

DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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

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

March 23, 2026

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY SERVICES AND ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

House Bill 2443 House Draft 1 – Relating to Disaster Services

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 2443 House Draft 1 - Relating to the Disaster Services. This bill integrates the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs into emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities. It establishes a Disability Integration Specialist position, to be located in the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, who shall provide programming support for disability community projects that promote accessibility, inclusion, and equity in disaster management. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000.

A Disability Integration Specialist ensures that the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs are included in all phases of emergency management such as planning, response, recovery and mitigation. In addition, the Disability Integration Specialist can assist by being deployed to disaster sites and provide technical assistance.

One in five residents in Hawaii has a disability, and may require additional support before, during, and after disasters. People with disabilities encounter disproportionate risks, including difficulty evacuating without proper support, lack of accessible transportation, barriers to receiving emergency alerts and evacuation orders in alternate formats, face obstacles in accessing shelters, receive appropriate emergency medical care, and post-disaster relief programs such as housing, food, and financial assistance.

House Bill 2443 House Draft 1 ensures that people with disabilities, and people with access and functional needs have equitable access and safety.

As suggested in the House Committee on Public Safety's Committee Report, we request that bill be amended as follows:

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

(1) \$100,000 for the establishment of one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) disability integration specialist position, which shall serve as the emergency management specialist and which shall be exempt from chapter 76, Hawaii Revised Statutes, within the Hawaii emergency management agency; and

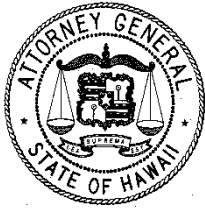
(2) \$100,000 for programming support for disability community projects, such as accessibility improvements in emergency shelters, public service announcements in accessible formats, training programs for shelter staff, and other projects to enhance disaster resilience for individuals with disabilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,



KRISTINE PAGANO
Acting Executive Director



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

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

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

BEFORE THE:

SENATE COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS AND ON
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

DATE: Monday, March 23, 2026

TIME: 2:45 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 016

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

Chairs Fukunaga and San Buenaventura and Members of the Committees:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

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

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

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

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

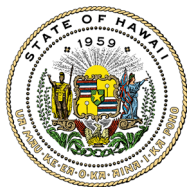
...

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

...

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



STEPHEN F. LOGAN
MAJOR GENERAL
ADJUTANT GENERAL
KA 'AKUKANA KENELALA

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
KAHU HO'OMALU PŪLIA

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

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

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2443 HD1,
RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON
PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS &
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

March 23, 2026

Aloha Chairs Fukunaga & San Buenaventura, Vice-Chairs Lee & McKelvey, and Members of both Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB2443 HD1, which addresses a critical need in our emergency management system by better integrating the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs throughout all phases of disaster management.

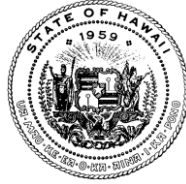
This bill's establishment of a dedicated Disability Integration Specialist within HIEMA is a vital step forward. This specialist will serve as a knowledgeable resource to ensure our disaster planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation efforts comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and related laws. Moreover, this position will foster collaboration with disability advocacy groups and service providers to promote accessibility, inclusion, and equity across the state's emergency management system.

In closing, House Bill 2443 HD1 represents a thoughtful, necessary investment in the safety and dignity of our disabled and access-need communities.

HIEMA supports this measure and urges the committee to pass it to ensure that no one is left behind in our disaster preparedness and response efforts.

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

James Barros: james.barros@hawaii.gov; 808-733-4300



STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE
KE KE'ENA KŪPA'A MAULI OLA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
415 S.BERETANIA ST. #415
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

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

Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs and
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

March 23, 2026, at 2:45 p.m.; Room Number: 016

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

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

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

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

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.

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

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



STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
STATE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
'A'UNIKE MOKU'ĀPUNI NO KA NĀ KĀWAI KULA

PRINCESS VICTORIA KAMĀMALU BUILDING
1010 RICHARDS STREET, Room 122
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
TELEPHONE: (808) 586-8100 FAX: (808) 586-7543

March 23, 2026

The Honorable Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs
The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Committee on Health and Human Services
The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chairs Fukunaga, San Buenaventura, and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: HB2443 HD1 - Relating to Disaster Services

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

The Council appreciates the amendments to the measure from the previous committee and continues to support this measure as it is critically important to the disability community. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as people with physical, sensory, psychiatric, and cognitive disabilities, are often disproportionately harmed during emergencies, not because of the disaster itself, but because emergency systems are not designed with access and functional needs in mind. Barriers such as inaccessible shelters, ineffective communication, lack of trained staff, and disruptions to essential supports place people with disabilities at heightened risk during evacuation, response, and recovery. Establishing a dedicated Disability Integration Specialist helps ensure that disability access is incorporated into emergency planning proactively, rather than addressed only after harm occurs.

