



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
February 25, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Debora Halbert

Vice President for Academic Strategy
University of Hawai'i System

HB 2005 HD2 – RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, 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. 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.



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

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

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

JOHN C. (JACK) LEWIN, MD
ADMINISTRATOR

February 23, 2026

TO: HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
And Honorable Members

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

RE: HB2005-HD2 -- RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

HEARING: Wednesday, February 25, 2026 @ 2:00 pm; Conference Room 308

POSITION: SUPPORT with COMMENTS

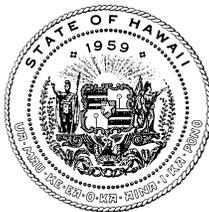
Testimony:

SHPDA supports HB 2005-HD2 with comments. This bill is intended to strengthen language access statewide by creating a structured, workforce-focused pathway to train and recognize qualified translators and interpreters in Hawai'i. By establishing the Language Access Education and Workforce Development Program at the University of Hawai'i, combined with ethics and bestpractices training, public-service focused instruction, and internship opportunities through the DLIR Hele Imua program, this bill seeks to build a culturally informed bilingual workforce that improves equitable access to critical services like education, health care, social services, law, agriculture, and government.

HB 2005-HD2 strengthens Hawai'i's capacity to serve a multilingual population by creating a consistent, statewide pipeline of trained and recognized translators and interpreters. By offering standardized instruction, ethical guidelines, and hands-on internship experience, the program improves the quality and reliability of language services across key service areas. It also supports workforce development by turning biliteracy into meaningful career opportunities for local students and community members.

Thank you for hearing HB 2005-HD2. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

■ -- Jack Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA



**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS**

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

February 25, 2026
Time: 2:00 PM
ROOM 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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 Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, members of the committee on Finance, 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.



February 24, 2026

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

To: Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Finance

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

Re: Testimony in HB2005 HD2, Relating to Language Access

Hearing: Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308, State Capitol

The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women is dedicated to advancing gender equity and ensuring that all women have equitable access to public resources and opportunities. The Commission **supports HB2005 HD2** because **language access is a critical barrier to full participation** in education, employment, and civic life for many women and their families across our state. We stand in strong support of HB2005 HD2. The Commission is committed to dismantling systemic barriers that disproportionately affect women and girls across the diaspora and support legislative measures that **enable economic self-sufficiency**.

By investing in language access education and workforce development, the proposed program will help build a pipeline of qualified professionals equipped to serve Hawaii's linguistically diverse population. Women are often primary caregivers and community navigators, and improved access to interpretation and translation services can reduce disparities in healthcare, legal, and social services. The bill's focus on workforce development also aligns with the Commission's commitment to economic empowerment, as it may open **new career pathways** for women interested in language access professions.

I respectfully urge this Committee to **pass HB2005 HD2**, in support of this important investment in workforce development and the expansion of language access services.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB2005, HD2
RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS**

House Committee on Finance

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 25, 2026 | Letter Date: February 24, 2026

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, 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



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

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

Representative Todd, Chair
Representative Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Feb 25th, 2026, 2pm Room 308

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

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

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

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

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

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

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



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hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com

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

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

Language access is also the law in Hawai‘i

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

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

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

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

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

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



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hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Liza Ryan Gill

Executive Director

Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights



To: The Honorable Chris Todd, Chair
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Higher Education

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

Hearing: Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 2:00pm, Conference Room 308

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: 2/24/2026 7:41:23 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
George "Bud" Antonelis. PhD	Na Kama Kai	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of In SUPPORT of HB2005 HD2

Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

Language access is not a luxury—it is essential for equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, and government programs in Hawai‘i. Yet there remains a significant unmet need for qualified interpreting and translation services across the State. HB2005 HD2 creates a practical, statewide pipeline to build this workforce through the University of Hawai‘i and to turn multilingual ability into a trained, ethical, professional skill.

Importantly, interpreting and translating require training beyond bilingual proficiency. Ethical standards, confidentiality, accuracy, and best practices are crucial—especially in high-stakes settings like healthcare, courts, and social services. This bill is a “win-win”: it expands career pathways for multilingual students (including Seal of Biliteracy recipients) while ensuring residents with limited English proficiency can access services with clarity and dignity.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee PASS HB2005 HD2 and fully fund the program.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

**Testimony of Megahn Chun and Alejandro Villarino
In SUPPORT of HB2005 HD2**

Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Wednesday, Feb 25, 2026

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

Our names are Megahn Chun and Alejandro Villarino, and we submit this testimony in **support of HB2005 HD2**, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i to train qualified interpreters and translators and strengthen Hawai‘i’s language access capacity.

