



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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

1010 Richards Street, Rm. 118 • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V) • Fax (808) 586-8129 • (808) 204-2466 (VP)

March 31, 2026

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Senate Bill 2851 Senate Draft 1 House Draft 1 – Relating to Deaf Individuals

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 2851 Senate Draft 1 House Draft 1 – Relating to Deaf Individuals. It authorizes deaf motor vehicle owners to register their vehicle as being owned by a deaf individual so that a deafness designation appears when a law enforcement officer accesses the motor vehicle's information. It is effective 1/1/2027.

People who are deaf or hard of hearing sometimes encounter miscommunication or misunderstanding interacting with law enforcement. While notations on identification cards or specialty information cards are useful in certain transactions, the act of reaching into a pocket to retrieve a card can be misinterpreted by law enforcement.

Providing the motor vehicle information before the interaction begins provides a safer encounter and effective communication between the driver with a hearing disability and law enforcement.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

KRISTINE PAGANO
Acting Executive Director

March 31, 2026

Testimony of Eleanor Macdonald
House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

Honorable Representative David A. Tarnas, Chair
Honorable Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Re: SB 2851 SD1 HD1, Relating to Deaf Individuals

Dear Rep. Tarnas, Chair, Rep. Poepoe, Vice Chair and Members,

I would like to strongly support SB 2851 SD1 HD1 to allow motor vehicle owners who are deaf to add a special code or symbol to their car registration indicating that they are deaf or hard of hearing. Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing who choose or elect to receive a special code or symbol on their car registration indicating that they are Deaf or Hard of Hearing will be protected by this bill.

When involved in a traffic stop, communication with a law enforcement officer can be difficult because of environmental noise making it confusing to follow instructions and comply with what the officer is saying. A police officer may think that they are not following orders or not complying to their requests. This misunderstanding may have dangerous results when a traffic stop occurs at night or places with poor lighting. A driver may try to use her/his hands for American Sign Language and the police officer may consider these movements a threat. Some of these consequences can be life threatening considering the conduct of ICE agents today.

Please pass this important bill .

Mahalo,

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

DEPARTMENT OF CUSTOMER SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA LAWELawe KUPA
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

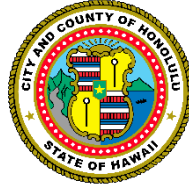
ADMINISTRATION

925 DILLINGHAM BOULEVARD, SUITE 257 • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817
PHONE: (808) 768-3392 • FAX: (808) 768-3750 • WEBSITE: honolulu.gov

RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR
MEIA

KIMBERLY M. HASHIRO
DIRECTOR
PO'O

MEGAN JOHNSON
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
HOPE PO'O



March 27, 2026

The Honorable David A. Tarnas, Chair
The Honorable Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair
and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs
State Capitol, Conference Room 325
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs:

SUBJECT: S.B. No. 2851, S.D. 1, H.D. 1 - Relating To Deaf Individuals
HEARING: Tuesday, March 31, 2026, 2:00 p.m.

The City and County of Honolulu, Department of Customer Services (CSD) respectfully offers **comments** to S.B. No. 2851, S.D. 1, H.D. 1 for your committee's consideration. Pursuant to Section 6-402 of the Revised Charter of the City and County of Honolulu, CSD Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) administers the motor vehicle registration program for the island of O'ahu.

While CSD supports the intent of the proposed legislation, there are anticipated operational impacts associated with instituting and administering a new process to add a designation bearing the international symbol for deafness or a numerical code designating deafness to the motor vehicle registration for a vehicle owned by a deaf individual:

- **Statewide Coordination of Data and Systems Integration:** Instituting and administering a new process to add a deafness designation to a motor vehicle registration will require database sharing and close coordination across all counties statewide, the State Department of Transportation, and the Honolulu Department of Information Technology to support eligibility determinations and enforcement, and to ensure consistent standards, procedures, and public

communications. Implementation will require updates to staff training, public information materials, application forms, and supporting technology systems to ensure consistent statewide administration.


- **Customer Service Considerations:** Instituting and administering a new process to add a deafness designation to a motor vehicle registration would also introduce additional complexity in the appointment scheduling process and at customer service windows, resulting in increased processing times and the potential for customer confusion.

CSD DMV will require sufficient time to fully implement the proposed legislation. Implementation will require system modifications, coordination with the State Department of Transportation and all county motor vehicle registration offices, updates to forms and internal procedures, staff training, public outreach, and the securing of necessary funding and information technology resources.

Given the scope of administrative and technical work required, CSD respectfully recommends an effective date of **January 1, 2028**, to allow adequate time for proper planning, system development, testing, and statewide coordination to ensure consistent and effective implementation.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on S.B. No. 2851, S.D. 1, H.D. 1.

