

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 5:40:04 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sabina Wilford	Testifying for Hawaii Interpreting Services	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha,

Hawaii Interpreting Services (HIS) strongly supports SB 2412. HIS works with independent contractors statewide to provide communication access to Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind citizens.

The pool of qualified interpreters has decreased significantly over the past several years due to the economic challenges of living in Hawaii. This shortage has left the current pool insufficient to meet the needs of our community, forcing us to leave crucial appointments and meetings unfilled.

We need to replenish the dwindling supply of interpreters in Hawaii by offering language classes and interpreter training to interested applicants nationwide. We must focus particularly on recruitment within the local community to attract individuals who understand the nuances of the language and cultural differences in Hawaii.

Mahalo,

Sabina Wilford

Owner/Director



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 11, 2026

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION AND ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senate Bill 2412 – Relating to the University of Hawai'i

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 2412 – Relating to the University of Hawai'i. 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 without such programs, despite more than two hundred (200) interpreter training programs nationwide.

Senate Bill 2412 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 Hawaii's deaf and hard of hearing community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

KRISTINE PAGANO
Acting Executive Director



**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 11, 2026

TO: SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair
Honorable Members

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

RE: **SB 2412 -- RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII**

HEARING: Wednesday, February 11, 2026 @ 1:00 pm; Conference Room 225

POSITION: SUPPORT with COMMENTS

Testimony:

SHPDA strongly supports SB 2412, with comments.

This bill addresses Hawai'i's shortage of qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters by investing in a sustainable, in-state training pipeline through the University of Hawai'i. It does this by appropriating \$140,000 for FY 2026–2027 to the University of Hawai'i at Manoa to establish a bachelor's degree program in ASL interpretation, develop a multi-year plan that includes a future master's degree program, and provide the personnel and administrative resources needed to launch and sustain these programs.

This bill builds an in-state interpreter workforce pipeline that helps interested residents build careers and provide essential services for hearing impaired citizens. Let's make it happen.

Mahalo for hearing this and for the opportunity to testify.

■ -- Jack Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA

LATE

JAN L. FRIED • American Sign Language/English Interpreter

• RID Certified-IC, CI, CT • Educator • Consultant •

10 February 26

To: The Senate
Thirty-Third Legislature, 2026, State of Hawai'i
Committees on Education and Health and Human Services
Sen. Donna Mercado Kim, Education Chair & Sen. Joy San Buenaventura, HHS Chair
Sen. Michelle Kidani, Education Vice Chair & Sen. Angus McKelvey, HHS Vice Chair

Fr.: Jan Fried

Re: **Support for SB 2412**, Relating to the University of Hawai'i

Hearing: 11 February 2026 at 1:00 PM, Conference Room 225

Aloha. I am writing to express my strong support for **SB 2412** because I am a professor of American Sign Language/English Interpreter Education and American Sign Language at UH-Kapi'olani Community College (KCC) and a nationally credentialed American Sign Language/English interpreter.

There has been and continues to be a severe shortage of qualified American Sign Language/English Interpreters across the United States, but the situation is exceptionally dire in Hawai'i and throughout the Pacific. One way to address this need is to strengthen the paths to becoming an interpreter.

For Deaf *and* hearing students to become qualified and effective interpreters, they need to have access to a full range of classes in ASL beyond the 200 level to ensure fluency, ASL and Comparative Linguistics, Deaf Culture and History, and an extensive curriculum focusing on the process of interpreting, interpreting in specialized venues, and targeted mentorships and internships. The national organization that credentials Sign Language interpreters requires certification candidates to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Ideally earning a BA degree in Interpreting/Interpreter Education is the best preparation for aspiring interpreters. Once they graduate from this type of program, they are prepared to take and pass, at an entry level, either the State's Screening offered by DCAB, the national interpreting exam offered by CASLI or the EIPA, a national screening for interpreters who want to work in K-12 settings. Establishing undergraduate and graduate programs in American Sign Language/English Interpreting allows students to remain *and* work in Hawai'i. The Deaf Community and future interpreters here deserve no less.

