

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 SENATE BILL 2121,
RELATING TO EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

February 18, 2026

Aloha Fukunaga, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a testimony to **COMMENT** on Senate Bill 2121.

HIEMA recognizes the critical importance of accessibility during a state of emergency and already strives to meet the standards set forth in this bill as a matter of best practice to ensure the deaf and hard-of-hearing community receives critical information in real-time.

While HIEMA supports the intent of increasing accessibility, there are practical limitations to the mandates described below:

- During a rapid-onset emergency, the immediate availability of such specific, certified personnel at all times and locations may be limited by the existing pool of qualified professionals in the state.
- HIEMA does not have jurisdictional control over how private news media outlets format their broadcasts, which may lead to challenges in ensuring full compliance as written in the statute.

- Senate Bill 2121 would establish strict new requirements for the provision and display of certified ASL interpreters. It represents an unfunded mandate and does not currently provide a dedicated funding source for the associated costs of hiring, certifying, or providing technical support for these services. Without a corresponding appropriation, the financial burden of maintaining these requirements on a permanent basis during all emergency proclamations will impact existing county and state agencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 2121.

James Barros: james.barros@hawaii.gov; 808-733-4300.



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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

1010 Richards Street, Rm. 118 • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
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February 18, 2026

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Senate Bill 2121 – Relating to Emergency Announcements

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 2121 – Relating to Emergency Announcements. This bill requires the Governor or mayor of a county to provide an American Sign Language interpreter during each official announcement broadcast via television or the Internet during a state of emergency. Requires the Governor or mayor of a county to ensure, to the fullest extent possible, that the American Sign Language interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands are visible during the broadcast. It also requires a news media outlet to display the American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture window during broadcasts of official emergency announcements.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing and rely on American Sign Language (ASL) did not receive equitable or effective communication during recent public emergencies, such as COVID-19, the Lahaina wildfires, and the tsunami warning. Significant communication barriers were reported, including the lack of qualified interpreters, interpreters being positioned too far from speakers, interpreters being partially obstructed or poorly lit, and television broadcasts failing to ensure interpreters were clearly visible on screen.

As a result, many individuals who rely on ASL were unable to access critical, time-sensitive information necessary to protect their health and safety.

We respectfully request that a minimum size for the picture-in-picture be established by amending Section 1 to read:

(b) A news media outlet that broadcasts or rebroadcasts a live official emergency announcement by an elected official or head of an emergency agency via television or the Internet shall display the American Sign Language interpreter in a clearly visible on-screen picture-in-picture window for the entire duration of the announcement. The picture-in-picture window shall be at least one-quarter (1/4) the size of the primary video and large enough to clearly see the interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands. The interpreter shall not be blocked or covered by captions, graphics, or other on-screen text, which must be repositioned if necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

KRISTINE PAGANO
Acting Executive Director



Testimony of Chris Leonard
President – Hawai'i Association of Broadcasters, Inc.

Re: SB2121: Senate Committee on Public Safety & Military Affairs - 2/18/2026 – 3:00PM

In support of SB2121 if amended

Aloha Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Lee and committee members,

My name is Chris Leonard, and I serve as President of the Hawai'i Association of Broadcasters, representing more than 100 free, over-the-air television and radio broadcasters statewide.

We support the intent of SB2121 and appreciate the effort to increase accessibility for all members of our community during declared states of emergency. Clear, accessible communication saves lives, and Hawai'i's broadcasters are committed public safety partners in delivering urgent information across television, radio, and digital platforms.

However, we would like to share some practical application concerns with the current language of the measure. As currently structured, the bill creates an internal inconsistency in how responsibility is assigned. Subsection (a) appropriately places the obligation on the Governor or Mayor to provide a certified American Sign Language interpreter and ensure proper positioning for broadcast visibility. However, subsection (b) shifts the operational burden to news media outlets by requiring that any outlet that broadcasts or rebroadcasts a live official announcement "shall display the American Sign Language interpreter in an on-screen picture-in-picture window for the full duration of the announcement." In effect, while the government provides the interpreter, broadcasters are made responsible for generating and inserting the picture-in-picture display themselves. While the goal is admirable, meeting this requirement would necessitate a multi-camera setup and larger on-site crews — resources that many broadcasters and smaller digital outlets, simply do not have available. The likely unintended consequence is that fewer media outlets would carry these press conferences, resulting in reduced public access rather than increased accessibility.

A workable solution would be to place responsibility for the accessibility feature at the source of the official announcement. Specifically, SB2121 should be amended to include the following language as amended in the companion bill HB1531 as shown below.

“The governor or mayor, as applicable, shall provide a primary pool feed for any live official announcement that includes an American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture window. A broadcaster that rebroadcasts the official announcement shall not be required to independently generate or insert this accessibility feature.”

Providing accessibility at the source ensures consistent statewide access while removing the technical and staffing burden from individual broadcasters, making compliance achievable for all outlets and preserving broad media participation during emergencies.

Mahalo for your consideration and your continued commitment to public safety and accessibility.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher S. Leonard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "C" and a long, sweeping underline.

