



# 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 Higher Education  
Friday, February 6, 2026 at 2:05 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 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 2489. 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.

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.

HB 2489 aligns with the recommendations of the Act 204, SLH 2024, 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 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.



# DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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

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February 6, 2026

## TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

### House Bill 2489 – Relating to the University of Hawaii

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 2489 – 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.

House Bill 2489 will create an educational pathway for Hawai'i students who wish to pursue a career as an ASL interpreter and help increase the number of qualified interpreters serving Hawai'i's deaf and hard of hearing community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

KRISTINE PAGANO  
Acting Executive Director



# **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 2:05 p.m.  
Conference Room 309 & Videoconference  
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

To: [COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION](#)

Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair  
Rep. Terez Amato, Vice Chair

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

**Re: H.B. 2489 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.<sup>1</sup> These issues are exacerbated

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<sup>1</sup> 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](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 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.

**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 12:57:45 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Angel Ramos	Hawai'i School for the Deaf and the Blind	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Dr. Angel Ramos, Principal of the Hawai'i School for the Deaf and the Blind. I have lived in Hawai'i for almost 10 years and each year the pool of interpreters gets smaller and smaller, making it harder and harder to meet the interpreting needs of our students and staff. We need interpreters for Professional Development, for athletics, for IEP meetings and other meetings with parents. As a Deaf individual, I have also found it difficult to get quality interpreters for medical/professional meetings. And this is just for Oahu. Imagine the difficulty Deaf individuals and mainstream programs have in getting interpreters on the neighbor islands. The pool is almost non-existent, often requiring interpreters residing in Oahu to fly to the neighbor islands to interpret. There is no doubt that we need an Interpreter Training Program (ITP) and with interpreters today required to have a bachelor's degree, UH is the most logical place for an ITP program to be implemented.

**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 2:48:32 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Megan Blazak	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee,

As a constituent of House District 2, I support this measure.

**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 4:55:04 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kammi Koza	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair(s) and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kammi Koza, and I am a Deaf community member who has been deeply involved in interpreting spaces and Deaf-related advocacy across Hawai‘i. I am writing today in strong support of H.B. No. 2489, which proposes the establishment of a bachelor’s degree program in American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation at the University of Hawai‘i.

Hawai‘i has long faced a critical shortage of qualified ASL interpreters — a shortage that directly affects access to education, employment, healthcare, legal rights, and public services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals across the islands. As someone who navigates this daily, I’ve personally witnessed the struggles Deaf individuals endure due to interpreter availability — especially in neighbor islands and rural communities.

This bill is not just about education. It’s about equal access, empowerment, and equity. Hawai‘i is currently one of only eight states in the U.S. without a formal interpreter training program. We rely heavily on out-of-state interpreters, which isn’t sustainable, affordable, or culturally grounded in local Deaf experiences.

By establishing a homegrown bachelor’s (and eventually master’s) degree program, we would:

- Train local interpreters who understand local culture, language needs, and community nuances
- Provide Deaf individuals with consistent and qualified interpreting support

- Create academic and career opportunities for those passionate about serving the Deaf community
- Strengthen the pipeline of qualified interpreters in K–12 schools, medical settings, and public service

I urge you to pass H.B. 2489 to address this long-standing need. Hawai‘i’s Deaf community deserves better, and this bill is a step toward meaningful, sustainable access.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kammi Koza

Pearl City, Hawai‘i

kalei7796782@yahoo.com

**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 5:14:50 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Erin Winfield-Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill!

**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 6:19:39 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

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

Comments:

Support!

**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 7:52:31 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jordan Kotani	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I strongly support HB 2489, which seeks to provide funding for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter training at the bachelor's degree level in Hawaii.

Hawaii continues to experience a critical shortage of qualified ASL interpreters, particularly in education, healthcare, legal, and government settings. Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing residents depend on skilled interpreters to access essential services, yet too often those services are delayed, limited, or unavailable due to workforce shortages.

Bachelor level training is essential to preparing interpreters who meet national certification standards and can effectively serve in complex environments such as classrooms, hospitals, courts, and state agencies. These programs require sustained funding for qualified faculty, supervised practicum experience, and rigorous language and skills development. Without state investment, programs cannot meet demand or adequately prepare students for professional practice.

HB 2489 represents an important investment in both accessibility and local workforce development. By funding ASL interpreter education in Hawaii, the State can grow its own pool of highly trained interpreters, reduce reliance on out-of-state providers, and ensure culturally competent services for our Deaf community.

Most importantly, this measure supports the civil rights of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals by improving access to communication, education, and public services. Equity and inclusion are not possible without language access, and HB 2489 moves Hawaii closer to that goal.

I respectfully urge the Legislature to pass HB 2489 and provide the necessary funding to support bachelor's level ASL interpreter training in Hawaii. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your commitment to accessibility and inclusion.

