



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

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**ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:**

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

**BEFORE THE:**

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

**DATE:** Friday, February 6, 2026

**TIME:** 10:15 a.m.

**LOCATION:** State Capitol, Room 411

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

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Chair Belatti and Members of the Committee:

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.



**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

February 6, 2026

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair  
House Committee on Public Safety  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 Relating to Disaster Services

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

This measure 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. To more accurately capture the role of this position, the Council respectfully offers the following amendments. We have also attached to this testimony a draft of the measure with the changes outlined below.

**Page 3**

Line 4: **advise current best and promised practices**

Line 6: ~~disability~~ **disabilities and access and functional needs**

Line 17: ~~disability-related~~ **disability and access and functional needs related**

**Page 4**

Line 5: ~~disability~~ with **disability and access and functional needs**

**Page 9**

1 11) Ensure compliance with **items 1-10 and** the Americans with Disabilities  
2 Act and related federal and state disability access  
3 laws by integrating the needs of individuals with  
4 disabilities and others with access and functional  
5 needs into emergency planning, preparedness, response,  
6 recovery, and mitigation activities, including  
7 providing auxiliary aids and services to ensure  
8 effective communication in all phases of disaster  
9 management **including accessible and alternative communication formats and services to**  
10 **ensure effective communication in all phases of disaster management;** advising on accessibility  
11 requirements **and current best and promised practices** for  
12 emergency shelters, evacuation procedures, and  
13 disaster communications; **supporting continuity of preparedness and response in all**  
14 **counties across the State of Hawaii;** and interfacing with  
12 disability advocacy organizations, service providers,  
13 and community members to strengthen inclusive disaster  
14 preparedness and response.”

With these changes, the Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities **strongly supports HB2443.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,



Daintry Bartoldus  
Executive Administrator

Attachment

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## A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1           SECTION 1. The legislature finds that one in five Hawaii  
2 residents has a disability, and many require functional or  
3 access support before, during, and after disasters. These  
4 individuals often encounter disproportionate risks, including  
5 difficulty evacuating without proper supports; lack of  
6 accessible transportation; barriers to receiving emergency  
7 alerts and evacuation orders in formats that they can  
8 understand; and obstacles in accessing shelters, emergency  
9 medical care, and post-disaster relief programs, such as  
10 housing, food, and financial assistance.

11           The legislature further finds that in the immediate  
12 aftermath of the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfires, many  
13 individuals with disabilities faced significant impediments to  
14 accessing emergency shelters and services. Shelters often  
15 lacked physical accessibility, disability-trained staff, and  
16 coordinated resources to address medical and functional needs.  
17 Nonprofit organizations and community members stepped in to fill



1 these gaps; however, the lack of a planned, coordinated response  
2 by state and county agencies highlighted systemic inequities in  
3 disaster preparedness and response for individuals with  
4 disabilities.

5 The legislature additionally finds that although the  
6 legislature passed Act 210, Session Laws of Hawaii 2024, to  
7 establish a limited English proficiency language access  
8 coordinator within the Hawaii emergency management agency, that  
9 position addresses only the needs of limited English proficient  
10 individuals under state and federal language access laws.  
11 Importantly, American Sign Language does not fall under the  
12 language access law, as American Sign Language is not a foreign  
13 language but a distinct language of the deaf community. The  
14 rights of individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or  
15 have other disabilities fall within the scope of the Americans  
16 with Disabilities Act, not language access statutes.

17 Accordingly, there remains a critical gap in disaster  
18 services planning and response for individuals with  
19 disabilities, including those who use American Sign Language and  
20 those with access and functional needs. A disability  
21 integration specialist position, serving as the State's



1 emergency management specialist within the Hawaii emergency  
2 management agency, is necessary to ensure compliance with the  
3 Americans with Disabilities Act and related federal and state  
4 disability laws, coordinate disability-related planning, advise  
5 current best and promising practices, and guarantee accessible  
6 disaster services for all individuals with  
7 ~~disabilities~~ disabilities and access and functional needs.