To clarify, an American Sign Language/English Interpreter Education program has existed at UH-Kapi'olani Community College for over 30 years. Unfortunately, due to reapproval challenges, the program has been on hiatus for the last seven years. Fortunately, it is slated to again offer classes remotely this fall. During the program's tenure we have made several attempts to move it to UH Mānoa. For several reasons these bids were unsuccessful. Hopefully this bill can finally make a BA in Interpreter Education a reality. Historically students who graduated from KCC's Interpreter Education program and wanted to pursue a bachelor's degree at UHM, had to major in a complementary program or develop their own through Individualized Studies, transfer to a remote Bachelors in Interpreting program or leave the state.

For this program to be successful at UHM, securing funding is tantamount. The General-funded position I have was a direct result of legislative action. Small, but critical programs like Interpreter Education need allocated funds to not only support them while building capacity but also to sustain them. The mission to build a thriving workforce that is uniquely and specifically positioned to meet the needs of the people of Hawai'i is critical. An American Sign Language/English Interpreter Education program that promotes specialized knowledge of Deaf and Hawaiian cultures is one such program.

Another way this program can be sustained is take advantage of existing resources and expertise. This can only occur through collaboration, as this endeavor requires instructors who are content specialists in ASL and instructors who are content specialists in Interpreter Education. The latter does not currently exist at UHM. The amount of funds being requested justifies a partnership as the sum may be insufficient to accomplish all the bill delineates without it. Pathways from the community college to UHM will help ensure there is more than one pipeline into the program. Not all ASL students want to or have the propensity to become interpreters, so the more pathways we have, the likelihood we will have the necessary numbers to sustain it.

I appreciate this opportunity to encourage the committees to support SB 2412. Your actions will have a profound and positive impact. *Mahalo.*

LATE

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 6:48:48 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hercules E. Goss-Kuehn	Testifying for Hawai'i Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha e nā hoa, ‘o wau ‘o Hercules.

I serve as President of the Hawai‘i Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and owner of Hercules Interpreting LLC. I also come from three generations of Deaf family.

I am here in strong support of this bill because Hawai‘i is facing a critical shortage of qualified ASL interpreters. I am one of the youngest certified interpreters in the state, and I can count on one hand the number of working interpreters who are truly local to Hawai‘i.

Hawai‘i experiences severe brain drain and does not adequately invest in cultivating local talent. We must establish academic rigor and training pathways here at home so both local residents and newcomers can become qualified interpreters in Hawai‘i.

There is a significant gap in culturally and linguistically competent interpreting. ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, pidgin, and local cultural knowledge are frequently misinterpreted by those trained elsewhere. This directly impacts access for Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and signing communities.

Personally, I had to leave Kapolei and Hilo to attend three interpreter training programs and complete four practicums on the continent. I now mentor interpreters, develop workshops, and invest in our local ASL community—but we need proper funding and infrastructure to sustain this work.

RID reports show that within five years, Hawai‘i will lose 25 to 33 percent of our interpreting workforce to retirement, with too few qualified interpreters to replace them. This will lead to serious consequences in healthcare, courts, education, and community access.

If this bill passes, I will personally apply to help build and teach in these programs.

Mahalo nui loa, maraming salamat po, for your time and consideration. I look forward to collaborating with you all in the years to come.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Education
and
Senate Committee Health and Human Services
Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at 1:00 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

SB 2412 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Kidani and McKelvey, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on SB 2412. 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.

SB 2412 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. The appropriations in SB 2412 provide 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 provide testimony on the measure.



February 10, 2026

Position: **SUPPORT** of **SB2412**, Relating to the University of Hawaii

To: Senators Donna Mercado Kim and Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chairs
Senator Michelle N. Kidani and Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chairs
Members of the Senate Committees on Education, and Health and Human Services

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

Re: Testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB2412**, Relating to the University of Hawaii

Hearing: Wednesday, February 11, 2026, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 225, State Capitol

The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women **supports SB2412** because access to qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters is essential for ensuring equity, health, safety, and inclusion. **Establishing a bachelor's degree program, with a pathway to a master's degree, at the University of Hawaii at Manoa directly addresses the shortage of highly trained interpreters in our state, enabling individuals to more fully participate in education, employment, healthcare, and civic life.**

The lack of local, advanced interpreter training programs has limited the pool of interpreters available in Hawaii, often resulting in barriers to communication and access to services, particularly for marginalized populations. **Women who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing face compounded challenges in accessing healthcare, legal services, and educational opportunities when interpreter services are insufficient or unavailable.** By investing in a robust training pipeline, the bill aligns with the Commission's mission to advance gender equity and remove systemic barriers.