This measure also reflects the reality that the disability community is far larger and more diverse than commonly understood. National data show that more than one in four adults in the United States lives with a disability, many of whom do not identify as disabled or interact with disability services. This includes people with chronic health conditions, mental health disabilities, sensory impairments, and age-related functional limitations who may only become visible to systems during an emergency. Planning that relies on narrow definitions or self-identification inevitably leaves people behind.

Importantly, disability integration strengthens emergency preparedness for everyone. Access and functional needs planning improves outcomes for kupuna, caregivers, people with medical dependencies, individuals with temporary injuries, and others who require accessible communication or supportive environments during crises.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daintry Bartoldus". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Daintry Bartoldus, Executive Administrator



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

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

DATE: Monday, March 23, 2026
TIME: 2:45 PM
PLACE: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 016
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

To:

[COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS](#)

Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair

Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

[COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES](#)

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair

Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

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

Re: HB 2443 HD1 Relating to Language Access

Testimony in SUPPORT

The Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) carries out the Hawai‘i constitutional mandate that no person shall be discriminated against in the exercise of their civil rights. Art. I, Sec. 5. HCRC has enforcement jurisdiction over Hawai‘i’s laws prohibiting discrimination in employment (Chapter 378, Part I, HRS), housing (Chapter 515, HRS), public accommodations (Chapter 489, HRS), and access to state and state-funded services (HRS § 368-1.5). Through this broad jurisdiction, the HCRC ensures that the constitutional promise of nondiscrimination is not merely aspirational, but actively protected in the daily lives of Hawai‘i’s people.

The HCRC is in support of HB 2443 HD1 because it ensures that Hawai'i's emergency management system reflects the needs of all residents, including those for non-native English speakers and people with disabilities. The devastating Maui wildfires in 2023 exposed many shortcomings in Hawai'i's emergency response systems, specifically in the area of communication. Physical accessibility or auxiliary aids at shelters, staff training and coordination of resources should be improved and strengthened statewide to reduce inequities during future disasters. During emergencies, access to important information is critical and could be the difference between life and death. Delay of vital information during emergencies could effectively be denial of communication because time is of the essence.

Our law is clear that no qualified individual in our state, *solely by reason of the individual's disability*, shall be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination by state agencies, or any program or activity receiving state assistance. Hawai'i Revised Statutes § 368-1.5. HB 2443 HD1 amends the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency's functions to ensure compliance with various state and federal disability access laws by integrating the needs of individuals with disabilities and others into the activities involving the planning, preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation of emergencies. This includes effective communication in all phases of disaster management. HB 2443 HD1 is a step in the right direction to recognize that the needs of individuals with disabilities should not be an afterthought, but part of the planning and preparedness process.

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

HB-2443-HD-1

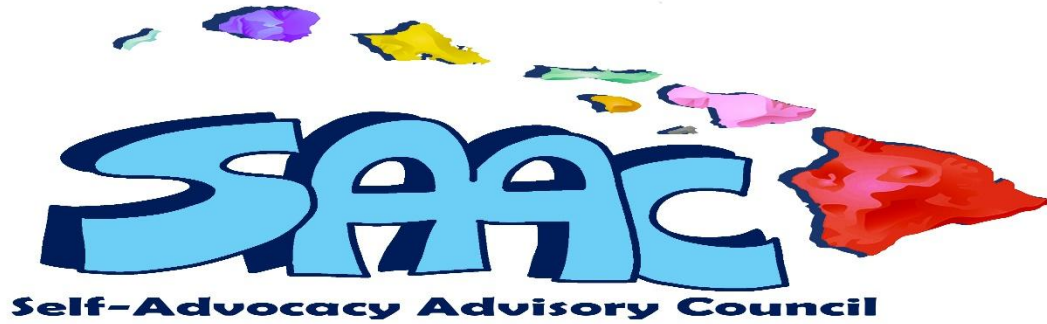
Submitted on: 3/17/2026 5:56:56 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/23/2026 2:45:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louis Erteschik	Testifying for Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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



The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Fukunaga and Chair San Buenaventura and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

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

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

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Timothy Renken,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Renken". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent horizontal line under the first name and a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

President, Hawaii Self-Advocacy Advisory Council

Following testimony has 5 individuals who support HB2443 HD1

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Fukunaga and Chair San Buenaventura and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is Josh Goetz and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1, which is the establishment of a Disability Integration Specialist at the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency coordinator for people with disabilities statewide. It's important to me because I need a direct support worker to help me with my needs and there is no emergency plan to support me and my worker in case I need to evacuate to an emergency shelter or a safe place in a disaster. I would need transportation for both of us and there is no current plan in place to help us with that.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2443 HD1.