8 Furthermore, the legislature finds that section 308 of the  
9 Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act  
10 (Stafford Act, P.L. 93-288, as amended) requires entities  
11 receiving Federal Emergency Management Agency funding to ensure  
12 equitable access to disaster services for individuals with  
13 disabilities. Federal Emergency Management Agency guidance also  
14 requires disability integration throughout emergency management,  
15 emphasizing planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and  
16 mitigation.

17 Therefore, the purpose of this Act is to:

- 18 (1) Add ~~disability-related~~ disability and access and  
19 functional needs related planning, preparedness,  
20 response, recovery, and mitigation to the designated



1 functions of the Hawaii emergency management agency;  
2 and  
3 (2) Appropriate funds to the Hawaii emergency management  
4 agency for the establishment of a disability  
5 integration specialist, who shall serve as the  
6 emergency management specialist and provide  
7 programming support for disability and access and  
8 functional needs community projects that promote  
9 accessibility, inclusion, and equity in disaster  
10 management.

11 SECTION 2. Section 127A-3, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
12 amended to read as follows:

13 "**§127A-3 Hawaii emergency management agency.** (a) There  
14 is established within the department of defense the Hawaii  
15 emergency management agency. The adjutant general shall serve  
16 as the director of Hawaii emergency management and, subject to  
17 the direction and control of the governor, shall oversee the  
18 agency.

19 (b) There shall be an administrator of emergency  
20 management who shall be appointed, and may be removed, by the  
21 director, and who shall have at least three years of experience



1 leading emergency management efforts at the local, state, or  
2 federal level. The administrator of emergency management shall  
3 be the civilian head of and responsible for the day-to-day  
4 operations of the agency. The administrator of emergency  
5 management shall report to the director. The administrator of  
6 emergency management shall, in the absence of the director, have  
7 all the duties and responsibilities of the director, and  
8 shall report directly to the governor. The administrator of  
9 emergency management shall not be subject to chapter 76.

10 (c) The administrator may, from funds allotted therefor,  
11 employ technical, clerical, administrative, and other personnel  
12 and make such expenditures as may be necessary.

13 (d) The administrator shall coordinate the activities of  
14 the agency with all county emergency management agencies, other  
15 state agencies, other states, or federal agencies involved in  
16 emergency management activities, and all organizations for  
17 emergency management within the State, whether public or  
18 private, and shall maintain liaison and cooperate with all  
19 county emergency management agencies, other state agencies,  
20 other states, or federal agencies involved in emergency  
21 management activities as provided in this chapter.



1 (e) The agency shall perform emergency management  
2 functions within the territorial limits of the State. In  
3 performing its duties, the agency shall:

4 (1) Prepare a state comprehensive emergency management  
5 plan, which shall be integrated into and coordinated  
6 with the emergency management plans of the federal  
7 government. The plan shall be integrated by a  
8 continuous, integrated comprehensive emergency  
9 management program. The plan shall contain provisions  
10 to ensure that the State prepares for, mitigates  
11 against, responds to, and recovers from emergencies  
12 and minor, major, and catastrophic disasters. In  
13 preparing and maintaining the plan, the agency shall  
14 work closely with agencies and organizations with  
15 emergency management responsibilities;

16 (2) Assign lead and support responsibilities to state  
17 agencies and personnel for emergency management  
18 functions and other support activities;

19 (3) Adopt standards and requirements for county emergency  
20 management plans. The standards and requirements  
21 shall ensure that county plans are coordinated and



- 1 consistent with the state comprehensive emergency  
2 management plan;
- 3 (4) Make recommendations to the legislature, building code  
4 organizations, and counties for zoning, building, and  
5 other land use controls; and other preparedness,  
6 prevention, and mitigation measures designed to  
7 eliminate emergencies or reduce their impact;
- 8 (5) Anticipate trends and promote innovations that will  
9 enhance the emergency management system;
- 10 (6) Institute statewide public awareness programs. This  
11 shall include intensive public educational campaigns  
12 on emergency preparedness issues, including but not  
13 limited to the personal responsibility of individual  
14 citizens to be self-sufficient for up to fourteen days  
15 following a natural or human-caused disaster;
- 16 (7) Coordinate federal, state, and local emergency  
17 management activities and take all other steps,  
18 including the partial or full mobilization of  
19 emergency management forces and organizations in  
20 advance of an actual emergency, to ensure the  
21 availability of adequately trained and equipped forces