We are partners in life and in community work, and co-founders of Mercado de la Raza, a space created to uplift and support Hawai‘i’s Latino community. Beyond operating a small business, we have worked together to connect families with critical resources during times of crisis — including helping Latino residents navigate aid and support during the Lahaina fires and assisting community members affected by the recent government shutdown. Mercado de la Raza also serves as a gathering place for Latino families and a platform for local Latino entrepreneurs to showcase and grow their businesses. Through this work, we are deeply connected to and invested in the well-being, safety, and dignity of our community.

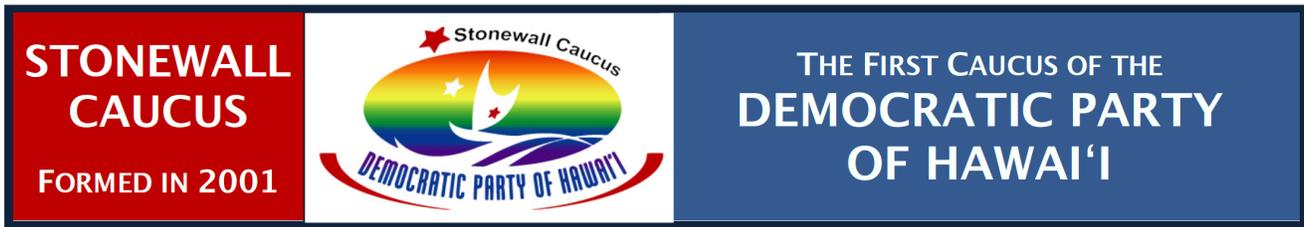
Language access is not a luxury—it is essential for equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, and government programs in Hawai‘i. Yet there remains a significant unmet need for qualified interpreting and translation services across the State. HB2005 HD2 creates a practical, statewide pipeline to build this workforce through the University of Hawai‘i and to turn multilingual ability into a trained, ethical, professional skill.

Importantly, interpreting and translating require training beyond bilingual proficiency. Ethical standards, confidentiality, accuracy, and best practices are crucial—especially in high-stakes settings like healthcare, courts, and social services. This bill is a “win-win”: it expands career pathways for multilingual students (including Seal of Biliteracy recipients) while ensuring residents with limited English proficiency can access services with clarity and dignity.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Committee **PASS HB2005 HD2** and fully fund the program.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Megahn Chun and Alejandro Villarino
Mercado de La Raza
808.593.2226



STONEWALL CAUCUS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB2005 HD2

Relating to Language Access – Education and Workforce Development Program at the University of Hawai‘i

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

On behalf of the Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai‘i, we submit this testimony in **strong support** of HB2005 HD2.

HB2005 HD2 establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i to train and recognize qualified translators and interpreters. Hawai‘i is one of the most multilingual states in the nation. Language access is essential to ensuring equitable access to healthcare, education, legal services, agriculture, emergency response, and other public programs that serve our diverse communities.

Bilingual ability alone is not sufficient for professional interpretation and translation, particularly in high-stakes environments such as hospitals, courts, schools, and social services settings. Accurate interpretation requires training in ethics, confidentiality, standards of practice, cultural competency, and specialized terminology. This bill builds a trained, ethical, and professional workforce to meet those needs statewide.

The measure creates structured pathways for high school graduates who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy, as well as community members with demonstrated biliteracy, to receive formal training, participate in internship opportunities, and earn recognition as qualified professionals. This not only strengthens state capacity to meet language access obligations but also creates meaningful career pathways for multilingual students across the University of Hawai‘i system.

Improving language access improves dignity, accuracy, and safety. When individuals fully understand medical instructions, court proceedings, educational materials, or emergency information, outcomes improve and costly misunderstandings decrease. Investing in this program is an investment in equity, public safety, and workforce development.

For these reasons, the **Stonewall Caucus respectfully urges the Committee to pass HB2005 HD2** and fund the Language Access Education and Workforce Development Program.