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Fukunaga and Chair San Buenaventura and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

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

The reason why I think HB2443 HD1 is important is:

It allows individuals like me to have support for my specific emergency needs. I need trusted people who will be able to help me communicate for me regarding my health information in case of an emergency or disaster and support me. It is difficult for me to explain myself which takes a lot of time. I live in Ewa Beach and there is no plan for people with disabilities to evacuate to a shelter with support for my medical needs.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2443 HD1.

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Fukunaga and Chair San Buenaventura and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

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

The reason why I think HB2443 HD1 is important is:

The bill gives accessible communication help especially when it is difficult for me to communicate with people. I cannot speak clearly and have difficulties communicating with others. During an emergency or disaster I would need help from a direct support worker to be with me if I had to go to a shelter and help me with my needs. I also use an electric wheelchair and I don't know if emergency wheelchairs can move around in a shelter.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2443 HD1.

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Fukunaga and Chair San Buenaventura and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

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

The reason why I think HB2443 HD1 is important is:

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2443 HD1.

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Fukunaga and Chair San Buenaventura and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: HB2443 HD1 Relating to Emergency Management

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

The reason why I think HB2443 HD1 is important is:

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2443 HD1.

HB-2443-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/18/2026 12:34:30 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/23/2026 2:45:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Testifying for Palehua Townhouses Association	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Our association supports HB2443. Please pass this bill.

Mik Golojuch, Sr., President



www.AlohaILHawaii.org

Mar 23, 2026

MISSION

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

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

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Roxanne U. Bolden

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Vice Chair

Zora Shove

Treasurer

Jonathan Yap

Member

Scott Suzuki
Sheila Castaneda
Jennifer Hartssock

The Honorable Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs
The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawaii
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

SUBJECT: HB2443 HD1 – Relating to Disaster Services

Position: Support

Chair and Members of the Committee:

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) is a Center for Independent Living (CIL) serving people with all types of disabilities statewide. From an Independent Living perspective, HB2443 HD1 is a necessary step to ensure that disabled residents are not left behind before, during, or after disasters.

HB2443 HD1 integrates the needs of people with disabilities and others with access and functional needs into the statutory duties of the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA), and establishes a Disability Integration Specialist with programming funds for disability-focused community projects.

The Maui wildfires showed that disabled residents faced inaccessible shelters, communication gaps, lack of coordinated supports, and reliance on ad hoc nonprofit response rather than a planned, statewide system. One in five Hawaii residents has a disability, and many require accessible transportation, effective communication, and continuity of health and personal care services to survive an evacuation and recovery.



www.AlohaILHawaii.org

MISSION

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Roxanne U. Bolden

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Jonathan Yap

Member

Scott Suzuki
Sheila Castaneda
Jennifer Hartssock

For the **Public Safety and Military Affairs** committee, this bill strengthens core public safety by:

- Embedding disability and access-and-functional-needs planning, training, and shelter accessibility directly into HI-EMA's statutory functions, rather than treating accessibility as an optional add-on.
- Reducing risk and liability by aligning Hawaii with the Americans with Disabilities Act and section 308 of the Stafford Act, which require equitable access to disaster services for disabled people.

For the **Health and Human Services** committee, this bill advances health equity by:

- Supporting continuity of home- and community-based services, durable medical equipment, medications, and personal assistance, which are essential to keep disabled people safely in the community during disasters and recovery.
- Funding disability-led, community-based projects such as accessible communications, shelter improvements, and training for staff who interact with people with diverse disabilities, including sensory, cognitive, psychiatric, and chronic health conditions.

From a fiscal and systems-change standpoint, investing in a qualified Disability Integration Specialist is preventative, not optional. Proactive disability integration reduces downstream costs of emergency retrofits, shelter modifications, litigation risk, and prolonged recovery for disproportionately impacted communities.

