



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

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

By

Peter Arnade, PhD

Dean

College of Arts, Languages & Letters
and

Vassilis L. Syrmos, PhD

Interim Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 2489 HD1 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Tood, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 2489 HD1. This measure provides the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa funds to establish a bachelor's degree program in American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation, develop a multi-year plan to include a master's degree, fund additional necessary personnel, and purchase supplies and equipment.

By appropriating funds to establish an ASL Interpreter Training Program (ITP), the State will close a significant gap in essential services. Hawai'i is currently one of only eight states in the nation that does not possess its own ITP, a deficiency that has resulted in a severe shortage of qualified ASL interpreters and dangerous gaps in communication during emergencies and healthcare situations. For example, during the initial three days of the Maui wildfires in August 2023, no on-site ASL interpreter was available for emergency response efforts or press conferences, causing significant confusion and anxiety within the Deaf community. Furthermore, the lack of qualified ASL interpreters in medical settings can lead to life-threatening consequences, including delayed treatments and misdiagnoses.

The Department of Education is also facing a crisis in meeting the federally mandated needs of Deaf students. As of February 2026, only three out of fifteen statewide positions for Educational Interpreters in the DOE were filled, leaving a significant service gap for the approximately 81 students across 258 schools who require ASL interpretation.

Across multiple categories of ASL interpretation needs, local interpreter agencies report an inability to fill requests due to the lack of an available workforce. Relying on recruiting interpreters from the mainland has proven to be an unsustainable and culturally inadequate solution. Mainland interpreters often lack knowledge of Hawai'i Sign Language variants and local culture, which can lead to critical misunderstandings. For instance, Deaf individuals have reported frustration when mainland interpreters struggle to interpret local concepts or Pidgin, sometimes requiring local interpreters to intervene to clarify communication. Additionally, interpreters recruited from out-of-state frequently leave due to the high cost of living and isolation, destabilizing the workforce. A local ITP would train residents who are rooted in the

islands, fostering intergenerational interdependence and ensuring a stable, culturally competent workforce.

Appropriating these funds leverages a massive surge in student interest and existing university resources. Recently gathered evidence indicates students would enroll in an ASL ITP and be able to pursue attractive career paths. Enrollment in ASL courses at UHM has increased by 1,400% over the last six years, growing from 19 students in 2019 to 265 in 2025, yet demand still exceeds capacity with 120 students waitlisted as of May 2024. Surveys indicate that 94% of current ASL students at UHM are interested in a bachelor's degree in ASL-English interpreting. Establishing this program offers a high return on a student's investment, as graduates entering this field can expect annual wages up to \$127,121 nationally. Establishing this program makes UHM eligible for U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration grants designed to address interpreter shortages.

The proposed ITP at UHM is designed to be a comprehensive resource for the entire state, not just traditional four-year students. It would provide critical professional development and "credentialing up" opportunities for current interpreters who need advanced training to achieve certification. Furthermore, the program would address the unique geographic challenges of our state by utilizing distance-learning technologies and intensive summer programming. This would ensure that current and aspiring interpreters on all islands could access this vital training without the prohibitive cost of relocating to O'ahu.

This appropriation represents the first year of a carefully considered five-year strategic plan to build out the program in a fiscally responsible manner. By using a phased implementation approach, the University ensures that the necessary academic foundation and accreditation standards are met before fully launching the interpretation degree.

Because internal UHM funding is currently prioritized for maintaining and replacing existing faculty lines, the rapid implementation of the ITP requires supplemental investment to avoid a likely three-fold increase in the development timeline.

This bill aligns with the recommendations of the Act 204 Working Group, which explicitly called for the creation of a Bachelor's degree-level ITP at UHM. UHM will seek input and partnership from State and community organizations that support Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind citizens to develop an ASL ITP that is aligned with the needs in the State. The State has a legal and ethical obligation to ensure effective communication for its Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind citizens, and continued reliance on mainland recruitment has failed. HB 2489 HD1 provides the seed funding necessary to build a permanent, local solution that ensures health and safety, educational access, and economic opportunity for Hawai'i.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.



