created after July 1, 2014, by other laws and not identified in section 76-16(b) expires three years after enactment unless affirmatively extended by an act of the Legislature.

If the Committee intends for the disability integration specialist position to be permanently exempt from chapter 76, HRS, we recommend amending section 76-16(b), HRS, to expressly include the position among the enumerated exemptions. This could be accomplished by amending section 76-16(b) to insert "disability integration specialist" within paragraph (32) as follows (omitted paragraphs indicated by ellipses):

(b) The civil service to which this chapter applies shall comprise all positions in the State now existing or hereafter established and embrace all personal services performed for the State, except the following:

...

(32) In the Hawaii emergency management agency, the executive officer, public information officer, civil defense administrative officer, branch chiefs, disability integration specialist, and emergency operations center state warning point personnel; provided that for state warning point personnel, the director shall determine that recruitment through normal civil service recruitment procedures would result in delay or noncompliance;

...

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I**  
**STATE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**  
**'A'UNIKE MOKU'ĀPUNI NO KA NĀ KĀWAI KULA**  
PRINCESS VICTORIA KAMĀMALU BUILDING  
1010 RICHARDS STREET, Room 122  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
TELEPHONE: (808) 586-8100 FAX: (808) 586-7543

February 27, 2026

The Honorable Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
House Committee on Finance  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Todd and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 - Relating to Disaster Services

The Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities is in **STRONG SUPPORT of HB2443 HD1**, which integrates the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs into emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities; establishes a Disability Integration Specialist position, to be located in the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, who shall provide programming support for disability community projects that promote accessibility, inclusion, and equity in disaster management; and appropriates funds.

The Council appreciates the amendments to the measure from the previous committee clarifying the proposed new duties of the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, which are critically important for individuals with access and functional needs (AFN). This population includes kupuna, individuals with chronic health conditions, sensory impairments, mobility limitations, physical, intellectual, developmental, and cognitive disabilities, neurodivergent individuals, medical dependencies, limited English proficiency, temporary injuries, caregivers, and others who may require additional support and accommodations during emergencies.

People with AFN are often disproportionately harmed during disasters not because of the event itself, but because emergency systems are not designed with access and functional needs in mind. Barriers such as inaccessible shelters, ineffective communication, lack of trained staff, and disruptions to essential supports increase risk during evacuation, response, and recovery.

Establishing a dedicated Disability Integration Specialist ensures that access and functional needs are incorporated into emergency planning proactively, strengthening shelter accessibility, communication systems, and continuity of care for the entire community.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **strongly supporting HB2443 HD1**.

Sincerely,

Daintry Bartoldus  
Executive Administrator



# **HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION** **KOMIKINA PONO KĪWILA O HAWAI‘I**

830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 411, HONOLULU, HI 96813 · PHONE: (808) 586-8636 · FAX: (808) 586-8655 · TDD: (808) 586-8692

DATE: Friday, February 27, 2026  
TIME: 10:00 AM  
PLACE: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE  
Conference Room 308  
State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street

To:

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
Rep. Chris Todd, Chair  
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

From: Alphonso Braggs, Chair  
and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

**Re: HB 2443 HD1 Relating to Language Access**  
**Testimony in SUPPORT**

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). Through this broad jurisdiction, the HCRC ensures that the constitutional promise of nondiscrimination is not merely aspirational, but actively protected in the daily lives of Hawai‘i’s people.

The HCRC supports HB 2443 HD1 because it ensures that Hawai‘i’s emergency management system reflects the needs of all residents, including those of non-native

English speakers and people with disabilities. The devastating Maui wildfires in 2023 exposed many shortcomings in Hawai'i's emergency response systems, particularly in communication. Physical accessibility or auxiliary aids at shelters, staff training, and coordination of resources should be improved and strengthened statewide to reduce inequities during future disasters. During emergencies, access to important information is critical and could be the difference between life and death. Delays in vital information during emergencies could effectively constitute a denial of communication, as time is of the essence.

Our law is clear that no qualified individual in our state, *solely by reason of the individual's disability*, shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination by state agencies, or any program or activity receiving state assistance. Hawai'i Revised Statutes § 368-1.5.

HB 2443 HD1 amends the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency's functions to ensure compliance with various state and federal disability access laws by integrating the needs of individuals with disabilities and others into emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities. This includes effective communication in all phases of disaster management. H.B. 2443 HD1 appears to be a step in the right direction toward recognizing that the needs of individuals with disabilities should not be an afterthought but part of the planning and preparedness process.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide support to this important bill.