AILH respectfully offers the following key recommendations for the Committees' consideration:

1. **Fund the Disability Integration Specialist at a competitive level** to attract and retain someone with deep expertise in disability law, emergency management, and engagement with disability-led



www.AlohaLLHawaii.org

MISSION

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

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Roxanne U. Bolden

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair / Sec

Valerie Yamada

Vice Chair

Zora Shove

Treasurer

Jonathan Yap

Member

Scott Suzuki
Sheila Castaneda
Jennifer Hartsock

organizations statewide.

2. **Ensure the position has clear authority within HI-EMA** to influence cross-agency and county planning, training, exercise, and after-action improvement, rather than functioning only as an advisor.
3. **Prioritize programming funds for sustainable, community-based capacity building**, such as accessible alerts and warnings, shelter access improvements, and cross-disability training for emergency personnel in all counties.

This bill aligns with national and federal guidance that calls for disability integration across all phases of emergency management and emphasizes that disabled people must be included in planning, not only in response.

On behalf of AILH's cross-disability community statewide, AILH respectfully urges the Committees on Public Safety and Military Affairs, and Health and Human Services to pass HB2443 HD1.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Aloha,

Roxanne Bolden

Executive Director

March 19, 2026

Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs
Chair Carol Fukunaga
Vice Chair Chris Lee
Members of the Committee

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Chair Joy A. San Buenaventura
Vice Chair Angus L.K. McKelvey
Members of the Committee

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

Aloha kākou!

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,
Amber King
Vice President, Legislative Affairs

HB-2443-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2026 3:05:46 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/23/2026 2:45:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ANNETTE TASHIRO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a Community Emergency Response Team member and a person with a disability, I feel that this is a necessary part of responding to our citizens before, during, and after disasters. People with disabilities need to be heard and be part of the preparation. We can be an integral part of the response process when the government emergency personnel have their hands full.

HB-2443-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2026 4:07:07 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/23/2026 2:45:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Natalie N. Greenleaf	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Carol Fukunaga and Joy A. San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Chris Lee and Angus L.K. McKelvey, and Committee Members,

My name is Natalie Nohealani Greenleaf. Mahalo for letting me share my testimony. I am writing in **strong support of HB2443 HD1**. I live in Lahaina, Maui. I am a member of Maui SAAC, and a self-advocate.

This bill is very important for people with disabilities. This bill will help people with mobility problems, like wheelchairs and walkers. It will also help people who are blind, like my roommate, and may need an escort to make sure they are safe in emergencies. It will make sure that emergency plans, including shelters, are prepared to help people with mobility problems. It is important for alerting to be accessible, so that people with disabilities know what is going on around them. In an emergency, having this position would make me feel more comfortable and help me to relax. It is important for people to have comfort and feel safe in emergencies.

I am in **strong support of HB2443 HD1**.

Mahalo for listening and for your time,

Natalie

Date: March 23, 2026

Committee: PSM/HHS, WAM

Bill: SB2852 SD1 – Relating to Disaster Services

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

My name is Kayla Hida and I am a social work student. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB2443 HD1, which relates to disaster services for people with disabilities and access or functional needs.

I work at an adult day health program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, where I've seen firsthand that disabilities are both seen and unseen. Many individuals have sensory sensitivities, communication barriers, or cognitive differences that make emergencies quite overwhelming. Working with them has taught me that disaster preparedness must include targeted supports like mobility assistance, accessible transportation, and clear communication to ensure everyone's safety.

Including a disability integration specialist or another trained professional is a vital component of this bill. Having someone on staff who understands and can support the needs of people with disabilities would make disaster planning and emergency shelters much stronger. This role would ensure that emergency planning and disaster response are an organized and well-coordinated system that is fair and accessible to all.

This bill addresses a critical gap in Hawai'i's emergency preparedness and response systems. From a social work perspective, this bill advances equity, dignity, and the ethical responsibility to serve all members of the community. Inclusive disaster planning is not optional... It is essential. By investing in focused interventions and professional expertise,

Hawai'i can build a more resilient system that protects and serves everyone, including those whose needs are too often overlooked.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

Mahalo,

Kayla Hida

3.18.2026

Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

To Senator Carol Funaga, Chair, Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair and Committee Members

Committee on Health and Human Services

To: Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair, Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair and Committee Members:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair and committee members:

My name is Kassie Sunada. I am writing in support of HB2443: Supporting a Functional Needs Coordinator.