February 24, 2026

Position: **SUPPORT** of **HB2489 HD1**, Relating to the University of Hawaii

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

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

Re: Testimony in HB2489 HD1, Relating to the University of Hawaii

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

The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women is dedicated to advancing equity and inclusion for all women and girls in Hawaii, including those who are Deaf or hard of hearing. The Commission **supports HB2489 HD1** because **access to qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters is essential for ensuring full participation in education, employment, healthcare, and civic life**. Establishing a bachelor's and, eventually, a master's degree program in ASL interpretation at the University of Hawaii would **address a longstanding gap in interpreter training and support the rights and opportunities of Deaf women and girls**.

Currently, the shortage of qualified ASL interpreters in Hawaii presents barriers to communication and access, disproportionately affecting women who may already face intersecting forms of discrimination. Research and best practices emphasize that **interpreter quality and availability are critical to equitable access**, particularly in settings such as healthcare, legal proceedings, and education, where **clear communication is vital**. By investing in local interpreter training, HB2489 HD1 aligns with efforts to reduce systemic inequities, enabling societal participation and the facilitation of opportunities.

The Commission **urges prompt passage of HB2489 HD1** as a meaningful step toward greater equity and inclusion in Hawaii. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.



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: Wednesday, February 25, 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: H.B. 2489 H.D. 1 Relating to the University of Hawai‘i
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).

There is a significant shortage of American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters in Hawai‘i and the demand for ASL interpreting services has only continued to rise in recent years due to greater awareness of accessibility rights for the Deaf community.¹ These issues are exacerbated

¹ Disability Communication and Access Board, *Assessment of American Sign Language Interpreting Services and the Interpreter Shortage in Hawai‘i Report to the Thirty-Third Legislature – 2024*, accessed on 2.5.26 at

https://health.hawaii.gov/opppd/files/2025/09/Act204SLH2024Report_DCAB_12.23.24.pdf

by the absence of any local training programs and Hawai'i is one of only eight states that does not have an American Sign Language Interpreter training program.

Hawai'i law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, housing, public accommodations, and state programs. Providing an ASL interpreter is one such accommodation so that Deaf individuals may fully enjoy or participate in those areas of everyday life. With a large population of Deaf individuals within our state, but with a critical shortage of ASL interpreters, H.B. 2489 H.D. 1 seeks to remedy this shortage of ASL interpreters to meet the needs of Hawaii's Deaf community. Having an ASL interpreter training program at the University of Hawai'i would not only recognize this need to serve the people of our state, but also provide an academic and career path for residents to become skilled professionals.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 2489 H.D. 1.



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 25, 2026

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

House Bill 2489 House Draft 1– Relating to the University of Hawaii

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 2489 House Draft 1 – Relating to the University of Hawaii. This bill appropriates moneys to establish a bachelor's degree program in American Sign Language interpretation at the University of Hawai'i Manoa campus with a multi-year plan to include a master's degree program for interpreter training.

In 2024, DCAB submitted a report to the Legislature titled "Assessment of American Sign Language Interpreting Services and the Interpreter Shortage in Hawai'i" which recommended the establishment of an American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter Training Program (ITP) within the University of Hawai'i system. Hawai'i is one of only eight states which does not have an ITP. There are over two hundred interpreter training programs nationwide.

Currently, the University of Hawaii at Manoa offers ASL classes within the College of Arts and Sciences Department of Linguistics. DCAB feels this is the ideal location for an ITP. A homegrown interpreter is able to achieve cultural competency much quicker than an interpreter from out of state.

House Bill 2489 House Draft 1 will create an educational pathway for Hawai'i students who wish to pursue a career as an ASL interpreter. It will also help increase the number of qualified interpreters serving Hawai'i's deaf and hard of hearing community, thereby achieving the federal ADA definition of effective communication. The proposed ITP at Manoa is designed to be a comprehensive resource for the entire state, not just for the traditional four-year university. It would provide critical professional development and "credentialing up" opportunities for current interpreters who need advanced training to achieve certification. Furthermore, the program would address the unique geographic challenges of our state by utilizing distance-learning technologies and intensive summer programming.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

KRISTINE PAGANO
Acting Executive Director

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 2:28:43 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Blazak	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

As a constituent of House District 2, I strongly support this measure. Establishing ASL bachelor's and master's degree programs at UH Manoa will create well-paying job opportunities for local students while filling a need for qualified ASL interpreters. In addition to benefiting local students, this type of program would attract students and faculty from out-of-state to study and work at UH as well as create the opportunity for UH to generate revenue from Continued Education Courses, professional development events, and practitioner conferences in the future. Please pass this bill. Thank you.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 2:43:48 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Beth Amaro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of HB 2489 HD1, which seeks to address the critical shortage of qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters in the State of Hawaii by establishing a bachelor's degree program in American Sign Language interpretation at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, with a multi-year plan to include a master's degree program.