[www.AlohaILHawaii.org](http://www.AlohaILHawaii.org)

Feb 24, 2026

#### MISSION

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) dedicated to providing independent living programs and services for persons with disabilities in Hawaii.

We work together with the community and consumers to improve the quality of life through individual choices and access to services.

#### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Roxanne U. Bolden

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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##### Member

Scott Suzuki  
Sheila Castaneda  
Jennifer Hartssock

The Honorable Chris Todd, Chair  
House Committee on Finance  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawaii  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1, Related to Disaster Services

Chair and Members of the Committee:

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) respectfully submits testimony in **support of HB2443 HD1 with recommendations.**

HB2443 HD1 integrates the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs into the statutory duties of the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA), including planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities. The bill also establishes and funds a Disability Integration Specialist position within HI-EMA and provides programming support for community-based accessibility initiatives.

The Legislature correctly recognizes that individuals with disabilities faced disproportionate barriers during the August 8, 2023 Maui wildfires, including inaccessible shelters, communication gaps, and lack of coordinated disability-specific supports. In the absence of a structured, statewide disability integration framework, nonprofit organizations and community members were required to fill critical gaps.

During the Maui wildfire recovery, AILH participated in coordinated disability-focused response efforts, including convening partners, interfacing with FEMA Disability Integrated personnel, and assisting with identification of access and functional needs gaps in shelters and recovery services. As a Center for Independent Living, AILH is not an emergency response agency and does not deploy into active disaster zones; however, our coordination experience underscored the need for a formalized, statewide disability integration structure



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Roxanne U. Bolden

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Valerie Yamada

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Zora Shove

### Treasurer

Jonathan Yap

### Member

Scott Suzuki  
Sheila Castaneda  
Jennifer Hartsock

within HI-EMA to prevent reliance on ad hoc community mobilization during future disasters.

From a fiscal perspective, disaster accessibility is not an optional enhancement. Section 308 of the Stafford Act requires equitable access to disaster services for individuals with disabilities. Failure to integrate disability considerations into emergency management risks noncompliance, inefficient resource deployment, and preventable harm that may increase recovery costs.

Investing in a Disability Integration Specialist position represents proactive risk mitigation. Integrating accessibility into planning reduces downstream expenditures associated with emergency retrofitting, shelter modifications, litigation exposure, and prolonged recovery for disproportionately impacted populations.

AILH respectfully offers the following recommendations to ensure the appropriation achieves durable impact:

First, the Disability Integration Specialist position must be funded at a competitive wage commensurate with the expertise required. Effective disability integration demands specialized knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), federal emergency management guidance, access-and-functional-needs planning, and community-based service coordination. Undercompensation risks high turnover and undermines the State's investment.

Second, the position should require demonstrated expertise in disability integration and meaningful engagement with disability-led organizations. Disability integration is most effective when informed by lived experience and established community partnerships.

Third, the role must be structurally empowered within HI-EMA to influence cross-agency planning rather than function as an advisory position without operational authority. Integration must occur across all emergency management phases and across counties, consistent with the bill's intent.

Finally, programming funds for disability-related community projects should prioritize initiatives that build sustainable capacity, such as shelter accessibility



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Scott Suzuki  
Sheila Castaneda  
Jennifer Hartssock

improvements, accessible communication systems, and training for emergency personnel.

Proactive disability integration strengthens disaster resilience statewide. It reduces long-term recovery costs, enhances compliance with federal requirements, and ensures equitable access to emergency services for one in five Hawaii residents.

AILH respectfully urges the Committee to advance HB2443 HD1 with consideration of these recommendations.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Aloha,

Roxanne Bolden

Executive Director



The Honorable Chris Todd, Chair  
House Committee on Finance  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Todd and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

The Hawai'i Self-Advocacy Advisory Council(SAAC) strongly supports HB2443 HD1. The bill makes sure that people with disabilities are included in all parts of emergency planning and response. It creates a Disability Integration Specialist within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency to help ensure shelters, communication, transportation, and services are accessible before disasters happen.

People with disabilities are often at higher risk during emergencies because systems are not designed for their needs. This bill helps fix that and recognizes that many more people have disabilities or functional needs than emergency systems typically account for. Planning for accessibility also benefits kūpuna, caregivers, people with medical needs, and anyone who may need extra support during a crisis.

For these reasons, the Hawaii Self-Advocacy Advisory Council strongly supports HB2443 HD1.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Timothy Renken,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Renken". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent horizontal stroke across the middle.