I live in Eleele, on the island of Kauai. This bill is important to me because it provides funding to support the creation of a Functional Needs Coordinator who can support adults with disabilities in emergencies. A Functional Needs Coordinator can assist with communication, equipment, and coordination of services if I need to seek shelter during an emergency. I support HB2443.

Mahalo for allowing me to speak.

Kassie Sunada
Laulea St.
Eleele, Hi 96705

HB-2443-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/18/2026 12:20:17 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/23/2026 2:45:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raelene Tenno	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support HB2443 HD1

This is a very vital needed service to Hawaii's population!

As a condo owner since 1990, there is nothing in statute for our emergency responders to fall back on to enforce emergency preparedness with the community. Enforce is what is needed and as stated by a Emergency responder, they can only recommend as there is noting in statute to support "Enforce".

Please pass this bill

Raelene Tenno

Please pass HB2443 HD1

Thank you

Raelene Tenno

HB-2443-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/18/2026 4:31:41 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/23/2026 2:45:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dominic Gawrichevsky	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Carol Fukunaga and Joy A. San Buenaventura, and Vice Chairs Chris Lee and Angus L.K. McKelvey, and Committee Members,

My name is Dominic Gawrichevsky. Thank you for letting me share my testimony. I am writing in **strong support of HB2443 HD1**. I live in Maui. I am a self-advocate with the Maui Self-Advocacy Advisory Council.

This bill is important because it will make emergency management stronger. It is important to make sure that our Kupuna and other people with access and functional needs are kept safe in an emergency, like those who are homeless with disabilities and need accessible shelters. As someone with a disability, this will help me feel safer and prepared for an emergency.

I know that I need to be prepared, and I can help prepare for an emergency on my own and help others who need it, but not everyone knows how to prepare. This bill would help to make sure people with access and functional needs and disabilities know to make their own plans, too. I believe in strong emergency management for people with disabilities to keep us safe.

I am in **strong support of HB2443 HD1**.

Thank you for listening and for your time, and thank you to our Maui legislators for advocating to keep us safe.

DG

HB-2443-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/19/2026 2:18:24 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/23/2026 2:45:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leilani Kailiawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Fukunaga and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Lee and McKelvey and Members of the Senate Public Safety and Military Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees,

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

I am the lead author of the report *Recovery Through a Disability Lens: Impacts of the 2023 Maui Wildfires on Disability Equity and Shared Prosperity*. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of HB2443 HD1, which would establish a Disability Integration Specialist within the Hawai‘i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA). Our research provides systematic evidence that people with disabilities experienced more severe and more persistent impacts from the 2023 Maui wildfires than people without disabilities. These disparities were not inevitable. Many reflect gaps in disability-informed planning, coordination, and implementation across preparedness, response, and recovery. HB2443 HD1 directly addresses those structural gaps.

Key findings from the UHERO Report

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our report concludes that disability equity should be mainstreamed as a cross-cutting principle in disaster management. HB2443 HD1 provides a concrete mechanism to institutionalize that integration within HI-EMA's statutory framework.

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

Mahalo for your consideration,

Daniela Bond-Smith

To: Committee on Health and Human Services/Public Safety and Military Affairs

From: Catherine Abellera

RE: HB 2443 HD1 – Relating to Disaster Services

Date: March 23, 2026

LATE

My name is Catherine Abellera, and I am writing in strong support of HB 2443 HD1.

As a professional working closely with children and families in Hawai'i, particularly in rural and underserved communities, I see firsthand the fragile balance many families navigate daily. This bill is timely and necessary, especially considering the recent devastating floods across our state.

Over the past week, Hawai'i has experienced some of the worst flooding in more than two decades, with over 200 residents rescued, thousands displaced, and widespread damage to homes, roads, schools, and critical infrastructure. Entire communities have been impacted, with families losing housing, access to clean water, and necessities. Early estimates suggest damages may exceed \$1 billion, underscoring the scale and urgency of this crisis. ()

For the families I serve—many already experiencing housing instability, limited transportation, and barriers to consistent communication—events like these are not temporary disruptions; they are compounding crises. When systems are already difficult to access, disasters further widen gaps in care, delay services, and increase stress on children during critical developmental periods.

HB 2443 HD1 represents an opportunity to strengthen our systems in a way that is responsive, coordinated, and equitable. It is essential that we build infrastructure and support that can withstand not only everyday challenges but also increasing climate-related emergencies. Investing in accessible, culturally responsive, and community-informed services ensures that families are not left behind, especially during times of crisis.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 2443 HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Catherine Abellera