This legislation is not only an important step towards meeting the needs of our Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities but also an investment in the workforce and education of Hawaii's residents. As noted in the 2024 report by the Disability and Communication Access Board, Hawaii faces an ongoing shortage of ASL interpreters. This shortage significantly impairs access to essential services, education, and employment opportunities for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

The need for qualified interpreters is undeniable, yet Hawaii remains one of only eight states without an ASL interpreter training program. This bill addresses this gap by providing a much-needed academic pathway for individuals who wish to pursue careers as certified ASL interpreters. The establishment of a bachelor's degree program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, followed by a long-term plan to include a master's degree, will not only equip Hawaii residents with the skills and credentials necessary to meet the demand for ASL interpreters but also provide a sustainable solution to the interpreter shortage.

By training local talent, this program will help ensure that the professionals who serve our communities understand the unique cultural and linguistic needs of Hawaii's Deaf population. Furthermore, the appropriations outlined in this bill will help fund the necessary infrastructure, resources, and personnel to launch and sustain these programs. With these investments, Hawaii can become a leader in developing a skilled, local workforce of ASL interpreters, which will directly benefit the Deaf community and enhance accessibility throughout the state.

By supporting this legislation, we are investing in the future of Hawaii's Deaf and hard-of-hearing residents and ensuring that they have the full access to communication, education, and employment opportunities that they deserve. The creation of a specialized ASL interpreter program at the University of Hawaii is a forward-thinking solution that will help eliminate the current shortage and empower Hawaii residents to fill this essential role.

For these reasons, I urge you to pass this bill and ensure that Hawaii is no longer left behind in providing crucial support and services to the Deaf community. Thank you for your consideration.

Beth Amaro, Lihue, Kauai

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:49:27 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cardenas Pintor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support this bill.

Mahalo nui loa,

Cardenas Pintor

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:06:47 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 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

2489 HB RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

TO INCLUDE PACIFIC ISLANDER LANGUAGES FOR THE SCHOOLS AND JUDICIARY
AS INTERPRETERS.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:59:32 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karina Park	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Karina Park, and I am a student at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa. I submit this testimony in strong support of H.B. No. 2489, H.D. 1, which would appropriate funds to establish a bachelor's degree program in American Sign Language interpretation at UH Mānoa.

It is deeply important that all residents, regardless of ability, have equitable access to resources, education, and opportunity. The Deaf and hard-of-hearing community in Hawaii deserves qualified, locally trained interpreters who understand our culture, our people, and our islands.

Within our community and across UH campuses, I have met incredibly talented and dedicated interpreters who would make this degree program exceptional. My mother is a retired educator and an American Sign Language interpreter who continues to serve our community, driving across the island daily to fill the growing need. She often speaks about her worry that there simply are not enough interpreters to meet the needs of the people around us, and I have seen that reality firsthand.

I believe this bachelor's program will not only help address that shortage, but will also cultivate a generation of highly qualified interpreters with the educational foundation our unique community here in Hawaii deserves. For example, students on UH campuses would be better supported by interpreters who hold equivalent or higher academic credentials, and who are equipped to meet the nuanced and specialized interpreting needs of a university setting.

I respectfully urge this Committee to support H.B. No. 2489, H.D. 1, and move it forward.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Karina Park

Aloha,

My name is Mollie Jeanne Manuli‘illohi Tynanes, and I am a third-year student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa studying psychology. I am testifying in support of establishing a bachelor's degree program in American Sign Language interpretation at the University of Hawai‘i Mānoa campus with a multi-year plan to include a master's degree program for interpreter training.