Research and best practices indicate that interpreter training programs rooted in the local context are more effective at preparing professionals to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of their communities.

Establishing these programs at the University of Hawaii ensures that future interpreters are equipped with the skills and cultural competence necessary to serve Hawaii's diverse population, including those at the intersections of gender and disability.

We respectfully recommend ongoing consultation with community stakeholders, including Deaf and hard-of-hearing women, to ensure the programs remain responsive and inclusive.

I respectfully urge this Committee to **pass SB2412**.

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 11, 2026
TIME: 1:00 PM
PLACE: Conference Room 225 & Videoconference
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
TIMESLOT: HHS

To:

[COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION](#)

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

[COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES](#)

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

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

Re: SB 2412 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).

The HCRC is submitting testimony in strong support of SB2412, which appropriates funds to establish a bachelor’s degree program in American Sign Language (ASL)

interpretation at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa, with a multi-year plan to include a master's degree program.

Why Language Access Matters

Language access is a fundamental civil right and a cornerstone of equity. For Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, qualified ASL interpreters are essential for full participation in education, healthcare, employment, and civic life. Without access, these community members face systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality.

The Reality in Hawaii

Hawaii faces a critical shortage of qualified ASL interpreters, as documented in the 2024 report by the Disability and Communication Access Board. Currently, Hawaii is one of only eight states without an ASL interpreter training program. This gap disproportionately impacts neighbor islands, where interpreter availability is even more limited, forcing residents to experience delays or forego essential services altogether.

SB2412 is Urgent because it will create a local pathway for Hawaii residents to become skilled interpreters. It also addresses workforce shortages by establishing a bachelor's program and planning for a master's program. It will also support accessibility statewide, reducing reliance on out-of-state interpreters and improving service delivery for all communities.

When we invest in language access, we strengthen our entire community. Accessibility ensures that Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals can fully engage, and it also benefits businesses, schools, and public services by fostering inclusion and compliance with federal and state laws.

Hawaii is proud of its cultural and linguistic diversity. By supporting ASL interpreter training, we affirm that diversity includes the Deaf community and that communication access is integral to our shared values of aloha and inclusion.

For these reasons, HCRC respectfully urges you to pass SB2412. This bill is not just about education, it is about equity, opportunity, and honoring the diversity that makes Hawaii unique.

Thank you for hearing the measure.

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 7:07:46 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB2412. My wife and daughter found American Sign Language extremely useful in their work with early child development and senior deaf clients. This would allow expansion of those who need this skill.

Please pass this bill.

Mike Golojuch, Sr.

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 9:14:51 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
ANNETTE TASHIRO	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

American Sign Language is a language that requires a professional process, just like any other language taught in Hawaii's schools. We need more educators who can teach, and we need individuals who can effectively communicate with populations that have been marginalized and excluded from the mainstream. If we lived in an ideal world, we all would need to know basic sign language.

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 4:52:10 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Thank you

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 10:01:52 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing population here need access to important daily life events such as Legal proceedings, schooling and Medical appointments. The diagnosis needs to be clear, and buy-in for treatment plans come with open dialogue. That access is currently not happening for all, because of the shortage of ASL/English Interpreters.

Most importantly we need to grow Interpreters locally. The program should give preference to students who graduated from local schools. In addition we need to graduate Interpreters who understand 'Olelo Hawai'i, not to mention the many cultures on island and within our Deaf population here. These local students deserve a career that allows them to stay in their homeland, and the Deaf deserve Interpreters they can understand because we do have a beautifully unique sign language on the islands..

Testimony of James Woodward in Support of SB2412

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 SB2412, 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 9, 2026

To the Honorable Members of the Senate Committee:

I submit this testimony in strong support of Hawai'i Senate Bill 2412 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.

