



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

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

Thursday, March 5, 2026 2:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference  
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

To: [COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS](#)

Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair

Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

From: Alphonso Braggs, Chair

and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

## **Re: H.B. 1531 HD1-- Relating to Emergency Announcements**

### **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).

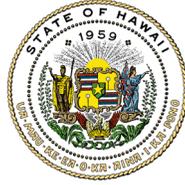
Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on H.B. 1531 HD1, which relates to ensuring accessible emergency communications for Hawai‘i residents. While our office does not have regulatory authority over emergency broadcast requirements, we want to highlight the critical importance of accessibility in all public communications, particularly during emergencies where critical information is shared by officials during emergency announcements.

Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have other communication disabilities rely on clear, timely, and accessible information to make informed decisions that protect their health and safety. H.B. 1531 HD1 recognizes that to be accessible to individuals who are deaf and use ASL, the essential information being relayed must be effectively communicated. This includes an unobstructed view of the ASL interpreter relaying the critical information. Ensuring that emergency announcements are delivered in formats that reach all members of our community strengthens public trust and supports equitable access to essential information.

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

**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 PŌULIA

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 1531 HD1,  
RELATING TO EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
JUDICIARY AND HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS

ADMINISTRATOR

HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

March 5, 2026

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA) recognizes and strongly supports the intent to increase accessibility through the inclusion of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters during official emergency announcements. Ensuring that emergency information is accessible to deaf and hard-of-hearing residents is a critical component of equitable emergency communication.

However, HIEMA respectfully proposes the following considerations and amendments regarding the ASL interpreter requirements:

- **Availability of Certified ASL Interpreters:**

During rapid-onset emergencies, it may be challenging to always secure the immediate availability of certified ASL interpreters and locations due to the limited pool of qualified professionals within the state.

- **Jurisdiction Over Broadcast Formatting:**

HIEMA does not have jurisdictional control over how private news media outlets format their broadcasts. This limitation may affect the agency's ability to ensure full compliance with the statute's detailed requirements for interpreter visibility and picture-in-picture display.

To address these concerns, HIEMA proposes including language that acknowledges the practical limitations of ASL interpreter requirements. HIEMA recommends temporarily pausing implementation for one year to allow the agency to conduct a survey and analysis to identify best practices for effective execution.

This amendment will help ensure that the intent of increased accessibility is achieved without placing unsustainable operational demands on HIEMA and partner agencies.

HIEMA appreciates the Legislature's leadership on this important bill and looks forward to working collaboratively to implement its provisions effectively and equitably across Hawai'i.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1531 HD1.

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



# DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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

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

March 5, 2026

## TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

### House Bill 1531 House Draft 1– Relating to Emergency Announcements

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 1531 House Draft 1 – Relating to Emergency Announcements. This bill requires the Governor or mayor of a county to provide an American Sign Language interpreter during each official announcement broadcast via television or the Internet during a state of emergency. It requires the Governor or mayor of a county to provide a primary pool feed for any live official announcement that includes an American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture window, and does not require broadcasters that rebroadcast the official announcement to independently generate or insert this accessibility feature. It is effective 7/1/3000.

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

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

We respectfully request that the bill be amended to include explicit requirements for the picture-in-picture window and to provide the State and counties sufficient time to implement these procedures. We propose that the bill be amended as follows:

SECTION 1. Chapter 127A, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated and to read as follows:

**"§127A- State of emergency; official announcements; American Sign Language interpreter; requirements.**

(a) Whenever the governor or mayor, as applicable, declares a state of emergency pursuant to this chapter, the governor or mayor shall provide an American Sign Language interpreter who is certified by a nationally or state recognized credentialing authority at each live broadcast press conference during the state of emergency. To the greatest extent possible, the governor or mayor shall ensure that the American Sign Language interpreter is physically positioned in a manner so that the interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands are always visible during a television or internet broadcast of the press conference.