I am currently taking ASL 202 and plan to take the maximum courses available (up to ASL 302). I aspire to become fluent in ASL and become an interpreter down the line. However, if my University offered a BA program in American Sign Language interpretation while I was applying, I would have double majored. I have had a passion for ASL since I was a child, but I have not had access to opportunities or resources until I reached college level, and even then, the resources are limited.

Imagine how many students could utilize their interests and passion in American Sign Language to earn a degree in the respective field, and then support our local deaf community through their careers. The passage of this bill will undoubtedly improve the inclusivity of UH, inspire students, and support the overall deaf community in Hawai‘i.

Mahalo for your consideration, and have a great day!

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:12:16 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Josiah Murphy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, esteemed representatives and staff members.

My name is Josiah Murphy. I have been a linguist for 23 years, and I'm currently a doctoral student at UH Manoa. I spent 8 years working in Ohio for the Community Centers for the Deaf, where I coordinated case management and interpreting services for D/deaf clients. I also spent 6 years working at Kent State University as staff in support of the ASL Interpreting and Deaf Education degree programs. As a linguist, colleague and ally of the D/deaf community, I am submitting testimony in favor of HB2489 HD1.

Deaf folks are in need of and have the right to sufficient communication access in all public aspects of life including education, health care, employment, law enforcement, and civic services. Just as working in these fields requires customized professional training to perform appropriately, so too interpreting for these fields requires customized professional training to communicate appropriately. It is unethical and often civilly illegal to fail to provide a professional/certified interpreter in those circumstances, and equally untenable to pass the responsibility on to the D/deaf person. Expecting a D/deaf person to rely on note-taking, smartphone transcription, family member, or student of a language is untenable and a failure to comply with the ADA, the IDEA, and other laws enacted to meet the civil rights of D/deaf people in our community.

In light of the shortage of professional/certified ASL interpreters in Hawai'i, it is the State's responsibility to support various means for increasing the availability of said interpreters. Authorizing and funding an ASL interpreting program through B.A. & M.A. programs at the University of Hawai'i is an excellent way to meet this need. Establishing these programs would bring the State into alignment with peers across the country who already provide comparable programs and meet their statutory obligations toward their D/deaf residents. Furthermore, these academic programs would provide an additional professional job track for Hawai'i residents, thereby diversifying Hawai'i's economic options and reducing 'brain drain.'

As a long-time linguist, educator, and interpreter, I can attest to the ability and readiness of UHM's Linguistics Department to appropriately establish and administer said degree programs. They already have Deaf and hearing faculty capable of teaching ASL, sign language linguistics, and related courses necessary to flesh out a full degree program. There is also a groundswell of support from department staff, undergraduate and graduate students. So I urge your committee to

vote 'yes' on this bill and related legislature to establish and fund B.A. & M.A. programs in ASL at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa!

Mahalo for your consideration,
Josiah Murphy, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:23:14 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cienna Sharbonow	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I think with the lack of and shortage of interpreters in Hawai'i having this degree being offered would be a giant help. I am a current student at UH Manoa and we have guest speakers come into our ASL class all the time that say that it's very hard to get an interpreter on island that doesn't have to fly in. As well as having to go to school to even become an interpreter a lot of the programs if not all of them I believe you have to leave island in order to get the qualification and go to school and then fly back to island and try to find a job. As well all know networking in the state you're trying to find a job is usually best option. I don't think it's necessarily fair to deaf people that there's a lack of interpreters and programs to become an interpreter on island when deaf people just need the extra help. It's not something they choose to need but they do need it on occasion. The lack of accessibility could be changed with having a bachelors program at UHM or even HPU or some college on island. But mainly UHM since we have to take a language anyway. It would be an easy addition into the programs.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:24:33 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Micah Pesta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Micah Pesta, and I am a resident of Kamuela on Hawai'i Island and a current student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. I strongly encourage you to pass this bill.

Upon coming to UH Mānoa, I have witnessed firsthand the importance of Deaf inclusivity and accessibility. During my freshman year, I met a friend who introduced me to American Sign Language. He is a fluent speaker as he has deaf sisters. From that moment on, I was inspired to learn ASL. I am now an ASL 202 student and actively involved in the Deaf community.

