

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/14/2026 9:51:57 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/16/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
amy agbayani	Testifying for The Legal Clinic	Support	In Person

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, 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 mmigrant 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 needs, mandates for language access and supports DOE UH educational and workforce development objectives.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Education
March 16, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.

By

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

HB 2005 HD2 – RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports HB 2005 HD2 – 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 for spoken and written translation efforts. 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, 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 HD2 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 capacity in the area of interpreter training. 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.

- 3) Please note that many professional settings (e.g., the court system) have official licensure processes and requirements that exist independently from higher education. As such, while a UH program could award students with a certificate of completion as specified in this measure, in practice, gainful employment as an interpreter will often depend on the attainment of additional credentialing.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of measure HB 2005 HD2. 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.

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

March 16, 2026

To: The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair,
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair, and
Members of the Senate Committee on Education

Date: Monday, March 16, 2026
Time: 1:00 p.m.
Place: Conference Room 229, State Capitol

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

Re: H.B. 2005 HD2 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 request. DLIR will defer to the University of Hawaii (UH) as the lead agency on internal implementation matters and on bill language.

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 the 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.



March 15, 2026

Position: **SUPPORT** of **HB2005 HD2**, Relating to Language Access

To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Education

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

Re: Testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB2005 HD2**, Relating to Language Access

Hearing: Monday, March 16, 2026, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 229, State Capitol

The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women is dedicated to advancing gender equity and improving the well-being of women and girls across the state. The Commission **supports HB2005 HD2** because **language access is a critical factor in ensuring that all women, including those from immigrant communities, can fully participate in educational, economic, and civic life**. The establishment of a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawaii directly aligns with our commitment to equity and inclusion.

Language barriers often disproportionately affect women, particularly those in immigrant and limited English proficient communities, by restricting access to essential services, employment opportunities, and educational advancement. **Creating a dedicated program to address these barriers can help reduce systemic inequities, foster greater economic independence, and support the social integration of women who may otherwise be marginalized due to language limitations.**

A program housed within the University of Hawaii leverages existing academic expertise and infrastructure, providing a strong foundation for effective workforce development and culturally competent language education. This approach is consistent with best practices that emphasize community-based, accessible, and sustainable solutions to language access challenges. It also has the potential to **create pathways for women to enter high-demand fields where bilingual and bicultural skills are increasingly valued**. Ongoing evaluation and transparent reporting will be important to measure progress and adapt strategies as needed.

We respectfully urge this Committee to **pass HB2005 HD2**, as an important step toward greater equity for all residents of Hawaii.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

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

March 16, 2026



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COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair

Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Monday, March 16, 2026 at 1:00 pm

Conference Room 229 & Videoconference

State Capitol

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2005, HD2 - RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

Aloha Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, Sen. Hashimoto representing my district, 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, HD2**, 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 interpret 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 stated that 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, HD2 to provide professionally trained interpreters. I request that you support language access and **vote in support of HB 2005, HD2.**

Mahalo for all you do for your constituents and community,

Christine Andrews, JD

Wailuku, Maui

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/15/2026 7:58:32 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/16/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)	Testifying for Pride at Work – Hawai‘i	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

Pride at Work – Hawai‘i is an official chapter of [Pride at Work](#) which is a national nonprofit organization that represents LGBTQIA+ union members and their allies. We are an officially recognized constituency group of the AFL-CIO that organizes mutual support between the organized Labor Movement and the LGBTQIA+ Community to further social and economic justice.

Pride at Work – Hawai‘i fully supports HB 2005 HD 2.

We ask that you support this needed piece of legislation.

Mahalo,

Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)

President

[Pride at Work – Hawai‘i](#)

To: The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Education

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

Hearing: Monday, March 16, 2026, 1:00pm, Conference Room 229

RE: **HB2005 HD2 Relating to Language Access**

AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support** of **HB2005 HD2**. 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 HD2**.

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/16/2026 3:39:06 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/16/2026 1:00:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marcella Alohalani Boido	Individual	Comments	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Good afternoon. Thank you for hearing this bill.

Since 2007, I have been a Hawai'i Judiciary Certified Spanish Court Interpreter (Tier 4). My work experience from the 1980s on includes interpreting for international conferences. In 1989 I started working in federal court here, and since 1990, in state courts. My translations have been accepted in every venue to which they were given, including immigration courts. My work as a subcontractor in forensic transcription and translation has been used in major cases on the mainland. I have done this type of work as well as document translation for the federal court here, and served as an expert witness.

There are fifteen (15) certified or higher tier spoken language court interpreters in Hawai'i. Four of them on Oahu are both more experienced and more highly credentialed than I am. One of them is a certified healthcare interpreter and trains healthcare interpreters over the internet.