(b) The governor or mayor, as applicable, shall provide a primary pool feed for any live official announcement that includes an American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture window. A broadcaster that rebroadcasts the official announcement shall not be required to independently generate or insert this accessibility feature. The picture-in-picture window shall be at least one-quarter (1/4) the size of the primary video and large enough to

clearly see the interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands. The interpreter shall not be blocked or covered by captions, graphics, or other on-screen text, which must be repositioned if necessary.

SECTION 2. New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on July 1, [3000] 2027."

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,



KRISTINE PAGANO  
Acting Executive Director



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII**  
**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  
March 5, 2026

The Honorable Representative David A. Tarnas, Chair  
House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Tarnas and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: HB1531 HD1, Emergency; Official Announcements; Broadcast Media; American Sign Language; Sign Language Interpreter

The Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) offers **SUPPORT** for H.B. 1531 H.D.1, which requires the Governor or county mayors to provide an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter during official emergency announcements broadcast via television or the internet.

Accessible communication during emergencies is essential to ensure that individuals who rely on ASL receive timely, life-saving information. Individuals who rely on ASL have historically faced barriers during emergency announcements when interpreters were absent, poorly positioned, or not clearly visible on screen.

While the Council supports the intent of this measure, it is important to ensure the targeted viewers can clearly see the ASL interpreter throughout the entire broadcast. Therefore, we respectfully request the following addition to the bill; on page 2, line 4 add; The picture-in-picture window shall be at least one-quarter (1/4) the size of the primary video and large enough to clearly see the interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands. The interpreter shall not be blocked or covered by captions, graphics, or other on-screen text, which must be repositioned if necessary. In addition, we respectfully request that a notation be included in the committee report indicating that the Act take effect on July 1, 2027, to provide the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency sufficient time to prepare for implementation.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide support and recommendations for HB1531 HD1.

Sincerely,

Daintry Bartoldus, Executive Administrator

**C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.**  
*Mayor*



**William V. Brilhante, Jr.**  
*Managing Director*

**Merrick Nishimoto**  
*Deputy Managing Director*

## *County of Hawai'i ~ Office of the Mayor*

25 Aupuni Street, Suite 2603 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720 • Phone (808) 961-8211 • Fax (808) 961-6553  
KONA: 74-5044 Ane Keohokālole Hwy., Bldg C • Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i 96740  
Phone (808) 323-4444 • Fax (808) 323-4440

Testimony of  
**C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.**  
Mayor, County of Hawai'i

Before the House Committee on  
**Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs**  
Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair  
Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

**Thursday, March 5, 2026, 2:00 p.m.**  
State Capitol Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

In consideration of  
**House Bill No. 1531, HD1**  
**Relating to Emergency Announcements**

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide comments on House Bill 1531, HD1. Upon consultation with my communications team, we support the intent of House Bill 1531, HD1, to improve emergency accessibility for deaf or hard-of-hearing residents, but not the current draft.

Emergencies often require immediate announcements with little notice; requiring a physically present American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter for every briefing would be difficult to coordinate and could delay urgent information from reaching the public.

We maintain strong partnerships with local TV broadcasters, radio, and digital platforms that provide live closed captioning and livestreamed briefings, and recent AI-assisted captioning has improved both speed and accuracy. Requiring the County to produce a picture-in-picture ASL feed would create additional technical and staffing burdens that could divert resources when speed and clarity are most critical.

We support the goal of greater accessibility, but believe that the measure, in its current form, would create operational challenges during emergencies and risk public safety.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

**KAUA'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**  
ELTON USHIO, ADMINISTRATOR



DEREK S.K. KAWAKAMI, MAYOR  
REIKO MATSUYAMA, MANAGING DIRECTOR

Testimony of  
**Elton S. Ushio**  
Emergency Management Administrator, County of Kauai

Before the  
**House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs**  
March 5, 2026; 2:00 PM  
Conference Room #325 and Videoconference

In consideration of  
**HB 1531 HD1**  
Relating to Emergency Announcements

Honorable Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

As the Administrator of the Kaua'i Emergency Management Agency (KEMA), I appreciate the opportunity to COMMENT on House Bill 1531 HD1. KEMA supports the intent of this measure and the goal of ensuring equitable access to emergency information for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

While KEMA supports the intent of this measure, we note the following concerns and limitations:

- Kaua'i has a very limited pool of certified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, and these resources may not always be available on demand during no-notice or short-notice activations and media engagements. Interim accessibility measures may therefore be necessary until interpreter availability can be expanded.
- To ensure improved accessibility without immediately placing currently unachievable operational requirements on emergency management agencies, we suggest a 1-year pause in implementation to allow for analysis, resource development, and planning to ensure future operational and compliance success.