My experience in the ASL program at UH Mānoa has been deeply enriching and has encouraged my goal of becoming an ASL interpreter. However, it has also revealed the limited in-state pathways available for people like me who wish to enter ASL interpreting. Currently, I would need to leave Hawai'i or enroll in an online program (which is challenging for an interactive language like ASL) in order to gain the necessary professional skills/training. Respectfully, I do not want to leave Hawai'i and go to the mainland to pursue this goal.

Establishing an Interpreter Training Program would be a wise investment in both UH Mānoa and the State of Hawai'i entirely. It would expand workforce opportunities such as providing interpreter jobs. But most importantly, it would also improve accessibility for Deaf community members by breaking barriers in healthcare, education, music, and more.

I have been involved in advocacy efforts that have helped draw many students into the growing ASL program at UH Mānoa. It has been exciting to see the program expand into 300-level classes, and the possible creation of an Interpreter Training Program!

I strongly urge you to support this bill and help make this vision a reality.

Mahalo for your time and consideration

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:14:05 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maja Szpunar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

There is currently a lack of ASL interpreters in Hawai'i. This leaves the deaf community at a communication disadvantage. In addition, for those who want to help solve these issues, many interpreter training programs currently force those pursuing the achievement to get certification on the mainland. This travel requirement not only discourages those interested from pursuing, but implements further issues such as accessibility to travel and funding. A bachelor's degree program in American Sign Language interpretation at the University of Hawai'i Manoa would open doors of education for many individuals, and allow local-hiring in the community, rather than outsourcing. Overall, local-hiring would save employers money from outsourcing, add to our population of individuals who seek higher education, and help the deaf community gain wider access.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:15:58 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chelsey Gono	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support the passage of HB2489 should be passed because it would provide UH students the opportunity and resources needed to pursue a career in ASL interpreting. As a student who is in her last semester of ASL, I have seen firsthand how transformative these courses can be. I entered my first ASL class barely knowing anything about the language. Now, I will be leaving with not only basic skills, but also a passion for advocacy and accessibility.

I wish I had the opportunity to explore the interpreting field more in depth. HB2489 would help create more opportunities for students like me to continue our education and serve Hawaii's deaf community. Expanding access to interpreter training will lead to more inclusion and community equity. Every person deserves to be heard, and providing students with the proper education and resources needed to pursue their desired career will ensure deaf individuals have equal access to communication.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:37:59 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Honeycutt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a hearing student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa who is highly involved with the local Deaf community and who has a number of Deaf and hard-of-hearing (HoH) friends.

I was shocked to learn that the state of Hawaii did not have an ASL interpreter training program. The shortage of ASL interpreters in the state is very evident; I am in no way qualified to interpret for my Deaf/HoH friends and acquaintances, but I often find myself in situations where I am trying to interpret so that they can feel included in events and conversations. I can only imagine what it is like to not be able to understand the languages around you—to be surrounded by people, yet feel so unseen, unheard, and completely left out. It is isolating and depressing. I have heard countless stories from Deaf/HoH friends and acquaintances about the lack of access due to not being able to provide ASL interpreters. It is truly a sad state of affairs.

I fully support the construction of an ASL interpreter program at the University of Hawaii and cannot wait for it to begin. There should be no reason for this bill to fail.

Thank you.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:46:29 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cecelia Morriss	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing today in strong support of HB 2489, HD1 (HSCR301-26), to establish a bachelor's degree program in ASL Interpretation at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

I have studied ASL and other languages inconsistently since my early teens, exploring Spanish, French, German, and Italian. When I discovered that ASL courses were offered at Mānoa, I was extremely excited. ASL was not something I had access to after high school, and I eagerly enrolled as soon as I learned about the program.

Studying ASL has strengthened my confidence in communication, helped me feel more valuable within my community, and deepened my understanding of minority communities that are too often overlooked. Establishing this degree pathway would provide students like myself the opportunity to pursue professional and educational interpretation while remaining close to home and growing alongside the community we hope to serve.

Mahalo for your consideration and support.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:58:48 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Destiny Weber	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee,

My name is Destiny Weber, and I am writing in strong support of the bill to establish American Sign Language (ASL) as a major within the University of Hawai'i System.

Creating an ASL major would greatly benefit the Deaf community in Hawai'i. Right now, it is harder for students to fully study ASL or become interpreters because there is no clear, complete degree pathway. Many students who want to pursue ASL seriously have limited options.

