



# 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  
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April 1, 2026

## TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

### House Bill 2443 House Draft 1 Senate Draft 1 – Relating to Disaster Services

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 2443 House Draft 1 Senate Draft 1 - Relating to the Disaster Services.

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.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing and rely on American Sign Language (ASL) reported significant communication barriers, including the lack of qualified and/or certified interpreters, interpreters being positioned too far from speakers, interpreters being partially obstructed or poorly lit, and television broadcasts failing to ensure interpreters were clearly visible on screen.

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

ASL interpreters should be qualified in addition to being certified by a nationally or state recognized credentialing authority. While on-site ASL interpreters are preferable, we recognize that there are factors which may make this difficult for some counties or in certain situations. The bill does not specifically require on-site ASL interpreters, but DCAB suggests the bill be amended to include video remote interpreting services (VRI) as an option. We request Section 10 be amended to read as follows:

SECTION 10. Chapter 127A, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated and to read as follows:

**"§127A-B Official announcements; proclamations; emergencies; American Sign Language interpreter; display; requirements; picture-in-picture required. (a) Beginning July 1, 2027, whenever the governor or mayor, as applicable, makes a proclamation pursuant to this chapter, the governor or mayor shall provide a qualified American Sign Language interpreter who is certified by a nationally or state recognized credentialing authority at each live broadcast press conference during the state of emergency. To the greatest extent possible, the governor or mayor shall ensure that the American Sign Language interpreter is physically positioned in a manner so that the interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands are always visible during a television or internet broadcast of the press conference.**

**(b) The governor or mayor, as applicable, shall provide a (1) standardized pool feed for any live official announcement that includes the American Sign Language interpreter in a**

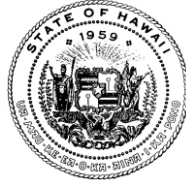
picture-in-picture window not less than one quarter the size of the primary video or (2) a live video streaming with the interpreter in a side by side window not less than one quarter the size of the primary video. (3) Any window shall be large enough to clearly see the interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands. The interpreter shall not be blocked or covered by captions, graphics, or other on-screen text; provided that the captions, graphics, or other on-screen text shall be repositioned as necessary. A broadcaster that rebroadcasts the official announcement shall not be required to independently generate or insert this accessibility feature.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,



KRISTINE PAGANO  
Acting Executive Director



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 SD1  
RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES**

Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senator Sharon Moriwaki, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

April 1, 2026, at 10:03 a.m.; Room Number: 211

The Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) **Supports** H.B. 2443 HD1 SD1, 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 OWR 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.<sup>1</sup>

H.B. 2443 HD1 SD1 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



SIERRA WHITESIDE  
CHAIRPERSON

DAINTRY BARTOLDUS  
EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATOR

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

April 1, 2026

The Honorable Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** Testimony in Support of HB2443 HD1 SD1, Relating to Disaster Services

The Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities is in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **HB2443 HD1 SD1**, 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.

The Council appreciates the amendments to the measure from the previous committee and defers to the Disability and Communication Access Board's (DCAB) amendments as outlined in their testimony 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 improve outcomes for kupuna, caregivers, people with medical dependencies, individuals with temporary injuries, and others who require accessible communication or supportive environments during crises.

For these reasons, the Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities **strongly supports HB2443 HD1 SD1.**

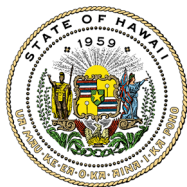
Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,



Daintry Bartoldus  
Executive Administrator

**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 SD1,  
RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
WAYS AND MEANS

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS  
ADMINISTRATOR  
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

April 1, 2026

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

HIEMA strongly supports HB2443 HD1 SD1, which addresses critical gaps in disaster services for individuals with disabilities, limited English proficiency, and all residents needing accessible emergency information.

The bill's creation of a Disability Integration Specialist will ensure compliance with disability laws and improve accessibility, inclusion, and equity in emergency planning and response. This role is essential to better serve vulnerable populations, as highlighted during past disasters.

