
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that one in five Hawaii
2 residents has a disability, and many require functional or
3 access support before, during, and after disasters. These
4 individuals often encounter disproportionate risks, including
5 difficulty evacuating without proper supports; lack of
6 accessible transportation; barriers to receiving emergency
7 alerts and evacuation orders in formats that they can
8 understand; and obstacles in accessing shelters, emergency
9 medical care, and post-disaster relief programs, such as
10 housing, food, and financial assistance.

11 The legislature further finds that in the immediate
12 aftermath of the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfires, many
13 individuals with disabilities faced significant impediments to
14 accessing emergency shelters and services. Shelters often
15 lacked physical accessibility, disability-trained staff, and
16 coordinated resources to address medical and functional needs.
17 Nonprofit organizations and community members stepped in to fill



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

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

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

17 Accordingly, there remains a critical gap in disaster
18 services planning and response for individuals with
19 disabilities, including those who use American Sign Language and
20 those with access and functional needs. A disability
21 integration specialist position, serving as the State's



1 emergency management specialist within the Hawaii emergency
2 management agency, is necessary to ensure compliance with the
3 Americans with Disabilities Act and related federal and state
4 disability laws, coordinate disability-related planning, advise
5 on current best and promising practices, and guarantee
6 accessible disaster services for all individuals with
7 disabilities and access and functional needs.

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

17 Therefore, the purpose of this Act is to:

18 (1) Add disability- and access-and-functional-needs-
19 related planning, preparedness, response, recovery,
20 and mitigation to the designated functions of the
21 Hawaii emergency management agency; and



1 (2) Appropriate funds to the Hawaii emergency management
2 agency for the establishment of a disability
3 integration specialist, who shall serve as the
4 emergency management specialist and provide
5 programming support for disability and access and
6 functional needs community projects that promote
7 accessibility, inclusion, and equity in disaster
8 management.

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

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

14 (1) Prepare a state comprehensive emergency management
15 plan, which shall be integrated into and coordinated
16 with the emergency management plans of the federal
17 government. The plan shall be integrated by a
18 continuous, integrated comprehensive emergency
19 management program. The plan shall contain provisions
20 to ensure that the State prepares for, mitigates
21 against, responds to, and recovers from emergencies



- 1 and minor, major, and catastrophic disasters. In
2 preparing and maintaining the plan, the agency shall
3 work closely with agencies and organizations with
4 emergency management responsibilities;
- 5 (2) Assign lead and support responsibilities to state
6 agencies and personnel for emergency management
7 functions and other support activities;
- 8 (3) Adopt standards and requirements for county emergency
9 management plans. The standards and requirements
10 shall ensure that county plans are coordinated and
11 consistent with the state comprehensive emergency
12 management plan;
- 13 (4) Make recommendations to the legislature, building code
14 organizations, and counties for zoning, building, and
15 other land use controls; and other preparedness,
16 prevention, and mitigation measures designed to
17 eliminate emergencies or reduce their impact;
- 18 (5) Anticipate trends and promote innovations that will
19 enhance the emergency management system;
- 20 (6) Institute statewide public awareness programs. This
21 shall include intensive public educational campaigns



1 on emergency preparedness issues, including but not
2 limited to the personal responsibility of individual
3 citizens to be self-sufficient for up to fourteen days
4 following a natural or human-caused disaster;

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

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



- 1 disaster response and recovery strategies and
2 procedures;
- 3 (9) Adopt standards and requirements for state agency
4 emergency operating procedures and periodically review
5 emergency operating procedures of state agencies and
6 recommend revisions as needed to ensure consistency
7 with the state comprehensive emergency management plan
8 and program; [~~and~~]
- 9 (10) Coordinate, in advance whenever possible, such
10 executive orders, proclamations, and rules for
11 issuance by the governor as are necessary or
12 appropriate for coping with emergencies and
13 disasters[~~-~~]; and
- 14 (11) Ensure compliance with paragraphs (1) to (10) and the
15 Americans with Disabilities Act and related federal
16 and state disability access laws by integrating the
17 needs of individuals with disabilities and others with
18 access and functional needs into emergency planning,
19 preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation
20 activities, including accessible and alternative
21 communication formats and series to ensure effective



1 communication in all phases of disaster management;
 2 advising on accessibility requirements and current
 3 best and promising practices for emergency shelters,
 4 evacuation procedures, and disaster communications;
 5 supporting continuity of preparedness and response in
 6 all counties across the State; and interfacing with
 7 disability advocacy organizations, service providers,
 8 and community members to strengthen inclusive disaster
 9 preparedness and response."

10 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
 11 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
 12 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027, to
 13 be allocated as follows:

14 (1) \$ for the establishment of one full-time
 15 equivalent (1.0 FTE) disability integration specialist
 16 position, which shall serve as the emergency
 17 management specialist and which shall be exempt from
 18 chapter 76, Hawaii Revised Statutes, within the Hawaii
 19 emergency management agency; and

20 (2) \$ for programming support for disability
 21 community projects, such as accessibility improvements



1 in emergency shelters, public service announcements in
2 accessible formats, training programs for shelter
3 staff, and other projects to enhance disaster
4 resilience for individuals with disabilities.

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

7 SECTION 4. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
8 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

9 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000.



Report Title:

Disaster Services; Appropriation

Description:

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 Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, who shall provide programming support for disability community projects that promote accessibility, inclusion, and equity in disaster management. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

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