If ASL were offered as a major, it would give people the opportunity to become qualified interpreters, educators, and advocates. This would increase access and communication for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals across our state. Hawai'i needs more trained professionals who understand both the language and Deaf culture.

ASL is a complete language and an important part of the Deaf community's identity. By offering it as a major, Hawai'i would show that Deaf language and culture are valued and respected.

I strongly support this bill and ask that you invest in expanding educational opportunities that directly support accessibility and inclusion in our state.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Destiny

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:28:51 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a current ASL 202 student at the University of Hawai'i, I have gained not only language skills but a deeper understanding of Deaf culture and the vital role the Deaf community plays in shaping and sustaining American Sign Language. My experience with the ASL program and its dedicated professors has been incredibly meaningful and illuminating.

Establishing a Bachelor's and Master's degree program in ASL interpretation would be a significant step forward for UH and for the broader Hawai'i community - expanding interpreter training locally will help increase access, equity, and meaningful communication between both Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals and the speaking/hearing community. I strongly support this bill and believe it will have lasting, positive impacts across our islands.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:29:19 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chloe Gibson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

A bachelor's degree in American Sign Language for the support of interpretation is an incredibly important movement that would help and support the deaf community. University of Hawai'i should offer this degree to promote awareness and equality for the deaf community.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:33:33 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mala Arkin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Members of the House Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. I write in strong support of House Bill 2489 and the establishment of an American Sign Language Interpreter Training Program (ITP) at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

Hawai‘i urgently needs a local pipeline to train qualified interpreters. Interpreter education must be grounded in place, culture, and community, and that grounding cannot be replicated through programs located elsewhere. While interpreters who relocate from the mainland often bring valuable experience, many face a steep learning curve when working in Hawai‘i’s unique linguistic and cultural environment, and a significant number ultimately return to the mainland. In recent years, this pattern—combined with affordability challenges—has further deepened the statewide interpreter shortage.

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires the provision of qualified interpreters, and that qualification does not happen quickly. Becoming a competent professional interpreter requires years of formal education, mentored practice, and real-world experience. Without an in-state training program, Hawai‘i remains dependent on an increasingly unstable and insufficient workforce pipeline.

Establishing an Interpreter Training Program at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa is a necessary and forward-looking step to build and sustain a local, qualified interpreting workforce. This program will help ensure consistent access to communication for Deaf, DeafBlind, hard of hearing, and DeafDisabled people across the state, while also creating meaningful educational and career pathways for Hawai‘i residents.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your support of House Bill 2489.

Respectfully submitted,

Māla Arkin

Certified Sign Language Interpreter

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:38:16 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marcus Bayne	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Mai Kākou Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Marcus Bayne. I am currently a junior at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM), majoring in Art Studio and also studying American Sign Language (ASL). I would like to offer my testimony and support of this bill as a student of UHM.

As a student studying ASL at UHM, I highly support this bill, HB2489, to provide funding for an ASL bachelor's degree program at the Mānoa campus.

My grandfather, Henry Godwin Bayne Jr, was ordained as a priest in California. When the Ministry of the Deaf needed more priests, my grandfather learned ASL to join them. He served as a vicar at the ministry for fourteen years before his retirement. When my grandfather was on his deathbed and too sick to talk, many of the people he had met while serving the ministry came to see him. The most my grandfather could do was sign, and his words were interpreted for my family. It gave my grandfather the chance to talk to my family before he passed away.

I bring up this story because it is what inspired me to start learning sign, and I believe Hawai‘i needs more people like my grandfather, people who want to help the deaf and hard of hearing (HoH). An ASL bachelor's and master's program at UHM would give people who want to help a better path towards becoming an interpreter and being able to be involved in this wonderful community.