My writings on court interpreter ethics have been incorporated into the official manuals for at least two USA states, as well as Finland and Queensland, Australia. For a Hawai'i state Office on Language Access (OLA) conference, I gave a talk on ethics for translators.

I have participated in five different intern programs. My roles: intern, administrator, teacher. These experiences taught me how internships can be valuable, positive, learning experiences. They can also go wrong, with interns being given nothing but scut work, or being ignored or sidelined because of prejudice against an intern based on race, gender, or age. There can be poor planning, or lack of appropriate supervision.

It requires thoughtful work and preparation to run a good internship program.

This bill is well intentioned, but based on multiple mistaken assumptions. Those mistaken assumptions make the internship program it proposes deeply, fatally flawed. More thinking and research, leading to major revisions, are needed to create a good internship program that may help with workforce development.

Generic training, that is, training conducted in English, on topics such as ethics, standards, and best practices, does not produce competent interpreters or translators. It functions to produce people who are more attentive to these issues, or so we hope.

The standard recommendation for generic trainings is for 40 hours, minimum. For healthcare interpreters, some advocates prefer 60 hours. I am a graduate of a nationally known program, The Community Interpreter®. Following another 40 hours of training, I was given a license to teach this program. UHM does not have staff to teach the proposed generic training program.

Interpreting (spoken work) and translation (written work) are skills.

Some people are natural interpreters. Some need training, preferably language-specific. Some people cannot develop the skills, regardless of training and/or study.

It takes a high level of bilingualism to do interpretation and/or translation. Generally, for interpreters, a level of at least two years of college education is considered the minimum. Most competent interpreters are educated to the bachelors level at the least.

To develop interpreting skills, language-specific skills training is generally needed. The UH system does not have the staff do this kind of training. KCC does do this for ASL.

Prof. Lucia Aranda teaches an upper division course in Spanish translation. If there is another language-specific course in translation at UHM, I do not know about it.

Translators have what we call a *direction*. They should work from their second (weaker) language into their first (stronger) language. The Seal of Biliteracy graduates are probably born and educated in the USA. That normally means that their direction would be from their Language Other Than English (LOTE) into English. This bill expects to have interns working from English into their LOTE—not the correct direction, and a violation of standards, ethics, and best practices.

For guidance on how to get translations done, see <https://www.atanet.org/client-assistance/buying-language-services>.

Section 2 (h) of this bill gives priority in entrance to the proposed generic training program to the Seal of Biliteracy graduates. There is no good justification for this. People achieve a high level of bilingualism in various ways. These may include formal study, living and studying abroad, being raised to speak two or more languages. All are valid.

An internship program that places interns in non-profit agencies or government offices could provide valuable learning experiences to monolingual and bilingual interns alike. The interns could learn about the work done in these settings, and could help with some of it. Learning how to do some of the work in their LOTE, under supervision, would be okay.

However, to expect the bilingual interns to do interpretation or translation is to create possible legal liability.

Schools do not certify interpreters or translators, just as they do not license doctors or lawyers.

Agencies can do something to improve the translations of their documents. They should translate their documents into what is called Plain English or Simple English. OLA has twice brought in experts to teach how to do this. Their talks were filmed. In the past, those videos, and some supporting written materials, were available on the OLA web site.

I can see the problems this bill hopes to solve. Unfortunately, although I am sympathetic to these concerns, it doesn't look to me as if this bill can fulfill what it promises. I'm sorry to say this.

There is a lot more to say about this bill. For now, I hope this is a good start, and that you find it useful. Please feel free to send me your questions.

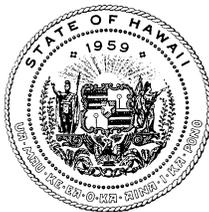
Thank you for reading these comments and hearing this bill.

Aloha,

Marcella Alohalani Boido, M.A.

Hawai'i State Judiciary Certified Spanish Court Interpreter (Tier 4)

Licensed Trainer, The Community Interpreter®



**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS**

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Phone: (808) 586-8730 / Fax: (808) 586-8733
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LATE

March 16, 2026
Time: 1:00 PM
ROOM 229 & VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

HB2005, HD2 - 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 Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, members of the committee on Education, good afternoon. 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 HD2- 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 obtained 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, HD2 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.



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB2005, HD2 RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

Senate Committee on Education

Sen. Donna Mercado Kim, Chair

Sen. Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: March 16, 2026 | Letter Date: March 13, 2026

Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The Legal Clinic (TLC) strongly supports HB2005, HD2 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, HD2 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, HD2'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, HD2 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.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of The Legal Clinic
and Board President Amy Agbayani,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christina Sablan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Christina Sablan
Community & Policy Advocate



COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Monday, March 16, 2026 at 1:00 pm
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference
State Capitol

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2005, HD2 - RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

Aloha Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, Sen. Hashimoto representing my district, 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 2005, HD2**, Relating to Language Access, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawaii and appropriates funds.