President, Hawaii Self-Advocacy Advisory Council

Following testimony has 5 individuals who support HB2433 HD1

The Honorable Chris Todd, Chair  
House Committee on Finance  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Todd and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1, Relating to Disaster Services

My name is \_Josh Goetz and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1, which is the establishment of a Disability Integration Specialist at the HI Emergency Management Agency coordinator for people with disabilities statewide.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2433 HD1.

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Committee on Public Safety

State Capitol

State of Hawai'i

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is \_Michelle Muralt and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1, which is the establishment of a Disability Integration Specialist at the HI Emergency Management Agency coordinator for people with disabilities statewide.

The reason why I think HB2443 HD1 is important is:

It allows individuals like me to have support for my specific emergency needs.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2433 HD1.

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Committee on Public Safety

State Capitol

State of Hawai'i

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is Vaipapa Soliai and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1, which is the establishment of a Disability Integration Specialist at the HI Emergency Management Agency coordinator for people with disabilities statewide.

The reason why I think HB2443 HD1 is important is:

The bill gives accessible communication especially when it is difficult for me to communicate with people.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2433 HD1.

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Committee on Public Safety

State Capitol

State of Hawai'i

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is Raymond Mamea and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1, which is the establishment of a Disability Integration Specialist at the HI Emergency Management Agency coordinator for people with disabilities statewide.

The reason why I think HB2443 HD1 is important is:

During disasters, people with disabilities need help to evacuate so they are not stuck in danger. I will need help and assistance during a hurricane evacuation because I am in a wheelchair and will have to evacuate using some kind of transportation to a emergency shelter.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2433 HD1.

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Committee on Public Safety

State Capitol

State of Hawai'i

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is James Labrie and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1, which is the establishment of a Disability Integration Specialist at the HI Emergency Management Agency coordinator for people with disabilities statewide.

The reason why I think HB2443 HD1 is important is:

If we don't have a coordinator for emergencies for people with disabilities, the disability community will be left stranded and have to rely on first responders, who are usually not available during natural disasters. I use an electric wheelchair and would be stranded if there is no plan to help me evacuate to an emergency shelter.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2433 HD1.

February 25, 2026

House Committee on Finance  
Chair Chris Todd  
Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi  
Members of the Committee

**Re: HB 2443 HD 1 – Relating to Disaster Services – SUPPORT**

Aloha kākou!

LeadingAge Pacific West is pleased to support House Bill 2443 HD 1 which would incorporate the needs of individuals with disabilities and access functional needs into the state’s emergency preparedness and response efforts.

LeadingAge Pacific West is a leading advocate for quality, mission-driven housing, care and services for older adults. Our nonprofit members include providers of affordable senior housing, residential care facilities for the elderly (assisted living), life plan communities, skilled nursing care, home and community-based services, home health and hospice care.

The needs of older and disabled adults during and following a disaster are very different than those of the general population and often overlooked. It is imperative that the state examine and include those needs when planning for emergencies. HB 2443 HD 1 makes necessary changes within Hawaii’s emergency management agency, including establishing and funding a new position dedicated to supporting those with disabilities and access and functional needs.

HB 2443 HD 1 is an important step toward filling much needed gaps in Hawaii’s emergency planning and response for older and disabled adults. For these reasons, LeadingAge Pacific West is pleased to support HB 2443 HD 1 and urges your support for this important measure.

Sincerely,  
Amber King  
Vice President, Legislative Affairs

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 PŪULIA

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

STATE OF HAWAI'I  
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2443 HD1,  
RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
FINANCE

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS  
ADMINISTRATOR  
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

February 27, 2026

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide **SUPPORT** testimony on House Bill 2443 HD1, which addresses critical and longstanding gaps in disaster services for individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

Approximately one in five Hawai'i residents live with a disability and face disproportionate risks during disasters. These risks include barriers to evacuation, inaccessible transportation, and difficulties receiving emergency communications in formats they can understand. The devastating Maui wildfires of August 2023 exposed systemic inequities where individuals with disabilities struggled to access emergency shelters and services due to lack of physical accessibility, trained staff, and coordinated resources.

Hawai'i currently lacks a dedicated position to ensure these mandates are met comprehensively. HB2443 HD1, will establish a full-time Disability Integration Specialist position within HIEMA. This specialist will be instrumental in:

- Coordinating disability-related planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation efforts to ensure compliance with ADA and related laws.
- Advising on best and promising practices for accessible shelters, evacuation procedures, and disaster communications.
- Providing programming support to disability and access and functional needs community projects that promote equity and inclusion.
- Strengthening statewide coordination and partnerships with disability advocacy organizations, service providers, and community members.