Maholo,

Marcus Bayne

Student of The University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

HB-2489-HD-1

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

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Annjalee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I truly believe that have an ASL interpreter program will benefit not only the deaf community in Hawaii but also just the general community as well. This will help broaden people's views of deaf awareness and provide a learning environment for people interested in learning ASL. This will also help deaf people feel more welcomed in the community and able to communicate with a lot more people. ASL is a vital skill to learn and I am in full support of this bill passing.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:43:02 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Arielle McMahan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing in strong support of the creation of a Bachelor’s degree in American Sign Language (ASL) Interpretation at our university. As a current ASL student, I have experienced firsthand how transformative learning ASL can be. However, without a dedicated interpretation pathway, students who want to pursue this work professionally are left without a clear academic route. Especially in Hawai’i, interpreters are in need. By establishing this program our university would excel in equality, inclusion, and meet a greater need of the community.

Mahalo

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:46:25 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nico Martin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Nico Martin, I am a Senior at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa graduating this fall. The HB2489 HD1 bill was brought to my attention by my ASL professor, Jonathan Reynolds, who I have been receiving ASL instruction from for over a year now.

My time spent studying ASL has been invaluable to me as a student, and has already allowed me to participate in the world in ways I couldn't before. If there were a bachelor's degree opportunity in ASL interpreting, I would absolutely pursue it, and even a masters path as well if such a thing existed at UH Mānoa.

I strongly agree with the passing of this bill, I believe it would be life changing for both hearing students wishing to pursue passion for the language, and more importantly the deaf population of Hawaii, having a greater amount of interpreters available to make life more accessible.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:46:56 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laura Safranski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please do approve this.. As an ASL Interpreter for 20 years in Hawai‘i, I was flown here.. I immerse myself in the culture and ‘Olelo Hawai‘i but i cannot stress the need to grow local interpreters for cultural access, representation and to provide local opio and kanaka oiwi a profession that keeps them home. One of the best parts is it also employs Deaf Intstructors locally. A career teaching their native tongue makes the best ASL/English Interpreters

I adore what i‘ve learned here but not all Interpreters can or will make the time to prioritize Hawai‘i language an traditions. That greatly affects the interpretation, aka the message, as it appears in everyday things. Including the names of our bills ;)

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:48:21 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shane Kincaid	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in favor of HB2489 HDI. I think it is imperative that the University offer this program. As a student in the ASL program, which is relatively new here at UH, more emphasis needs to be placed on the deaf individual. Interpreting is a fundamental experience that would greatly benefit the deaf community. I don't believe enough is being done to ensure everyone in our society has the same opportunities. Please consider my comments and pass this legislation.

My name is Lauryn Porlaris, and I am here in support of establishing an American Sign Language Interpreting Program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Hawai'i faces an ongoing shortage of qualified ASL interpreters. This shortage directly impacts Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals in education, healthcare, legal settings, and community services.

Creating an ASL Interpreting Program at UH Mānoa is would provide local students with career pathways while strengthening access and equity across Hawai'i. It would demonstrate the university's commitment to inclusion and ensure we are building a workforce that serves our own communities.

As Hawai'i's flagship institution, UH Mānoa has the opportunity to lead by investing in communication access and opportunity for all.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:52:39 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Violet King	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Violet King, and I am the Vice President of the Linguistic Society of Mānoa, a student organization at UH. I am a Linguistics student, and am submitting testimony as an individual citizen. Part of my role as Vice President is to advocate for students' needs and opinions to the UH Linguistics Department and the community.

Many students at UH are interested in becoming interpreters, especially with the recent creation of ASL 301 and 302 classes. Several students have started individual interpreting projects, such as the Interpreters Interest Group and student (non-professional) ASL interpretation for university sports games. Students are seeking local education opportunities to become interpreters, but are deeply saddened by the lack of formal interpreter training in Hawai'i that centers local signs, knowledge, and Hawaiian culture. Students are begging for an interpreter training program, as soon as possible!

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony, and for considering this bill.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:59:57 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ginger Barrett	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As co-founder and president of UH's ASL Club, I can confidently say Hawaii NEEDS interpreters! This program is absolutely necessary for accessibility in Hawaii.

HB-2489-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 2:00:30 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Apollo Reyes Martes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

At the time of writing this testimony, we are only three days removed from International Mother Language Day, a holiday created by UNESCO in November 1999. Many people in Hawai'i recognize the pain of having their language removed from them, discouraged, or otherwise assimilated into another, more dominant language.

American Deaf people, too, know this struggle all too well. I ask the legislators to please consider the connection of these struggles of our Deaf community and language access as a human right.