Senate Bill 2412 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 Senate Bill 2412. 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

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

I strongly support SB 2412, which seeks to provide funding for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter training at the bachelor's degree level in Hawai'i.

Hawai'i 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's-level interpreter 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 experiences, and rigorous language and skills development. Without state investment, programs cannot meet demand or adequately prepare students for professional practice.

SB 2412 represents an important investment in accessibility and local workforce development. By funding ASL interpreter education within Hawai'i, 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 SB 2412 moves Hawai'i closer to that goal.

I respectfully urge the Legislature to pass SB 2412 and provide the necessary funding to support bachelor's-level ASL interpreter training in Hawai'i. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your commitment to accessibility and inclusion.

Mahalo nui loa,

Jordan Kotani

Certified Sign Language Interpreter

Subject: Testimony in Support of SB 2412 – ASL Interpreter Training Program at UH Mānoa

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is Cory Horwitz, and I am a Deaf Education teacher on Maui. I am writing in strong support of SB 2412 and the effort to establish an American Sign Language interpreter training program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Every day I see how critical interpreters are for students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing to fully access their education. Several of my students depend on interpreters for meaningful access not only to lessons, but also to social interactions with their peers and participation in the life of the classroom and school community. Without interpreters, they are isolated from both learning and the relationships that help children feel connected and successful in school.

Unfortunately, we are facing a serious shortage of qualified interpreters. We often have to fly interpreters from Oahu to meet students' basic access needs, which is expensive and not sustainable. When positions go unfilled, students miss access to instruction, peer conversations, and everyday classroom interactions. Inconsistent language access affects their academic progress, social development, and sense of belonging. Teachers and support staff are left trying to bridge gaps that only qualified interpreters can fill.

One of the biggest challenges is that Hawai'i currently has no in-state ASL interpreter training programs. Anyone interested in becoming an interpreter must leave Hawai'i to attend programs on the mainland, and many do not return. This makes it extremely difficult to build and retain a stable, local workforce, particularly on neighbor islands.

Creating an interpreter training pathway within Hawai'i would help us grow local professionals who understand our communities and are more likely to stay and work here. This is especially important for neighbor islands, where staffing challenges are even greater.

Supporting SB 2412 is an investment in educational equity for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students across our state. Our students deserve consistent language access, and this program is an important step toward making that possible.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Cory Horwitz
Deaf Education Teacher
Maui, Hawai'i

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 11:11:55 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I live on Maui. I'm a former Teacher of the Deaf. I currently work for Ceeds of Peace at the Hawaii School for the Deaf. I work with families raising deaf Keiki. Ever since I've moved here in 1991 there has been a shortage of ASL interpreters. Hawaii recognized ASL as a foreign language over six years ago but it still isn't being offered in schools across Hawaii. We needed to grow our own signing citizens. Grow our own ASL interpreters, teachers of the Deaf. Please fund this bill! Deaf citizens need our support!

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 8:26:56 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of HB 2412, 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

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 9:38:28 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Honorable Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Kidani and McKelvey, and Members of the Committees,

As a constituent of Senate District 1, 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.

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 11:07:05 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Randall John Francisco	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of this legislation that will provide a pathway for students to enter this career as a professional who completed a formal educational program and recognizes the individual for their committment and dedication. I was at Kapi'olani Community College when it established a partnership with Gallaudet University, Washington D.C. After decades, the establishment of this degree pathway will provide both Hawai'i residents and non-residents an opportunity to work towards and complete a program that culmiates with the Bachelor's degree. Most of all, the program acknowledges the need for professionals dedicated to both the deaf and hard of hearing communities at a time when access, economic and social justice are critically needed for all. Mahalo nui loa for your consideration. Aloha.

LATE

SB-2412

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 1:42:41 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carolyn M Golojuch	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB2412 relating to the establishment of American Sign Language Bachelor's and Master's degrees American Sign Language (ASL) at the University of Hawai`i. As a Social Worker with hands on experience with person's diagnosed with Hearing Loss, it is imperative that educated, trained and experienced teachers are available for each student.

Hawai`i has a shortage of ASL teachers. ASL is acknoweleged as a language and thus the passage of SB2412 needs your attention and passage ASAP.

Mahalo,

Carolyn Martinez Golojuch, MSW