Mahalo,

Jordan Kotani

Certified Sign Language Interpreter



**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 8:34:08 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Michele Rose Morris	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Currently the amount of qualified/certified interpreters is dwindling. Sadly, this means consumers (both hearing and Deaf) are going without communication access which can cause negative consequences on people's lives. We have no local interpreter training program and therefore is no pathway for people to join the workforce locally. People have gone to the mainland to get training and rarely return to Hawaii. As the study DCAB did last year showed, a good number of qualified interpreters will be retiring within 5 or so years. This will leave an even bigger gap. An ITP is crucial.

## Testimony of James Woodward in Support of HB2489

My name is James Woodward. I have been a resident of Hawai'i since 2013. I would like to submit testimony as an individual who is a resident of Hawai'i. I am a sign language linguist who worked for 54 years on teaching and researching the structure, teaching, and interpretation of American Sign Language and a number of other sign languages. around the world.

I worked for 25 years (1969-1995) at Gallaudet University, the world's first and only liberal arts college (and later university) for deaf students in various positions related to sign languages and deaf studies. After taking early retirement from Gallaudet, I worked as the Director of Research for Ratchasuda College for deaf and for blind students at Mahidol University at Salaya, Thailand from 1995 through 2000, where I was involved in the establishment of sign linguistics courses, a sign language teacher training for deaf people, and a sign language interpretation program.

In 2000, I moved to Dong Nai College (later University) in Bien Hoa, Viet Nam and helped establish the Center for Studying and Promoting Deaf Culture, which provided research and training programs in sign linguistics, sign language teaching, and interpreter training.

After turning over everything in Viet Nam to my Vietnamese colleagues in 2006, I joined The Chinese University of Hong Kong, where I helped establish the Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies, which also focused on programs in sign linguistics, sign language teaching, and sign language interpretation.

In 2013, I moved to Honolulu and became an adjunct professor of linguistics at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, until retiring in 2023. As an adjunct professor at UHM I established and taught the course Linguistics 635 An Introduction to Sign Linguistics. I would like to reiterate here that I am providing testimony solely as an individual who is a resident of Hawai'i. My testimony is solely my own and is not related in any way to UHM.

Because of my background I would like to express my strong support for HB2489, since qualified interpreters are crucial to the success of deaf individuals. It is particularly important to set up an interpreter training program to meet the needs of deaf individuals in Hawaii, since Hawaii is one of the few states that does not have an interpreter training program.

February 5, 2026

To the Honorable Members of the House Committee:

I submit this testimony in strong support of Hawai'i House Bill 2489 and commend the Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB), and especially Pono Tokioka, for their sustained and thoughtful work in advancing this bill to its current form. The development of this proposal reflects a clear commitment to addressing longstanding gaps in communication access for Deaf communities across the state. I regret that I am unable to testify in person or via Zoom; please do not mistake my absence for a lack of interest or engagement. I currently have a newborn at home and have quickly learned—like many new parents—that my daughter's schedule now determines my own (and she does not often make advance appointments).

I am a nationally-certified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter and interpreter trainer who relocated to Hawai'i from the mainland in 2020. As noted in the DCAB's *Assessment of American Sign Language Interpreting Services and the Interpreter Shortage in Hawai'i*, the majority of ASL interpreters currently working in the state are like me: non-native and non-local professionals who were raised and trained elsewhere. While many bring valuable experience, representation matters. Deaf people—including Deaf, DeafBlind, hard of hearing, and DeafDisabled individuals—have historically had limited access to interpreters who share their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. This lack of representation can affect the depth, nuance, and accuracy of interpretation, particularly in complex environments such as health care, education, employment, and legal settings.

Since 2020, demand for virtual interpreting services has increased exponentially on a national scale. As a result, even interpreters who reside in Hawai'i are often spending the majority of their working hours providing services virtually, and not always to local communities. The current workforce is therefore not exclusively serving in-state needs. Many interpreters are contracted across multiple time zones due to scheduling reliability and competitive financial incentives. The irony for many of us living in Hawai'i is that, in order to afford the cost of living here, we must often accept out-of-state work where compensation is higher. This dynamic further reduces interpreter availability for Deaf people within Hawai'i and exacerbates the local shortage.

Over the past several years, the interpreter shortage in Hawai'i has worsened. Some of the most qualified and experienced interpreters in the workforce have relocated to the mainland due to affordability challenges and family obligations. This loss has had a direct and harmful impact on the Deaf community, resulting in reduced access to services, longer wait times, limited interpreter choice, and inconsistent quality of communication access. These barriers

significantly affect Deaf constituents' ability to fully participate in civic life, maintain their health, and pursue education and employment on equal footing with their non-deaf peers.

House Bill 2489 presents a thoughtful and necessary solution. As noted in the bill, Hawai'i is one of only eight states without an ASL interpreter training program, despite more than two hundred interpreter education programs existing nationwide. Establishing a four-year bachelor's degree program at UH Mānoa will create a sustainable, homegrown pipeline of interpreters who are linguistically skilled, culturally responsive, and grounded in Hawai'i's unique communities. The inclusion of a multi-year plan to add a master's degree program is particularly important, as graduate-level preparation is increasingly the national standard and will ensure that Hawai'i remains competitive with programs on the mainland while retaining talent within the state.