The bill also appropriates necessary funds to support this position and related programming, making a significant investment in safety, inclusion, and resilience for our most vulnerable populations.

Passing this bill will create a safer, more equitable emergency management system that protects all residents before, during, and after disasters.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2443, HD1.

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

**HB-2443-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:21:45 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
James Kilgore	Full Life	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Full Life strongly supports HB2443 HD1, which includes people with disabilities with access to emergency planning, preparedness, response, and recovery. We strongly support aligning emergency preparedness with ADA and believe that a Disability Integration Specialist position will ensure that people with disabilities are not left behind in planning and responding to emergencies.



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE**  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
415 S. BERETANIA ST. #415  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

**Testimony on H.B. 2443 HD1**  
**RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES**

Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Finance

February 27, 2026, at 10:00 a.m.; Room Number: 308

The Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) **Supports** H.B. 2443 HD1, Relating to Disaster Services and defers to the State of Hawai'i's Department of Defense (HI DOD).

The mission of the OWR is to strengthen state systems and services by advancing hope-centered principles and supporting Hawai'i's transition toward becoming a trauma-informed state. In this work, our office explores avenues to increase access and availability to mental, behavioral, social, and emotional health services and support.

Following the 2023 Maui wildfires, the Office of Wellness and Resilience was charged with coordinating the mental health and wellbeing response. Over the past two and a half years, our office has gathered lessons learned and developed recommendations that now inform a Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework for Disasters and Traumatic Events. The framework underscores the importance of meeting disability, access, and functional needs; ensuring that resources are accessible to all communities; and providing disaster materials, communications, and language translation that reflect the full diversity of the region. Individuals with disabilities

who are fully involved in both the delivery and planning of disaster-related services not only generate better disaster preparedness but also promote social inclusion.<sup>1</sup>

H.B. 2443 HD1 advances these priorities by establishing a Disability Integration Specialist within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, helping ensure that the needs of people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs are fully integrated into disaster planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

Tia L.R. Hartsock, MSW, MSCJA  
Director, Office of Wellness & Resilience

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<sup>1</sup> Pertiwi, P., Llewellyn, G., Villeneuve, M., Llewellyn, G. & Villeneuve, M., 2019, 'People with disabilities as key actors in community-based disaster risk reduction', *Disability & Society* 34(9–10), 1419–1444. 10.1080/09687599.2019.1584092

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi and Members of the House Finance Committee,

My name is Daniela Bond-Smith. I am a Research Economist at the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization (UHERO). My testimony is submitted as an individual and not as a representative of the University of Hawai'i.

I am the lead author of the report *Recovery Through a Disability Lens: Impacts of the 2023 Maui Wildfires on Disability Equity and Shared Prosperity*. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of HB2443 HD1, which would establish a Disability Integration Specialist within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA).

Our research provides systematic evidence that people with disabilities experienced more severe and more persistent impacts from the 2023 Maui wildfires than people without disabilities. These disparities were not inevitable. Many reflect gaps in disability-informed planning, coordination, and implementation across preparedness, response, and recovery. HB2443 HD1 directly addresses those structural gaps.

### **Key findings from the UHERO Report**

1. **Housing instability:** By 2025, fewer than half of disabled residents had secured permanent housing. Those with disabilities were substantially more likely to remain in temporary units or unstable arrangements and more likely to rely on full rental assistance to avoid severe rent burdens.
2. **Employment and income losses:** Disabled residents experienced sharper employment declines and were significantly more likely to exit the labor force. People with pre-fire disabilities started with lower incomes and have seen further declines, while people who have been disabled since the fires have experienced particularly steep losses.
3. **Health deterioration and access barriers:** Disabled residents reported greater and persistent deterioration in physical and mental health and higher rates of healthcare access difficulties after the fires.
4. **Unmet needs and navigation barriers:** Disabled respondents reported markedly higher unmet needs for housing, financial assistance, healthcare, transportation, and help accessing services. More than one-third of disabled respondents struggled to navigate assistance programs.

These disparities are documented in detail in our report which is available on UHERO's website.

### **How a Disability Integration Specialist can strengthen disaster systems and reduce preventable disparities and long-term costs**

1. **Housing recovery:** Disabled residents lag behind in transitions to permanent housing by about 15 percentage points and rely heavily on rental assistance to remain stably housed. For future disasters and the ongoing Maui recovery, embedding disability expertise within HI-EMA would allow housing recovery coordination to more systematically address accessibility gaps, improve transitions from temporary to permanent housing, and reduce prolonged dependence on high-cost interventions.