Requiring certified American Sign Language interpreters for official emergency announcements starting July 1, 2027, guarantees that the deaf and hard-of-hearing community receives timely and clear information in an accessible format.

Expanding bilingual resources will improve communication with Hawai'i's diverse residents who have limited English proficiency, supporting federal civil rights mandates and promoting equitable access to emergency information.

Finally, the statewide fourteen-day emergency preparedness communications program will educate and motivate households to build essential emergency supplies, enhancing overall community resilience.

We respectfully urge the committee to pass this bill to strengthen Hawai'i's emergency management system for all residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2443 HD1 SD1.

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

**HB-2443-SD-1**

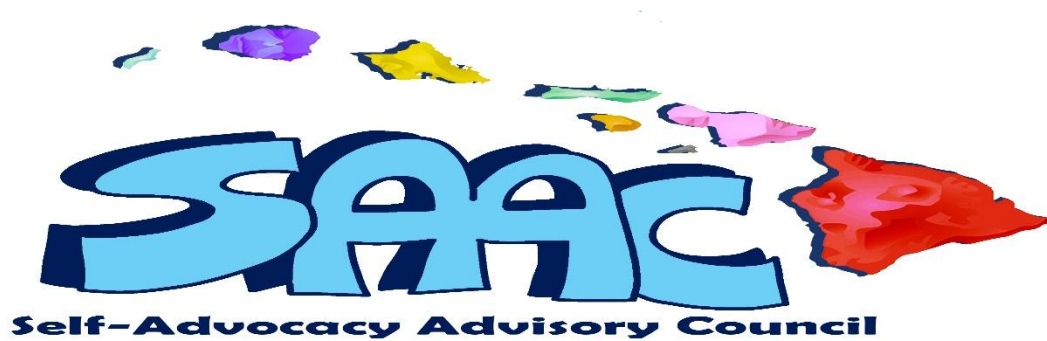
Submitted on: 3/30/2026 6:05:17 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2026 10:03:00 AM

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

Comments:

Support.



The Honorable Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

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

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 SD1 Relating to Emergency Management

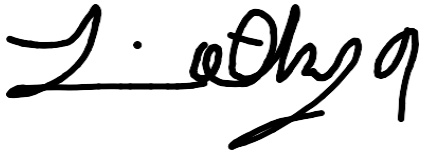
The Hawai'i Self-Advocacy Advisory Council(SAAC) strongly supports HB2443 HD1 SD1. The bill makes sure that people with disabilities are included in all parts of emergency planning and response. It creates a Disability Integration Specialist within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency to help ensure 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 SD1.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Timothy Renken,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy Renken". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent horizontal line across the middle.

President, Hawaii Self-Advocacy Advisory Council

Following testimony has 5 individuals who support HB2443 HD1 SD1

The Honorable Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

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

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 SD1 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is Josh Goetz and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1 SD1, 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 SD1.

The Honorable Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

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

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 SD1 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is Michelle Muralt and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1 SD1, 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 SD1 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 SD1.

The Honorable Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

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

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 SD1 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is Vaipapa Soliai and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1 SD1, 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 SD1 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 SD1.

The Honorable Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

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

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 SD1 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is Raymond Mamea and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1 SD1, 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 SD1 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 SD1.

The Honorable Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

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

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 HD1 SD1 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is James Labrie and I am in full support of HB2443 HD1 SD1, 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 SD1 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 SD1.

**HB-2443-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 9:15:39 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2026 10:03:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
James Kilgore	Testifying for Full Life	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the WAM Committee:

Full Life strongly supports HB244 HD1 SD1. This measure strengthens emergency preparedness by ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities and others with access and functional needs are fully integrated into disaster planning and response. It promotes accessible communication, inclusive systems, and coordinated supports that are critical during emergencies. This is a systems-level improvement that advances equity, safety, and community resilience.