Christopher S. Leonard
President – Hawai'i Association of Broadcasters



February 17, 2026

Testimony of Kristina Lockwood

Vice President & General Manager, KHON2

Re: SB2121 – Senate Committee on Public Safety & Military Affairs

Hearing: February 18, 2026 – 3:00 PM

Position: In support of SB2121, if amended

Aloha Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the Committee,

My name is Kristina Lockwood, and I serve as Vice President and General Manager of KHON2, a free, over-the-air television station serving communities statewide. KHON2 is a long-standing public safety partner and routinely carries emergency announcements issued by state and county officials across broadcast, digital, and streaming platforms.

We support the intent of SB2121 to enhance accessibility for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community during declared states of emergency. Timely, clear communication is essential during emergencies, and broadcasters share the goal of ensuring that life-saving information reaches all residents.

KHON2 already complies with all applicable federal FCC requirements, including closed captioning mandates for emergency information. These federal standards are well established and are already integrated into broadcasters' emergency operations.

The inclusion of a live American Sign Language interpreter represents an **additional layer of accessibility**, which we support when it is provided at the source of the official announcement. However, we cannot support statutory language that places responsibility on broadcasters to independently provide, pay for, staff, or technically generate an ASL interpreter or picture-in-picture display.

As currently drafted, SB2121 risks creating operational barriers that could unintentionally delay or discourage the dissemination of emergency information. During fast-moving emergencies, broadcasters must be able to immediately carry and rebroadcast official announcements without additional production requirements, technical criteria, or staffing obligations that may not be feasible in real time.



KHON2's position aligns precisely with the amendment language adopted in HB1531 and requests that SB2121 include the same clarification, as follows:

“The governor or mayor, as applicable, shall provide a primary pool feed for any live official announcement that includes an American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture window. A broadcaster that rebroadcasts the official announcement shall not be required to independently generate or insert this accessibility feature.”

This language appropriately places responsibility for accessibility at the source of the announcement, where it can be implemented consistently and equitably, while ensuring that broadcasters remain free to rapidly share emergency information without delay or added liability.

KHON2 will continue to carry official emergency announcements and will gladly rebroadcast any primary feed that includes an ASL interpreter as provided. We respectfully ask that the bill clearly state that broadcasters are **not responsible** for independently providing or funding this accessibility feature, and that no additional criteria be imposed that could impede the timely delivery of critical public safety information.

We believe this amendment preserves the bill's intent, enhances accessibility, and avoids unintended consequences that could reduce emergency coverage.

Mahalo for your consideration and for your continued commitment to public safety and accessibility.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina Lockwood
Vice President & General Manager
KHON2



SB-2121

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 8:56:11 AM

Testimony for PSM on 2/18/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nancy D Moser	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In support

SB-2121

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 11:12:58 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/18/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dana Keawe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support SB2121

Dana Keawe

To: Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair
Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: February 17, 2026

RE: Senate Bill 2121
Measure Title: RELATING TO EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS.
Report Title: Emergency; Official Announcements; Broadcast Media; American
Sign Language; Sign Language Interpreter

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support Senate Bill 2121. Thank you for introducing this bill.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

SB-2121

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 6:01:39 PM

Testimony for PSM on 2/18/2026 3:00:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kanani Kai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I SUPPORT SB2121.

Mahalo,

Kanani Kai

Member Indivisible Hawaii

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Sen. Carol Fukunaga, Chair

Sen. Chris Lee, Vice Chair

LATE

HEARING:

Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 3:00 pm

Conference Room 016 & Videoconference

State Capitol

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2121, RELATING TO EMERGENCY ANNOUNCEMENTS.

Aloha Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Lee, Senator Hashimoto of Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Andrews and I am a long-term resident of Wailuku, Maui. I write to you today in **strong support of SB 2121**, Relating to Emergency Announcements, which requires the Governor or mayor of a county to provide an American Sign Language interpreter during each official announcement broadcast via television or the Internet during a state of emergency, requires the Governor or mayor of a county to ensure, to the fullest extent possible, that the American Sign Language interpreter's face, body, arms, and hands are visible during the broadcast, and requires a news media outlet to display the American Sign Language interpreter in a picture-in-picture window during broadcasts of official emergency announcements.

I am the parent of a young adult with substantial hearing loss and testify today not only as a parent of a hear-of-hearing child, but also as a resident of Maui, where we all are recovering and rebuilding from the wildfire disaster, and where the state of emergency from the recent weather event we experienced statewide are both top of mind. Requiring ASL interpretation of official announcements during a state of emergency seems a long-past-due measure to ensure the safety of our deaf and hard-of-hearing community members. I am a bit surprised that this bill is necessary, since ASL interpretation seems like it would already be required under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and I posit that the bill is a necessary measure for the state to be in compliance with the ADA.

In support of Hawai'i's deaf and hard-of-hearing community members, and equal access to necessary official announcements during a state of emergency, I respectfully request your **strong support of SB 2121**.

Mahalo,

Christine Andrews, JD
Wailuku, Maui