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 we have identified risks to our community presented by unnecessary barriers, such as the current significant unmet need for qualified bilingual assistance. 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. Roots Reborn has helped close some of the gap with disaster management and legal program language assistance. However, the need for bilingual assistance, especially for mental health and physical health treatment, is preventing survivors from receiving the care that they need to recover from the disaster. This is why HB 2005, HD2 is so greatly needed.

House Bill 2005, HD2 creates a pathway to increase Hawai'i's language access workforce by drawing upon our existing communities. It supports multilingual students by creating training opportunities, career experience, and professional pathways to become trained, qualified interpreters/translators and bilingual professionals. Being bilingual is not the same as being 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. We **urge you to support HB 2005, HD2** and to vote to pass it out of this committee.

Sinceramente,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Veronica'.

Veronica Mendoza

Maui Roots Reborn, *Founding Executive Director*
El Pueblo en Accion Maui, *Founding Coalition Member*

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/14/2026 12:37:36 PM

Testimony for EDU on 3/16/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carolyn Weygan-Hildebrand	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Greeting!

I strongly support the bill’s recognition that Hawai‘i’s multilingual population is an inherent public asset. In a state where linguistic diversity reflects generations of migration, cultural continuity, and community knowledge, multilingual capacity should be seen not only as a need for accommodation but also as a strength that can be intentionally developed for public benefit.

This measure appropriately recognizes that bilingual and biliterate students, including those who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy, represent an important workforce pipeline for translation and interpretation services in education, health care, social services, legal services, agriculture, tourism, disaster management, cyber-based endeavors, and government. By creating structured pathways into these professions, the bill affirms that language competency has civic, economic, and institutional value.

As a UH alumni and also former workforce development professional, I do have one comment. This bill should encourage the UH not to do engage in this in silos. IAll existing language programs, along with their professors and instructors, should be engaged and they should collaborate and deliver on the right metrics. The right metrics in this regard would be to significantly increase the number of certified translators and interpreters in our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB2005 (HD2)
Relating to Language Access

TO: Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the
Committee on Education

FROM: Helena Manzano

DATE: March 16, 2026

Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in **strong support of HB2005 (HD2)**. I submit this testimony as an individual with years of professional experience working to ensure Hawai'i residents have fair and equal access to state programs, services, and benefits.

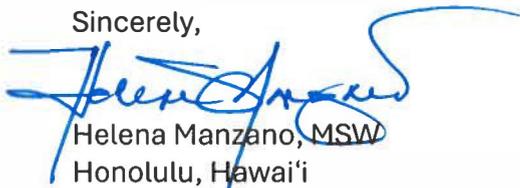
Language must not be a barrier to navigating and fully participating in our state systems. Although Hawai'i has a State Language Access Law (HRS 321C), there remains a practical challenge in meeting the demand for language assistance services, which exceeds the current supply of qualified interpreters and translators. To ensure our laws work as intended, the State needs a structured and sustainable pathway to develop professionals who can provide these services.

My support for this measure is based on three key points:

- **Bilingualism is only the starting point.** A common misconception is that being bilingual is sufficient to serve as an interpreter or translator. Professional or "qualified" interpreting and translating require knowledge of ethical standards, confidentiality protocols, and specialized techniques and terminology. In my experience, relying on untrained individuals is not only ineffective but can also create liability. It may introduce bias or errors that can lead to serious consequences, particularly in healthcare, education, human services, agriculture, transportation, emergency services, disaster response, and legal proceedings.
- **Developing our local talent pool.** Since 2017, the Hawai'i Department of Education has seen a 54% average annual increase in students earning the **Seal of Biliteracy**. With more than 3,000 students already recognized for their language skills, this measure helps create a pathway to turn that classroom achievement into a professional career in Hawai'i.
- **A workforce solution for the State.** Establishing this program at the University of Hawai'i will create a pipeline of trained and qualified language assistance providers, strengthening the State's capacity to serve the public effectively and maintain compliance with the law.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Helena Manzano, MSW
Honolulu, Hawai'i
Email: yve_manzano@yahoo.com

March 15, 2026

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair

Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Committee on Education

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 of Terrina Wong
In SUPPORT of HB2005**

Senator Kim, Chair
Senator Kidani, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: March 16, 2026

Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the Committee on Education

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 a 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

March 15, 2026

LATE

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 HB2005 to invest in our heritage learners and fulfill our state's commitment to meaningful language access. It is an investment in our local talent and will help fulfill our state's commitment to meaningful language access.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo,

Debra Andres Arellano

Debra Andres Arellano