2. **Labor market recovery:** The number of labor market exits among working-age adults with pre-existing disabilities increased by about 50%, and nearly half of all working-age adults with disabilities are now out of the labor force. If not addressed quickly and proactively, extended labor market detachment can have lasting consequences for future employment prospects and economic stability. Integrating disability considerations into recovery and workforce coordination from the outset would help prevent avoidable exits and mitigate long-term public costs associated with sustained labor market exclusion.
3. **Unmet needs among newly disabled residents:** In 2025, more half of disabled residents live in or near poverty and report consistently higher unmet needs across financial assistance, healthcare, transportation, and health insurance, especially for people who acquired disabilities and health conditions in the aftermath of the fires. A dedicated disability integration function would improve cross-agency coordination and ensure that recovery systems more systematically identify and connect newly disabled residents to available supports.
4. **Navigating assistance systems:** Approximately 40% of residents with pre-existing disabilities report serious difficulty navigating recovery resources—nearly three times the rate of others. A Disability Integration Specialist within HI-EMA could support clearer program design, better coordination across agencies and providers, and more accessible recovery processes that reduce fragmentation.
5. **Healthcare access and preparedness:** Around 40% of disabled residents report healthcare access difficulties after the fires, compared with 25% for people without disabilities. Building disability expertise into emergency management can support proactive planning for improved accessibility in the healthcare response in future disasters, helping ensure continuity of care and reducing preventable morbidity and health-related costs.

HB2443 HD1 does not create a new large-scale program. It establishes planning, advisory, and coordination capacity within HI-EMA. From a fiscal perspective, embedding disability integration into preparedness and recovery is a forward-looking investment. Reducing avoidable barriers, improving program alignment and anticipating predictable disparities can strengthen recovery outcomes and help contain longer-term public expenditures.

Our report concludes that disability equity should be mainstreamed as a cross-cutting principle in disaster management. HB2443 provides a concrete mechanism to institutionalize that integration within HI-EMA's statutory framework.

The evidence from the Maui wildfires shows persistent disparities across housing, income, health, and access to assistance. Establishing a Disability Integration Specialist is a structural step toward reducing those disparities in future disasters while strengthening the resilience of the entire community. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB2443 HD1.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Daniela Bond-Smith

To: Representative Chris Todd, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
Committee on Finance

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: February 25, 2026

RE: House Bill 2443 HD1  
Measure Title: RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES.  
Report Title: Disaster Services; Appropriation (\$)

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 2443 HD1. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

**HB-2443-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 3:21:45 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Lila Mower	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this measure.

**HB-2443-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 9:29:52 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jackie Keefe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Jackie Keefe, and as someone who worked for the past 14 months as an advocate for fire survivors with disabilities I am in strong support of **HB2443 HD1**, which integrates the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs into emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities. Establishing a Disability Integration Specialist within the Hawai‘i Emergency Management Agency strengthens compliance with civil rights obligations and ensures disability expertise is embedded in disaster systems. Inclusive emergency planning benefits the entire community.

This measure is of the utmost importance to the disability community. People with disabilities, which encompasses a much larger sect of our population than most people realize, have faced endless challenges navigating Maui's disaster response and recovery. These are some of the most marginalized in our communities, and as such need and deserve extra support.

Disaster response and recovery systems are designed to be ableist; not because any official or agency decided this, but because those with disabilities are simply not present or prioritized in most planning measures.

Take, for example, the check-in process with American Red Cross: they have one question about disability on their intake... "Do you have a disability?" However, many folks with medical, access, and functional needs do not consider themselves to have a disability. This both limits the assistance that they may receive and oversimplifies disability. Reliance on narrow definitions or self-identification inevitably leaves people behind.

If we choose to plan to create this position for a Disability Integration Specialist with HIEMA, it benefits all of us; much like when civil engineers have an understanding of physical disability, perhaps from an aging parent or the lessons learned from being a new parent themselves... Sidewalk design improves. Often they do not have curb cuts that allow for people to enter and exit the sidewalk easily, but when you are pushing a stroller through your neighborhood for the first time or out walking with a parent who no longer has the mobility to step up and down anymore, you are able to see design differently.

The same is true emergency management. Disability integration strengthens emergency preparedness for everyone. Inclusivity is a way to strengthen safety for our entire community,

and this position has the power to restructure how we do things.

**It is important to me that I echo the suggested changes that were submitted by the states council on developmental disabilities.**

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Jackie Keefe, Lahaina