Sincerely,

 Kimberly M. Hashiro
Director



www.AlohaILHawaii.org

Mar 31, 2026

MISSION

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) dedicated to providing independent living programs and services for persons with disabilities in Hawaii.

We work together with the community and consumers to improve the quality of life through individual choices and access to services.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Roxanne U. Bolden

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair / Sec
Valerie Yamada

Vice Chair
Zora Shove

Treasurer
Jonathan Yap

Member
Scott Suzuki
Sheila Castaneda
Jennifer Hartssock

The Honorable David A. Tarnas, Chair
House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs
The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawaii
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

SUBJECT: SB2851 – Relating to Deaf Individuals

Chair and Members of the Committee:

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) **supports SB2851 SD1, HD1**, which authorizes deaf motor vehicle owners to register their vehicle so that a deafness designation appears when a law enforcement officer accesses the vehicle's information. We commend the Legislature for taking this important step toward safer interactions between Deaf and hard-of-hearing drivers and law enforcement.

Why this bill matters.

People who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing face real and serious risks during traffic stops. Environmental noise, limited line of sight for lip-reading, and the natural use of hands to communicate in American Sign Language can all be misread by an officer as confusion or noncompliance. As others have testified, the consequences of such misunderstandings can be life-threatening. Providing officers with advance notice—before they approach the vehicle—is a common-sense, proactive safety measure that can protect both drivers and officers.

From an Independent Living perspective, we also value that this designation is **voluntary and driver-initiated**. The choice to add the designation rests with the individual, consistent with the principles of self-determination and personal autonomy that guide the IL movement.



www.AlohaILHawaii.org

MISSION

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) dedicated to providing independent living programs and services for persons with disabilities in Hawaii.

We work together with the community and consumers to improve the quality of life through individual choices and access to services.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Roxanne U. Bolden

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair / Sec

Valerie Yamada

Vice Chair

Zora Shove

Treasurer

Jonathan Yap

Member

Scott Suzuki
Sheila Castaneda
Jennifer Hartsock

We offer the following comments for the Committee's consideration:

1. **Lower the decibel threshold from 82 dB to 41 dB.** As noted by the Disability and Communication Access board (DCAB) and attorney and disability advocate Peter Fritz, the current 82 dB threshold limits the bill to individuals with profound hearing loss, excluding many hard-of-hearing individuals who face the same communication barriers during traffic stops in noisy environments. The 41 dB standard is consistent with New Jersey's enacted law (P.L. 2024, c.12) and with the companion bill HB 1993, HD1 as amended by the House Committee on Transportation. We strongly support aligning this bill to the same standard.
2. **Delete the income tax verification option.** The provision allowing deafness to be demonstrated through income tax filings is inconsistent with how other disability-related designations are verified in Hawaii, and it unnecessarily exposes sensitive financial information. Certification by a qualified otolaryngologist or licensed audiologist under Chapter 468E is the appropriate and clinically grounded standard. This provision was also removed from HB1993, HD1, and we recommend the same here.
3. **Add explicit data privacy protections.** From an IL standpoint, we encourage the Committee to ensure that the deafness designation is used **solely** for the communication-safety purpose for which it is intended. Statutory language explicitly limiting secondary use of the designation—and establishing that it may not be used as the basis for stops, searches, or any adverse action—would strengthen the bill and protect the civil rights of Deaf and hard-of-hearing drivers.
4. **Pair this legislation with officer training.** The designation is most effective when officers know how to act on it. We encourage the Legislature to couple this measure with mandatory, Deaf-led communication training for law enforcement so that officers are equipped to use visual communication methods, access qualified



www.AlohaILHawaii.org

MISSION

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) dedicated to providing independent living programs and services for persons with disabilities in Hawaii.

We work together with the community and consumers to improve the quality of life through individual choices and access to services.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Roxanne U. Bolden

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair / Sec

Valerie Yamada

Vice Chair

Zora Shove

Treasurer

Jonathan Yap

Member

Scott Suzuki
Sheila Castaneda
Jennifer Hartssock

interpreters, and approach Deaf and hard-of-hearing drivers with the appropriate accommodations.

We appreciate the collaborative work of the Deaf community, DCAB and disability advocates across Hawaii who have championed this legislation. We urge the Committee to pass SB2851 SD1 HD1 with the amendments noted above.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo,

Roxanne Bolden
Executive Director

SB-2851-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/25/2026 8:49:21 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/31/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louis Erteschik	Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is a good idea. It will potentially avoid confusion and confusion which could lead to dire consequences. It would be easy for a law enforcement officer to mistake a deaf person's lack of understanding for non compliance.