Importantly, national networks already exist to support interpreter education and curriculum development. My professional nationwide network includes interpreting scholars and national organizations who have consistently demonstrated a willingness to collaborate with emerging programs, and I believe Hawai'i would attract strong interest and culturally-respectful support as this initiative moves forward. That said, the program budget may need to be adjusted to align with national norms for interpreter education. If additional funding is not feasible, it may be necessary to recalibrate the 2026–2027 objectives to ensure the program's quality, sustainability, and long-term success. This will require additional research into the current interpreter education market to effectively attract and retain qualified faculty and leadership.

The establishment of this program would directly reduce the statewide shortage of ASL interpreters and significantly improve outcomes for Deaf constituents. Improved access to qualified, culturally-responsive interpreters will enhance Deaf people's ability to receive comparable health care, achieve equitable employment outcomes, and live productive, self-determined lives alongside their non-deaf peers.

For these reasons, I strongly urge your support of House Bill 2489. This bill represents an investment not only in workforce development, but in equity, access, and the well-being of Hawai'i's Deaf communities for generations to come.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jacqueline Gonzalez  
[hi.jackie.gonzalez@gmail.com](mailto:hi.jackie.gonzalez@gmail.com)

**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 12:47:23 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

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

Comments:

**To the Honorable Members of the House 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 continent 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 continent. 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**

**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 1:07:06 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Isabel Mejia Ramos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly support HB2489, which funds the creation of a Bachelor's degree program in American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

This program will build a local pipeline of highly trained ASL interpreters to serve our Deaf community and help address the current shortage of qualified professionals across healthcare, education, and public services.

Mahalo.

February 6, 2026

Submitted to the Hawaii State House  
COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Honorable Rep. Andrew T. Garrett, Chair

Re: HB 2489

Dear Chair Garrett and Members,

I would like to strongly support HB 2489 to require the University of Hawaii, Manoa establish an ASL Interpreter Training Program.

This legislation is crucial to acknowledge American Sign Language (ASL) as a bonafide language equal to all spoken languages of other cultures. I first learned ASL in 1975 as a counselor for the Hawaii Division of Vocational Rehabilitation assigned to work with Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind people. It took me perhaps five (5) years to effectively converse in ASL with Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals and families using ASL so I relied on ASL interpreters.

While Hawaii has had an excellent American Sign Language “education” program at Kapiolani Community College, Hawaii has never had an ASL “interpreter training” program. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), one of the certifying bodies for ASL interpreters, now requires a bachelor’s degree as a minimum requirement for certification. Therefore, I would like to enthusiastically support the establishment of an ASL Interpreter Training Program at the University of Hawaii, Manoa campus. This program shall include different modes of communication used by Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind residents in Hawaii. A specialized curriculum will be designed to meet the communication needs of individuals who are both deaf and blind.

I heartily support HB 2489 to establish an ASL interpreter training program at UH, Manoa.

Kindly pass this critically important bill.

Mahalo in advance,

Eleanor Macdonald, M.Ed., CRC (ret.)



**LATE**

**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 10:43:41 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sherry Shimizu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 6, 2026

Dearest Honorable Representative Garrett (Chair), Representative Amato (Vice Chair), and Members of the House Committee on Higher Education (HED):

Aloha, I apologize for the lateness of this testimony as I just found out last night, so I am in support of HB2489 to establish an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter training program at UH, Manoa. Disability Communication and Access Board (DCAB) completed Act 204 in 2024 and found it is imperative to cover the gap for ASL interpreters need here in Hawai'i, is to establish our own ASL interpreter certification program on the islands instead of sending students to the mainland. It is a matter of life and death for people requiring ASL to communicate whether in medical settings, interaction with law enforcement, and everyday or routine life. Please support this bill, HB2489. Sincerely, sherry Shimizu

**LATE**

**HB-2489**

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 11:01:02 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/6/2026 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kekai Kaaumoana-Cummings	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Kekai Kaaumoana-Cummings, and I am writing in strong support of HB2489, which proposes establishing an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter training program at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

At this time, Hawai‘i does not have enough qualified ASL interpreters to meet the needs of the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. This shortage creates serious barriers to access in education, healthcare, employment, and public services. Many Deaf individuals experience delays or go without interpreters altogether, which directly impacts their safety, independence, and quality of life.

ASL interpreter training program at UH Mānoa would:

- Address the current shortage of interpreters in Hawai‘i
- Increase the number of locally trained, culturally competent ASL interpreters
- Improve access to education, medical care, and government services
- Create career pathways for local students while keeping talent in our state

UH Mānoa is uniquely positioned to lead this effort as Hawai‘i’s flagship university. This program would be a meaningful step toward equity, accessibility, and inclusion for Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard-of-hearing residents across Hawai‘i.

Access to communication is not a privilege, it is a right. HB2489 responds directly to the current lack of interpreters and helps build a sustainable solution for Hawai'i's future.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB2489.

Mahalo nui loa for your time, consideration, and commitment to serving the people of Hawai'i.

Ke aloha,

Kekai Kaaumoana-Cummings