1 of emergency management personnel before, during, and  
2 after emergencies and disasters;

3 (8) Implement training programs to improve the ability of  
4 state and local emergency management personnel to  
5 prepare and implement emergency management plans and  
6 programs. This shall include a continuous training  
7 program for agencies and individuals that will be  
8 called on to perform key roles in state and local  
9 post-disaster response and recovery efforts and for  
10 local government personnel on federal and state post-  
11 disaster response and recovery strategies and  
12 procedures;

13 (9) Adopt standards and requirements for state agency  
14 emergency operating procedures and periodically review  
15 emergency operating procedures of state agencies and  
16 recommend revisions as needed to ensure consistency  
17 with the state comprehensive emergency management plan  
18 and program; ~~and~~

19 (10) Coordinate, in advance whenever possible, such  
20 executive orders, proclamations, and rules for  
21 issuance by the governor as are necessary or



1 appropriate for coping with emergencies and  
2 disasters~~[.]~~; and  
3 (11) Ensure compliance with items 1-10 and the Americans  
4 with Disabilities Act and related federal and state  
5 disability access laws by integrating the needs of  
6 individuals with disabilities and others with access  
7 and functional needs into emergency planning,  
8 preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation  
9 activities, ~~including providing auxiliary aids and~~  
10 ~~services to ensure effective communication in all~~  
11 ~~phases of disaster management including accessible and~~  
12 ~~alternative communication formats and series to ensure~~  
13 ~~effective communication in all phases of disaster~~  
14 ~~management~~; advising on accessibility requirements and  
15 ~~current best and promising practices~~ for emergency  
16 shelters, evacuation procedures, and disaster  
17 communications; ~~supporting continuity of preparedness~~  
18 ~~and response in all counties across the State of~~  
19 ~~Hawaii~~; and interfacing with disability advocacy  
20 organizations, service providers, and community



1           members to strengthen inclusive disaster preparedness  
2           and response."

3           SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general  
4 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$200,000 or so much  
5 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027, to be  
6 allocated as follows:

7           (1) \$100,000 for the establishment of one full-time  
8           equivalent (1.0 FTE) disability integration specialist  
9           position, which shall serve as the emergency  
10          management specialist and which shall be exempt from  
11          chapter 76, Hawaii Revised Statutes, within the Hawaii  
12          emergency management agency; and

13          (2) \$100,000 for programming support for disability  
14          community projects, such as accessibility improvements  
15          in emergency shelters, public service announcements in  
16          accessible formats, training programs for shelter  
17          staff, and other projects to enhance disaster  
18          resilience for individuals with disabilities.

19          The sum appropriated shall be expended by the Hawaii  
20 emergency management agency for the purposes of this Act.

1           SECTION 4. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed  
2 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

3           SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

4



INTRODUCED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

**Report Title:**

Disaster Services; Appropriation

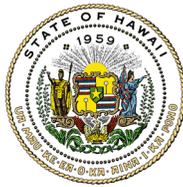
**Description:**

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 Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, who shall provide programming support for disability community projects that promote accessibility, inclusion, and equity in disaster management. Appropriates funds.

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*



JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



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

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

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

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

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2443,  
RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
PUBLIC SAFETY

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS  
ADMINISTRATOR  
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

February 6, 2026

Aloha Chair Belatti, Vice-Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide **SUPPORT** testimony on House Bill 2443, which addresses critical gaps in disaster services for individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs.

Hawai'i residents that live with a disability, face disproportionate risks during disasters. They often encounter obstacles in times of evacuation, don't have the ability to access shelters, and lack effective communication during emergencies.

While Act 210 (2024) addressed language access for limited English proficient individuals, it did not cover American Sign Language or disability-related needs, which falls under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Federal law, including Section 308 of the Stafford Act, and FEMA guidance require disability integration throughout emergency management planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.

By providing funding for this specialist and related programming, the bill promotes accessibility, inclusion, and equity in emergency management. This will enhance disaster resilience for vulnerable populations and strengthen Hawai'i's overall emergency preparedness system.

Passing this bill is essential to create a safer and more inclusive response framework that protects all residents before, during, and after emergencies.

I respectfully urge your support for this essential measure. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 2443.