Mahalo,

Jim Kilgore



1050 Bishop St. PMB 235 |  
Honolulu, HI 96813  
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**Executive Officers**

**Kit Okimoto**, Okimoto Corp., *Chair*  
**Jayson Watts**, Mahi Pono, *Vice Chair*  
**Jill Tamura**, Tamura Super Market, *Secretary/Treas.*  
**Lauren Zirbel**, HFIA, *President and Executive Director*  
**Paul Kosasa**, ABC Stores, *Advisor*  
**Toby Taniguchi**, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*  
**Joe Carter**, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, Odom, *Advisor*  
**Eddie Asato**, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*  
**Gary Okimoto**, Safeway, *Advisor*  
**Maile Miyashiro**, C&S Wholesale, *Immediate Past Chair*

**LATE**

TO: Committee on Ways and Means  
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION  
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: March 3, 2026  
TIME: 10:17am

RE: HB2443 HD1 SD1 Relating to Emergency Preparedness Communication  
Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

HFIA is in support of this measure. In particular we are in support of the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency to developing and implementing a statewide public education and communications program to promote household emergency preparedness consistent with the Agency's 14-day essential supplies recommendation.

As the measure notes, household emergency preparedness is a critical element of statewide resilience and continuity during hurricanes, floods, wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, pandemics, supply chain disruptions, and other emergencies. Hawaii emergency management agency (HIEMA) recommends that households maintain a fourteen-day supply of essential emergency supplies, including food, water, and regularly used medications, however, only twelve per cent of households statewide appear to meet the fourteen-day standard.

Enabling Hawaii households to be better prepared and more resilient means a more prepared and resilient Hawaii. We urge the Committee to pass this measure and we thank you for the opportunity to testify.



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[Twitter.com/aarpHawaii](https://twitter.com/aarpHawaii) | [facebook.com/aarpHawaii](https://facebook.com/aarpHawaii)

**LATE**

**The Thirty-Third State Legislature  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
April 1, 2026  
Conference Room 211, 10:03 a.m.**

TO: The Honorable Donovan Dela Cruz Chair  
FROM: Keali'i S. López, State Director  
RE: Support for H.B. 2443 HD1 SD1 Relating to Disaster Services

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Sharon Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

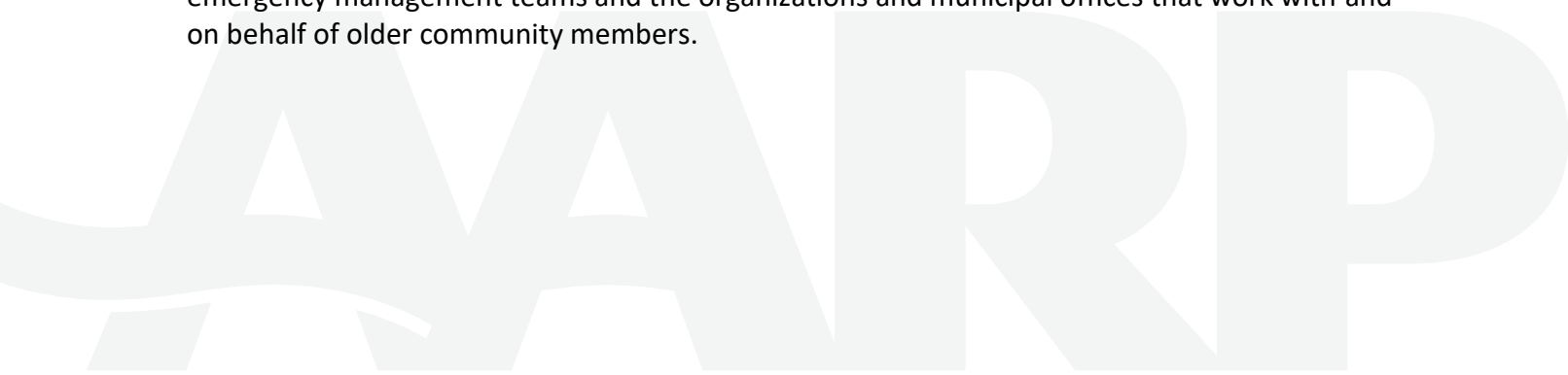
My name is Kealii Lopez, State Director for AARP Hawai'i. AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan, social impact organization dedicated to empowering people age 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. We advocate for the issues that matter most to older adults and their families: health and financial security, and personal fulfillment. On behalf of our nearly 135,000 members in Hawai'i, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

AARP Hawai'i strongly supports H.B. 2443 HD1 SD1, which integrates the needs of kūpuna, individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs into emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities.