Testimony in Strong Support of HB2005 HD2

Mahalo for your consideration and for your continued commitment to strengthening equity and workforce development in Hawai'i.

Respectfully submitted,

Abby Simmons (she/her)
Chair
Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 11:14:19 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristen Young	Faith Action for Community Equity	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, I submit this testimony in support of HB2005 HD2, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i to train qualified interpreters and translators and strengthen Hawai‘i’s language access capacity.

Language access is not a luxury—it is essential for equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, and government programs in Hawai‘i. Yet there remains a significant unmet need for qualified interpreting and translation services across the State. HB2005 HD2 creates a practical, statewide pipeline to build this workforce through the University of Hawai‘i and to turn multilingual ability into a trained, ethical, professional skill.

Importantly, interpreting and translating require training beyond bilingual proficiency. Ethical standards, confidentiality, accuracy, and best practices are crucial—especially in high-stakes settings like healthcare, courts, and social services. This bill is a “win-win”: it expands career pathways for multilingual students (including Seal of Biliteracy recipients) while ensuring residents with limited English proficiency can access services with clarity and dignity.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee PASS HB2005 HD2 and fully fund the program.

Mahalo,

Kristen Young
Honolulu, HI 96813



COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 2:00 pm

Conference Room 308 and Via Videoconference

State Capitol

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

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, Reps. Miyake and Yamashita 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 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', written over a horizontal line.

Veronica Mendoza

Maui Roots Reborn, *Founding Executive Director*

El Pueblo en Accion Maui, *Founding Coalition Member*

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:55:04 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
amy agbayani	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.

February 24, 2026

Rep. Chris Todd Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi Vice Chair

Committee Members

Committee of Finance

RE: Testimony in Support of HB2005 HD2

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 I urge you to support HB2005. HD2

Barbara Tom

Director

Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Center

Phone: 808-392-5946

Testimony In SUPPORT of HB2005 HD2

Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Wednesday, Feb 25, 2026

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is Jeremiah Brown, and I am the multilingual learners program coordinator at Waipahu High School. I am writing in strong support of HB2005 HD2, which establishes a statewide Language Access Education and Workforce Development Program at the University of Hawai'i.

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

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

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

HB2005 HD2 directly addresses this need, a need that was made clear during the pandemic and the aftermath of the Maui wildfires. By creating a structured, statewide program that builds on the Seal of Biliteracy and provides training and paid internship opportunities, this bill validates students' linguistic skills while also protecting the communities they serve. It transforms what is currently informal, uneven, and often uncompensated labor into a professional pathway that benefits both students and the State of Hawai'i.

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

From my experience in schools, I can say with confidence that there is both student interest and workforce need for a program like the one proposed in HB2005 HD2. My school alone sends out dozens of multilingual graduates into the workforce every year. This bill builds on existing successes, such as the Seal of Biliteracy, and thoughtfully extends them into higher education and workforce development.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support HB2005 HD2. Mahalo for your time, your consideration, and your continued commitment to equity, access, and opportunity for Hawai'i's diverse communities.

Respectfully,

Jeremiah Brown
Multilingual Learners program coordinator
Waipahu High School

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:41:10 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marie Iding	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Legislators,

It is time for such a program to exist. In legal, healthcare and educational contexts each person needs to be understood and assured that their needs and wishes are translated or interpreted accurately by someone proficient in the target language.

Thank you

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 6:53:38 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kanani Kai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly SUPPORT HB2005.

Mahalo,

Kanani Kai

Member Indivisible Hawaii

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:21:15 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deanna Espinas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Submitting testimony in support.

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:27:02 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Robert I Nehmad	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a resident of the State of Hawaii and support this Bill.

I expect your support of this Bill since it reinforces the will of the residents of the State of Hawaii.

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:33:03 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Greg Puppione	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is Greg Puppione, and I submit this testimony in support of HB2005 HD2, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i to train qualified interpreters and translators and strengthen Hawai‘i’s language access capacity.

Language access is not a luxury—it is essential for equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, and government programs in Hawai‘i. Yet there remains a significant unmet need for qualified interpreting and translation services across the State. HB2005 HD2 creates a practical, statewide pipeline to build this workforce through the University of Hawai‘i and to turn multilingual ability into a trained, ethical, professional skill.