In closing, KEMA supports the intent and equity objectives of House Bill 1531 HD1 and encourages consideration of a measured implementation approach that recognizes operational realities while Hawai'i works to expand ASL interpretation resources for emergency communications.

Sincerely,

Elton S. Ushio

Administrator



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

Re: HB1531: House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs – 3/5/2026 – 2:00pm

**In support of HB1531 HD1**

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Committee Members,

My name is Chris Leonard, and I serve as the President of the Hawai'i Association of Broadcasters. Our organization represents more than 100 free, over-the-air television and radio broadcasters across the State of Hawai'i.

We appreciate the Legislature's continued commitment to improving accessibility for all members of our community and would like to express our support for HB1531 HD1. We believe the amended language reflects a thoughtful and collaborative effort to balance accessibility goals with the practical realities faced by broadcasters and provides a meaningful path forward toward increased access to important government communications.

As originally drafted, HB1531 raised concerns regarding the operational feasibility of requiring television and internet broadcasters to display an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter in a picture-in-picture window for the full duration of any live official announcement. Meeting that requirement would have necessitated additional camera setups and expanded on-site crews, resources that many broadcasters do not have available. The unintended consequence would likely have been fewer broadcasters carrying these press conferences, ultimately limiting public access.

We appreciate that HB1531 HD1 addresses these concerns by recognizing the importance of flexibility and shared responsibility in achieving accessibility. The amendment acknowledges that accessibility can be most effectively provided at the source through a standardized pool feed that includes an ASL interpreter ensuring consistent access for viewers while removing significant technical and staffing burdens from individual broadcasters.

This approach promotes broader participation by media outlets of all sizes and better serves the public interest by maximizing both accessibility and distribution of critical information.

Mahalo for your leadership, responsiveness, and continued commitment to advancing accessibility in our state. We look forward to working collaboratively as this measure moves forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher S. Leonard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "C" and a long, sweeping underline.

Christopher S. Leonard  
President – Hawaii'i Association of Broadcasters



COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair

Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Thursday, March 5, 2026 at 2:00 pm

Conference Room 325 and Via Videoconference

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1531, HD1 - RELATING TO EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, Rep. Cochran of Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Veronica Mendoza, Founding Executive Director of Roots Reborn and a founding coalition member of El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui - The People in Action Maui. Roots Reborn **strongly supports HB 1531, HD1**, Relating to Emergency Announcements, which requires the Governor or mayor of a county to provide an American Sign Language interpreter during each official announcement broadcast via television or the Internet during a state of emergency; requires the Governor or mayor of a county to ensure, to the fullest extent possible, that the American Sign Language interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands are visible during the broadcast; requires the Governor or mayor of a county to provide a primary pool feed for any live official announcement that includes an American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture window, and does not require broadcasters that rebroadcast the official announcement to independently generate or insert this accessibility feature.

Roots Reborn is a grassroots, multicultural immigrant-justice and disaster-response organization serving migrant and immigrant communities on Maui and beyond. Born out of the August 2023 wildfires, we immediately stepped in to move aid, navigate systems alongside families, and build the trusted relationships that still anchor our work today. What began as wildfire response has grown into essential infrastructure for immigrant communities facing overlapping crises—from recovery and housing instability to shifting federal policies, increased enforcement, and rising fear.