Kūpuna and others who have chronic illnesses, functional limitations, or disabilities are especially vulnerable during natural disasters. During the 2023 Lahaina fire, two-thirds of the 102 deaths were of people 60 and older. Yet, the state's final report on the fire contained no recommendations aimed at specifically reducing kupuna deaths in future disasters.

Mobility issues and the needs of kūpuna and people with disabilities and chronic conditions like dementia must be addressed during evacuations and in evacuation shelters. Addressing the needs of kūpuna during disasters is critical as the number of older residents in Hawai'i rises along with the risk of severe weather events due to climate change.

A key to ensuring that older adults are properly served by disaster preparedness and emergency planning is acknowledging and addressing the gaps that exist between local emergency management teams and the organizations and municipal offices that work with and on behalf of older community members.



Better integrated disaster planning will help local governments better protect kūpuna, whether they are living independently in the community or residing in assisted living or health care facilities.

This bill represents a positive step toward better preparing our communities and supporting kūpuna.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of H.B. 2443 HD1 SD1.

**HB-2443-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 3:56:16 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2026 10:03:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Iris Xiao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Sharon Y. Moriwaki, and Committee Members,

My name is Iris Xiao. Thank you for letting me share my testimony. I am writing in **strong support of HB2443 HD1 SD1.**

I live on Kapolei, Oahu. I am a self-advocate from Maui, and I am the Legislative Liaison for the Maui Self-Advocacy Advisory Council.

HB2443 HD1 SD1 is important because this position would help people with access and functional needs and disabilities be safe in emergencies. I am a wheelchair user, so I have first-hand experience of how important it is for the community to be accessible. It is disappointing how inaccessible emergency preparedness and response is, and people with disabilities should be equally supported in these processes. There is not a lot of accessible information and resources to help people with disabilities and mobility concerns prepare for an emergency. It is important for all people to get alerts, regardless of their access and functional needs or disability, to keep them aware and safe.

I am in **strong support of HB2443 HD1 SD1.**

Thank you for listening and for your time,

Iris Xiao

**HB-2443-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 4:03:04 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2026 10:03:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair, Vice Chair Sharon Y. Moriwaki, 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 SD1**. I live in Lahaina, Maui. I am a self-advocate and member of the Maui Self-Advocacy Advisory Council.

As someone with a disability, this HB2443 HD1 SD1 is very important to me. 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 systems 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 SD1**.

Mahalo for listening and for your time,

Natalie

**HB-2443-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 4:08:17 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2026 10:03:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kyle Moniz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair, Vice Chair Sharon Y. Moriwaki, and Committee Members,

My name is Kyle Moniz. Thank you for letting me share my testimony. I am writing in **strong support of HB2443 HD1 SD1.**

I live in Kihei, Maui. I am a self-advocate and the Chair of the Maui Self-Advocacy Advisory Council.

This bill is important to me because I think this is important to let people know what is happening to keep them away from the danger. For alerts, it is important that people can understand the emergency and what is being said. This keeps people safe and learning what is happening. It is important for emergency plans to help people with wheelchairs, for shelters and emergency transportation for leaving. If there were more trainings for people with disabilities to be prepared, it would make me feel more relaxed and more prepared.

I am in **strong support of HB2443 HD1 SD1.**

Thank you for listening and for your time.

Kyle Moniz

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

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 SD1, 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 SD1 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 SD1 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 HDI 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 SD1.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Daniela Bond-Smith