Importantly, interpreting and translating require training beyond bilingual proficiency. Ethical standards, confidentiality, accuracy, and best practices are crucial—especially in high-stakes settings like healthcare, courts, and social services. This bill is a “win-win”: it expands career pathways for multilingual students (including Seal of Biliteracy recipients) while ensuring residents with limited English proficiency can access services with clarity and dignity.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee PASS HB2005 HD2 and fully fund the program.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 6:02:34 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tim Huycke	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB2005.

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:11:32 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lynn Otaguro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is Lynn Otaguro and I submit this testimony in **support of HB2005 HD2**, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i to train qualified interpreters and translators and strengthen Hawai‘i’s language access capacity.

Language access is not a luxury—it is essential for equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, and government programs in Hawai‘i. Yet there remains a significant unmet need for qualified interpreting and translation services across the State. HB2005 HD2 creates a practical, statewide pipeline to build this workforce through the University of Hawai‘i and to turn multilingual ability into a trained, ethical, professional skill.

Importantly, interpreting and translating require training beyond bilingual proficiency. Ethical standards, confidentiality, accuracy, and best practices are crucial—especially in high-stakes settings like healthcare, courts, and social services. This bill is a “win-win”: it expands career pathways for multilingual students (including Seal of Biliteracy recipients) while ensuring residents with limited English proficiency can access services with clarity and dignity.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee **PASS HB2005 HD2** and fully fund the program.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Lynn Otaguro

Oahu, Hawaii

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

Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 25, 2026

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

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

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

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

The state needs a program to nurture this growing pool of talent. There are now thousands of students who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy, and hundreds more who have earned the internationally-recognized Global Seal of Biliteracy. The program proposed by this bill provides a welcome opportunity for these individuals to continue to develop their skills to serve the multilingual needs of the state. As the language of the bill identifies, language access is not a luxury—it is a fundamental requirement for ensuring equitable access to

education, healthcare, legal services, and emergency government programs. In a state as diverse as Hawaii, our multilingual population is one of our greatest strengths; however, this strength can only be realized when we bridge the communication gap with a trained, culturally competent workforce.

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

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

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

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

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 5:10:55 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kehaulani Coleman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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

February 25, 2026

To: The Honorable Chris Todd, Chair,
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair, and
Members of the House Committee on Finance

Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2026
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Place: Conference Room 308, 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 should the measure continue through the legislative process.

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

DLIR's Hele Imua program provides residents, including students, with internship opportunities in both 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.

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program
Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.
TDD/TTY Dial 711 then ask for (808) 586-8842.

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:00:41 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nathan Leo Braulick	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo,

Nathan Leo Braulick

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:09:24 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Allan Nebrija	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on COMMITTEE,

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

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

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

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

While the HIDOE’s State Seal of Biliteracy successfully recognizes the value of bilingual proficiency, there is currently no established pathway for these recipients or other bilingual residents to transition into the workforce as qualified interpreters and translators.

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

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

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

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

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

Respectfully,

Allan Nebrija

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:49:11 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Judith Mura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Judith Mura. STRONGLY SUPPORT HB2005 HD2

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:43:13 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nandita Sharma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB2005 and encourage each of you to do the same. It can only benefit people in the state of HI to have a statewide language access education and workforce development program. UH is the best institution to house such a program as it has a wealth of experienced instructors and administrators, as well as a large cohort of language learners.

Providing people with the opportunity to develop language and workforce skills benefits us all at very little cost.

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 SB3238 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.

Sincerely,
Debra Andres Arellano

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 2:00 pm

Conference Room 308 and Via Videoconference

State Capitol

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

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, my Rep. Miyake for Wailuku, Rep. Yamashita of Maui, 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



NAKEM Conferences

94-390 Hoaeae Street, Waipahu, HI 96797 / nakemconferences@gmail.com

24 February 2026

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair &
Members, House Finance Committee

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members,

We are officers and members of NAKEM Conferences, an advocacy organization for linguistic justice in the State of Hawai'i for the past twenty years. We are also members of the instructional faculty of a department at the University of Hawai'i whose mandate is to honor and respect the languages spoken and used daily by our diverse communities. We 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.

We wish to clarify that we are not testifying in our capacity as faculty members of the university, but as language justice workers and advocates — a shared commitment that has united us for more than thirty years.

