

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

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

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

JOHN C. (JACK) LEWIN, MD
ADMINISTRATOR

February 24, 2026

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

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

RE: **HB 2488-HD1 -- RELATING TO THE DISABILITY AND
COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD**

HEARING: Thursday, February 26, 2026 @ 2:00 pm; Conference Room 308

POSITION: SUPPORT with COMMENTS

Testimony:

SHPDA supports HB 2488-HD1, with comments.

SHPDA agrees that patients who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or dead-blind should be provided with auxiliary aids and services, including qualified sign language interpreters, to ensure effective communication. Identifying those needs to include patient preference, site specific needs, legal duties and more is crucial.

Hawaii faces a growing number of hard of hearing residents amid its aging population with tens of thousands already affected statewide. Hearing loss significantly impacts health outcomes and quality of life, often exacerbating isolation and chronic conditions.

State data indicate tens of thousands of Hawaii residents experience some degree of hearing loss, including many with serious difficulties. This aligns with demographic projections showing Hawaii's population aged 65 + rising from 200,712 in 2020 to 215,570 by 2030 (24.4% of total population), driving higher prevalence as hearing impairment increases sharply with age. Untreated hearing loss raises risks of cognitive decline, dementia (up to 5x higher) falls, and hospitalizations as it limits communication and early detection of health issues. It correlates with depression, anxiety, and poorer management of comorbidities like diabetes or heart disease in seniors. In Hawaii's island context, access barriers amplify these effects for rural populations.

Hearing difficulties lead to social isolation, reduced independence and lower life satisfaction, straining family caregivers and increasing long term care demands. Daily challenges include misunderstandings in conversations, missing safety cues or exclusion from community events, and worsening mental health. Early interventions like hearing aids can mitigate up to 90% of these impacts, yet affordability remains a hurdle.

A study of the communication needs of deaf, hard-of-hearing and deaf blind would provide direction, identify current resources and identify gaps. This would lead to better care. SHPDA defers to the Disability and Communication Access Board on the specifics, details and costs.

Thank you for hearing HB 2488-HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

■ -- Jack Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA



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 26, 2026

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

House Bill 2488 House Draft 1– Relating to the Disability and Communication Access Board

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 2488 House Draft 1– Relating to the Disability and Communication Access Board. This bill requires the Disability and Communication Access Board to study the health care communication needs of patients who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deaf-blind. And it requires a report to the Legislature 20 days prior to the 2027 Regular Session. Effective 7/1/3000.

Patients who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, or deaf-blind often encounter significant communication challenges in health care settings, especially at the hospital or when transitioning to a skilled nursing facility. These barriers can lead to misunderstandings about treatment plans, delayed care, and even safety risks during transitions between facilities.

The study will identify communication needs, evaluate current practices, and provide recommendations to improve guidance for health care providers to ensure effective communication.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

KRISTINE PAGANO
Acting Executive Director

HB-2488-HD-1

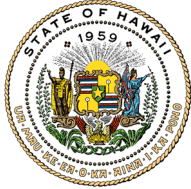
Submitted on: 2/24/2026 5:52:35 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

This seems like a good idea since DCAB is often the lead agency with knowledge of what is needed by the population referenced in this bill. We do get questions in our office about what are the obligations of health care settings to provide “effective communication” and what constitutes effective communication in different contexts. It would be good to get a handle on this and DCAB is well positioned to undertake this and hopefully it will put all health care providers on the same page.



HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

KOMIKINA PONO KĪWILA O HAWAI‘I

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

DATE: Thursday, February 26, 2026
TIME: 2:00 p.m.
PLACE: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 308
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

To:

[COMMITTEE ON FINANCE](#)

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

From: Alphonso Braggs, Chair

and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

Re: HB2488 HD1 Relating to the Disability and Communication Access Board

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).

The Hawaii Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) is in support of HB2488 HD1. This measure requires the Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) to conduct a study on the health care communication needs of individuals who are deaf, hard of

hearing, and deaf-blind, and to report findings and recommendations to the Legislature prior to the 2027 Regular Session.

We defer to DCAB as the agency with the expertise and responsibility to implement this study and develop guidance for health care providers. Their leadership is essential to ensuring that recommendations are practical, effective, and responsive to community needs.

HCRC strongly supports this bill because it addresses a critical equity issue: disparities and barriers to accessing health care experienced by deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind individuals. These barriers include: a limited availability of qualified interpreters, including sign language and tactile interpreters, especially on the neighbor islands; inconsistent compliance with legal obligations to provide auxiliary aids and services; and, a lack of clear guidance for health care providers on effective communication practices.

Effective communication in health care is not optional; it is a legal and civil rights requirement. Without it, patients face risks to their health and well-being, and providers risk violating anti-discrimination laws. This study will help identify gaps and propose solutions that advance equity and compliance.

For these reasons, HCRC urges the committee to pass HB2488 HD1. We look forward to DCAB's findings and recommendations and stand ready to support efforts that improve access and protect the rights of Hawaii's diverse communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

HB-2488-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:11:08 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

2488 HB RELATING TO THE DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD.

HB-2488-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:07:40 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lila Mower	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this measure, but prefer its original enactment date (upon approval).