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



# DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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

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

February 6, 2026

## TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

### House Bill 2443 – Relating to Disaster Services

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 2443 – 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.

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 ensures that people with disabilities, and people with access and functional needs have equitable access and safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

KRISTINE PAGANO  
Acting Executive Director



**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII  
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII

**KENNETH FINK, MD, MGA, MPH**  
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

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DIRECTOR  
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**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
**KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO**  
**EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON AGING**  
NO. 1 CAPITOL DISTRICT  
250 SOUTH HOTEL STREET, SUITE 406  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-2831

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2443**  
**RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES**

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
Rep. Gregg Takayama, Chair  
Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS  
Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair  
Rep. Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair

Testimony of Caroline Cadirao  
Director, Executive Office on Aging  
Attached Agency to the Department of Health

Hearing: Friday, February 6, 2026, 9:00 A.M.

Conference Room: 329

- 1 **EOA Position:** The Executive Office on Aging (EOA), an attached agency to the Department of
- 2 Health (DOH), supports the intent of HB2443. EOA requests that this program and
- 3 appropriation not conflict with, reduce, or replace priorities identified in the executive budget.
- 4 **Purpose:** Integrates the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access and
- 5 functional needs into emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation
- 6 activities. Establishes a Disability Integration Specialist position, to be located in the Hawai'i
- 7 Emergency Management Agency, who shall provide programming support for disability
- 8 community projects that promote accessibility, inclusion, and equity in disaster management.

- 1 This measure is good policy and is necessary to ensure compliance with the Americans with
- 2 Disabilities Act and related federal and state disability laws.
- 3 **Recommendation:** The Executive Office on Aging (EOA) supports the intent of this measure
- 4 and defers to HIEMA for implement this program.
- 5 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE**  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
415 S. BERETANIA ST. #415  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

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

Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair  
Representative Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Public Safety

February 7, 2026, at 10:15 a.m.; Room Number: 411

The Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) **Supports** H.B. 2443, 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 well-being 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 Well-Being 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.

H.B. 2443 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



# 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

Friday, February 6, 2026 10:15 a.m.  
Conference Room 411 & Videoconference  
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

To: [COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY](#)

Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Representative Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

From: Marcus L. Kawatachi, Executive Director of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission  
and HCRC Staff

### Re: H.B. 2443 Relating to Disaster Services

#### HCRC Staff Comments

**While the Commission has not yet had the opportunity to meet and take an official position on H.B. 2443, the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) staff provides following comments.** The 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).

The devastating Maui wildfires in 2023 exposed many shortcomings in our state’s emergency response systems, specifically in the area of communication needs for limited English proficient (LEP) persons and the needs of individuals with disabilities. Additionally, those with disabilities are often disproportionately at an increased risk during emergencies due to lack of effective communication, lack of physical accessibility or auxiliary aids at shelters, and

a general lack of coordinated resources. During emergencies, access to important information may be the difference between life and death, and when time is of the essence, delay of vital information during emergencies is effectively a denial of communication. 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. HRS § 368-1.5.

H.B. 2443 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 emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation activities, including ensuring effective communication in all phases of disaster management. This bill appears to be a step in the right direction to recognize that the needs of individuals with disabilities should not be an afterthought during emergencies, but part of the planning and preparedness process.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide these comments.

**HB-2443**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 6:30:46 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/6/2026 10:15:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Louis Erteschik	Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

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.

**HB-2443**

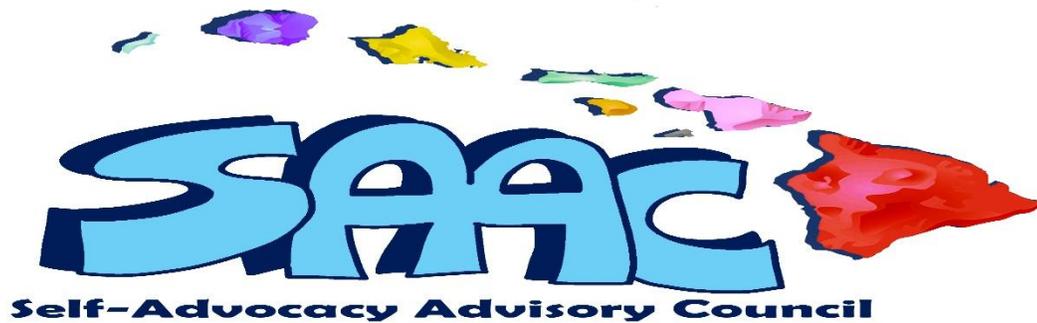
Submitted on: 2/4/2026 6:43:38 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/6/2026 10:15:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Michael Marsh	Responsive Caregivers of Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support



