

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 2622,  
RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

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:

I am writing to express **SUPPORT** for House Bill 2622, which appropriates funds to the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA) - to enhance its capacity to provide bilingual resources and services to residents with limited English proficiency (LEP).

As this bill highlights, Hawai'i is home to a significant foreign-born population—approximately 260,000 individuals, making up 18% of the State's population. Many of these residents speak languages other than English at home, including Ilokano, Tagalog, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Samoan, Tongan, and several Micronesian languages. Over 10% of the population have limited English proficiency, creating barriers to accessing critical emergency services.

HIEMA has an established language coordinator and aims to leverage collaboration with other state agencies to build a network of language support – to help save lives and foster community resilience. This effort will enhance outreach and coordination, ensuring that critical messages reach all members of our community, regardless of language barriers.

We respectfully request that standard language be included in this measure, provided it does not negatively impact the priorities of the Governor's executive budget. This ensures alignment with statewide fiscal planning while advancing critical language access initiatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 2622.

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



**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 4, 2026

**TO:** HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY  
Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair  
Representative Kim Coco Iwamoto, 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 2622 -- RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS**

**HEARING:** Friday, February 6, 2026 @ 10:15 am; Conference Room 411

**POSITION:** SUPPORT with COMMENTS

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SHPDA strongly supports HB2622 with comments. HB2622 funds the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA) to expand bilingual resources and services so residents with limited English proficiency can receive—and act on—critical emergency information in real time.

From a health system standpoint, language access during disasters is a core safety function. When evacuation orders, shelter rules, medication guidance, and assistance instructions are not understood, the predictable result is preventable injury, delayed care, missed reunification, and avoidable emergency department utilization, especially for older adults, migrant workers, and mixed-status families. On Maui and across our neighbor islands, these risks concentrate in communities that already face barriers to primary care, transportation, and stable housing.

HIEMA's own language access planning framework considers a dedicated Limited English Proficiency Specialist function to coordinate compliance, training, vendor support, and reporting. HB2622 should therefore include sufficient, explicit funding for a permanent position and consideration towards working with trusted community organizations working with these non-English proficient populations. Trust is a key factor in emergency situations, and these organizations have done much of the groundwork already to establish these relationships.

For these reasons, SHPDA supports HB2622.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

-- Jack Lewin MD, Administrator, SHPDA



# **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. 2622 Relating to Language Access**

### **HCRC Staff Comments**

**While the Commission has not yet had the opportunity to meet and take an official position on H.B. 2622, 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).

Hawaii’s population is proudly diverse and nearly one in five individuals in Hawai‘i are born outside of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, nearly twenty-five percent of the State’s

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Foreign Born Persons, Percent 2020-2024*, 17.9%, last accessed 2.4.26 at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/HI#>.

population speaks a language other than English at home.<sup>2</sup> The 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. 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.

While the legislature passed Act 210, Session Laws of Hawaii 2024, which established a limited English proficiency language access coordinator within the Hawai'i emergency management system, H.B. 2622 recognizes that with more than two hundred and sixty thousand foreign-born individuals in our state and those who speak a primary language other than English, these individuals are still greatly underserved and language access needs remain largely unmet, especially in the event of an emergency where communication is critical. This bill aims to provide the Hawai'i emergency management agency with additional resources to fill these critical needs.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide these comments.

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<sup>2</sup> Research and Economic Analysis Division, DBEDT, *Detailed Languages Spoken at Home in the State of Hawai'i* (March 2016), last accessed on 2.4.26 at [https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/acs/Report/Detailed\\_Language\\_March2016.pdf](https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/acs/Report/Detailed_Language_March2016.pdf).