As the bill recognizes, language access is not a luxury; it is a fundamental requirement for ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, and emergency government programs. In a state as diverse as Hawai'i, our multilingual population is one of our greatest strengths. That strength, however, can only be fully realized when communication barriers are addressed through a trained and culturally competent workforce.

HB 2005 provides a structural framework to respond to the shortage of qualified interpreters and translators. The bill's emphasis on the Department of Education's Seal of Biliteracy offers a practical pathway for retaining local talent in the islands. It transforms students' existing linguistic abilities into marketable professional skills and creates a clear bridge from high school to careers in public service, healthcare, and related fields. At the same time, it is important to recognize that additional training is necessary to meet the advanced proficiency standards required for professional translation and interpretation. The programs proposed in this bill would provide that essential preparation.

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

Ensuring that every resident can understand their doctor, participate fully in their child's education, and navigate the legal system is a matter of statewide importance and constitutional responsibility. This bill represents a meaningful investment in workforce development while safeguarding the dignity and equitable treatment of our non-English-speaking residents.

We respectfully urge your support for this measure. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Truly yours,



Dean A. Domingo, MEd
President, NAKEM Hawaii



Aurelio S. Agcaoili, PhD
President, NAKEM Conferences &
Chair, NAKEM Consortium

HB-2005-HD-2

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:56:27 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amy Wake	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Rev. Amy Chieko Wake

In SUPPORT of HB2005 HD2

Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Wednesday, Feb 25, 2026

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is Amy Wake, Pastor of Wesley United Methodist Church in Kahala and I submit this testimony in support of HB2005 HD2, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i to train qualified interpreters and translators and strengthen Hawai‘i’s language access capacity.

Language access is not a luxury—it is essential for equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, and government programs in Hawai‘i. Yet there remains a significant unmet need

for qualified interpreting and translation services across the State. HB2005 HD2 creates a practical, statewide pipeline to build this workforce through the University of Hawai'i and to turn multilingual ability into a trained, ethical, professional skill.

Importantly, interpreting and translating require training beyond bilingual proficiency. Ethical standards, confidentiality, accuracy, and best practices are crucial—especially in high-stakes settings like healthcare, courts, and social services. This bill is a “win-win”: it expands career pathways for multilingual students (including Seal of Biliteracy recipients) while ensuring residents with limited English proficiency can access services with clarity and dignity.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee PASS HB2005 HD2 and fully fund the program.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Amy Wake

Pastor, Wesley United Methodist Church

pastoramywake@gmail.com

Testimony of Wendy Naomi Sodetani
In SUPPORT of HB2005 HD2

Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Wednesday, Feb 25, 2026

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is **Wendy Naomi Sodetani**, and I submit this testimony in **support of HB2005 HD2**, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i to train qualified interpreters and translators and strengthen Hawai‘i’s language access capacity.

I am testifying as an individual born and raised in Hawai‘i and an active member of the Indivisible Hawai‘i Statewide Network. I recently retired from a community health center in Kalihi caring for underserved populations, primarily low-income, new immigrant and Pacific Islander migrant families. **Most of our patients are of Limited English Proficiency (LEP).**

HB2005 HD2 is critically important to protect the dignity and civil rights of our community members for whom English is not their native tongue. Language access is not a luxury—it is essential for equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, and government programs in Hawai‘i. Yet there remains a significant unmet need for qualified interpreting and translation services across the State. HB2005 HD2 creates a practical, statewide pipeline to build this workforce through the University of Hawai‘i and to turn multilingual ability into a trained, ethical, professional skill. Without trained language access, residents with limited English proficiency face steep barriers to healthcare, education, legal services, emergency information, and government programs — and full participation in our island community.

Importantly, interpreting and translating require training beyond bilingual proficiency. Ethical standards, confidentiality, accuracy, and best practices are crucial—especially in high-stakes settings like healthcare, courts, and social services. This bill is a “win-win”: it expands career pathways for multilingual students (including Seal of Biliteracy recipients) while ensuring residents with limited English proficiency can access services with clarity and dignity.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee **PASS HB2005 HD2** and fully fund the program.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Wendy Naomi Sodetani

Member of Indivisible Hawai'i Statewide Network (IHSN)

naomisodetani@gmail.com

(808) 741-0555