The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair  
Committee on Public Safety  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 Relating to Emergency Management

The Hawai'i Self-Advocacy Advisory Council(SAAC) strongly supports HB2443. 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.

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 stroke across the middle.

President, Hawaii Self-Advocacy Advisory Council

Following testimony has 5 individuals who support HB2433

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Committee on Public Safety

State Capitol

State of Hawai'i

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 Relating to Emergency Management

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2433.

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Committee on Public Safety

State Capitol

State of Hawai'i

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is \_Michelle Muralt and I am in full support of HB2443, 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 is important is:

It allows individuals like me to have support for my specific emergency needs.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2433.

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Committee on Public Safety

State Capitol

State of Hawai'i

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is Vaipapa Soliai and I am in full support of HB2443, 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 is important is:

The bill gives accessible communication especially when it is difficult for me to communicate with people.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2433.

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Committee on Public Safety

State Capitol

State of Hawai'i

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is Raymond Mamea and I am in full support of HB2443, 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 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 a emergency shelter.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB2433.

The Honorable Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Committee on Public Safety

State Capitol

State of Hawai'i

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Au Belatti and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** HB2443 Relating to Emergency Management

My name is James Labrie and I am in full support of HB2443, 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 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 HB2433.

**HB-2443**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 10:14:50 AM

Testimony for PBS on 2/6/2026 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jackie Keefe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Au Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jackie Keefe and I am an advocate for fire survivors with medical, access, and functional needs for the Kelea Foundation. I am **in strong support of HB2443**.

This measure is of the utmost importance to the disability community. People with disabilities, which encompasses a much larger sect of our population than most people realize, have faced endless challenges navigating Maui's disaster response and recovery. These are some of the most marginalized in our communities, and as such need and deserve extra support.

Disaster response and recovery systems are designed to be ableist; not because any official or agency decided this, but because those with disabilities are simply not present or prioritized in most planning measures.

Take, for example, the check-in process with American Red Cross: they have one question about disability on their intake... "Do you have a disability?" However, many folks with medical, access, and functional needs do not consider themselves to have a disability. This both limits the assistance that they may receive and oversimplifies disability. Reliance on narrow definitions or self-identification inevitably leaves people behind.

If we choose to plan to create this position for a Disability Integration Specialist with HIEMA, it benefits all of us; much like when civil engineers have an understanding of physical disability, perhaps from an aging parent or the lessons learned from being a new parent themselves... Sidewalk design improves. Often they do not have curb cuts that allow for people to enter and exit the sidewalk easily, but when you are pushing a stroller through your neighborhood for the first time or out walking with a parent who no longer has the mobility to step up and down anymore, you are able to see design differently.

The same is true emergency management. Disability integration strengthens emergency preparedness for everyone. Inclusivity is a way to strengthen safety for our entire community, and this position has the power to restructure how we do things.

**It is important to me that I echo the suggested changes that were submitted by the states council on developmental disabilities.**

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Jackie Keefe, Lahaina

**HB-2443**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 12:25:07 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/6/2026 10:15:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kaili Swan	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I am in strong support of this bill because i am in the feeling safe being safe program for hawaii self advocacy advisory program to teach emergency preparedness for people with disability in case of any disaster that happen in the community and also i am certified trainer in that program as well please pass this bill thank you

**HB-2443**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 11:21:32 AM

Testimony for PBS on 2/6/2026 10:15:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
ANNETTE TASHIRO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this bill. There is a need to grow the Community Care Foster Homes.

**HB-2443**

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 8:15:00 AM

Testimony for PBS on 2/6/2026 10:15:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Laura Safranski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I gravely support this bill.. Because people die when they are not included in communications, especially when something as grave as our emergency announcements