In our work helping Maui wildfire survivors navigate disaster recovery, health care, and legal representation, we have identified lack of qualified bilingual assistance as a significant barrier. At the time of the wildfires, about one-third of Lahaina residents were foreign born, and 36% aged five and older spoke a language other than English at home. We stand in solidarity with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community in requesting that this community, too, have access to necessary and potentially life-saving emergency information as envisioned by HB 1531, HD1.

As a Maui-based disaster-response organization serving migrant and immigrant communities, we support a statewide public education and communications program to promote emergency preparedness and to ensure access to information in a state of emergency. **We urge you to support HB 1531, HD1** and to vote to pass it out of this committee.

Sinceramente,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Veronica Mendoza', written over a horizontal line.

Veronica Mendoza

Maui Roots Reborn, *Founding Executive Director*

El Pueblo en Accion Maui, *Founding Coalition Member*

**HB-1531-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/3/2026 7:29:53 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
B.A. McClintock	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this important bill. Mahalo.

To: Representative David A. Tarnas, Chair  
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair  
Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: March 4, 2026

RE: House Bill 1531 HD1  
Measure Title: RELATING TO EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS.  
Report Title: Emergency; Official Announcements; Broadcast Media; American  
Sign Language; Sign Language Interpreter

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 1531 HD1. Your consideration is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

**HB-1531-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/4/2026 11:14:29 AM

Testimony for JHA on 3/5/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Inga Park Okuna	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Inga Park Okuna and I am writing in support of HB1531. I am a working sign language interpreter in Hawaii. In the distant past, my colleagues and I have interpreted during emergencies such as an impending tsunami or hurricane. We were shown in the PIP on the news.

Of course more recently during COVID proclamations, sign language interpreters were also often seen on camera.

Having an interpreter is crucial in providing necessary information to many members of our Deaf Community.

Our adult son, who we fostered as a youth, is profoundly Deaf. Like many of our Deaf Community members, he has difficulty accessing written communication due to reading challenges. He requires clear sign language communication to get the full message. In the case of an emergency, having sign language access is even more critical.

Thank you for considering this bill and I hope you will support it. It can save lives. For those who live alone, there is no one to tell them that sirens are sounding, and they might not even realize there is a potential or actual emergency occurring unless they see an interpreter on the screen. Not everyone has a smart phone to alert them and even if they do, they might not be able to fully understand the message. When people are stressed, it becomes even harder to understand what is written if one's reading skills are limited.

Thank for caring about our local Deaf Community members.

-Inga Park Okuna

Sign Language Interpreter

Mother of a Deaf Individual

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair

Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Thursday, March 5, 2026 at 2:00 pm

Conference Room 325 and Via Videoconference

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1531, HD1 - RELATING TO EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, Rep. Cochran of Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Andrews. I am a long-term resident of Wailuku, Maui, and a lawyer licensed for over 25 years in Hawai'i. I am also the parent of a hard-of-hearing child. I **strongly support HB 1531, HD1**, Relating to Emergency Announcements, which requires the Governor or mayor of a county to provide an American Sign Language interpreter during each official announcement broadcast via television or the Internet during a state of emergency; requires the Governor or mayor of a county to ensure, to the fullest extent possible, that the American Sign Language interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands are visible during the broadcast; requires the Governor or mayor of a county to provide a primary pool feed for any live official announcement that includes an American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture window, and does not require broadcasters that rebroadcast the official announcement to independently generate or insert this accessibility feature.

As the parent of a hard-of-hearing child and an attorney, I am surprised that ASL interpretation is not currently mandated on state and local announcements during a state of emergency. We have learned many hard lessons in the aftermath of the Maui wildfires, and ensuring equitable access to information during a state of emergency should be a priority. As the parent of a hard-of-hearing child, I stand with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community and their access to necessary and potentially life-saving information during a disaster. I also note that many in Maui are foreign-born and speak English as a second language. I would strongly advocate for inclusion of emergency information in the languages of our migrant and immigrant neighbors in this bill.

Thank you for helping all of our community members be prepared for and informed in the case of future emergencies. I respectfully request that you vote in **support of HB 1531, HD1**.

Mahalo,

Christine L. Andrews, JD

Wailuku, Maui