SB-2851-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/25/2026 10:56:29 AM

Testimony for JHA on 3/31/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I am in strong support of SB 2851 SD1 HD1, which would allow motor vehicle owners who are deaf to have the option to add a special code or symbol to their car registration indicating that they are deaf.

When involved in a traffic stop, it is vitally important for the person to have effective communication with a law enforcement officer, so that both sides can be understood. Often, a traffic stop is a challenging environment for a person who is deaf to navigate, as it can be noisy and they may not have clear line of sight to attempt to lipread the officer if that option is possible. An officer may feel the individual is being uncooperative, when in reality the person being stopped simply doesn't understand what's being asked.

In today's environment, it is extremely important for there to be effective communication between law enforcement and the public. Please support this important legislation which will increase safety for all involved.

Mahalo,

Beth Amaro, Līhu'e, Kaua'i

PETER L. FRITZ
T-Mobile Relay: (808) 586-0077
Email: plflegis@fritzhq.com

To: House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs
Hearing Date: Tuesday, March 31, 2026, 2:00 p.m.

RE: Testimony in Support of S.B. 2851, S.D. 1, H.D. 1, Relating to Deaf Individuals

Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

S.B. 2851, S.D. 1, H.D. 1

I am Peter Fritz. I am hard of hearing, an attorney, an advocate for persons with disabilities, and a former member of the Disability and Communication Access Board and the State Rehabilitation Advisory Committee. I testify in support of S.B. 2851, S.D. 1, H.D. 1.

This bill authorizes a deaf motor vehicle owner to add a voluntary designation to their vehicle registration. When a law enforcement officer conducts an electronic check of the vehicle's registration during a traffic stop, the designation alerts the officer that the owner is deaf. The designation is visible only to law enforcement. It is not printed on the license plate or otherwise available to the public.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing drivers face communication barriers during traffic stops that hearing drivers do not. Road noise and passing vehicles interfere with the ability to hear and understand verbal commands. A deaf driver who does not respond to an officer's instructions, or who uses hand gestures to communicate, may be misread as noncompliant or threatening. An officer who knows in advance that the driver is deaf can approach the stop with that information. The designation reduces the risk of miscommunication for both the driver and the officer.

Amendments Adopted by the House Committee on Transportation

The House Committee on Transportation amended S.B. 2851 S.D. 1 in two respects. First, the Committee lowered the definition of deaf from 82 decibels to 41 decibels. The 41 decibel standard covers individuals with moderate to severe hearing loss who face the same communication barriers during traffic stops as profoundly deaf individuals. Second, the Committee deleted the provision that permitted deafness to be verified by income tax forms. Verification is now required by a

qualified otolaryngologist or a licensed audiologist under chapter 468E.

These amendments align S.B. 2851 S.D. 1, H.D. 1 with H.B. 1993, H.D. 1, the companion bill, as amended by the same committee on February 12, 2026.

Request

I request the Committee to pass S.B. 2851, S.D. 1, H.D. 1 forward. The Department of Customer Services of the City and County of Honolulu has requested an effective date of January 1, 2028, to allow adequate time for implementation. I take no position on that request.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Peter L. Fritz
Attorney at Law
Former Member, Disability and Communication Access Board
Former Member, State Rehabilitation Advisory Committee

SB-2851-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 7:57:08 AM

Testimony for JHA on 3/31/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Malaki 30, 2026

Dearest Honorables Representatives Tarnas (Chair), Poepoe (Vice Chair), and Members Belatti, Hashem, Kahaloa, Sayama, Takayama, Cochran, Garcia, and Shimizu of House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs (JHA):

Aloha, I am typing to you all today to express my support for SB 2851 / HB1993 relating to Deaf individuals, which authorizes Deaf motor vehicle owners to register their vehicle as being owned by a Deaf individual and printed in their vehicle registration. This is to ensure the safety of the Deaf driver, since when stopped by police on the roads, most police do not know how to interact with Deaf people and can be deathly in situations as police carry firearms. Ideally, I and many other Deaf people prefer to have “Deaf” printed on our State and/or Driver’s License due to having a hard-copy of proof instead of accessing a system that the general public does not have. However, this is the first step, so I hope you all pass this legislation.

Sincerely,
sherry Shimizu

Submitted to the House Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs (JHA) Committee

SB 2851 Relating to Deaf Individuals

Dear Honorable Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair and Vice Chair Mahina Poepoe,

I strongly support allowing people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing to voluntarily have their disability shown as proof on their vehicle registration, especially for police officers to observe. This could improve quality of life and save lives. Deaf people have been harmed and even killed during police encounters because officers misinterpreted our behavior when we tried to communicate. I fear that I—or another deaf person—could be shot for attempting to signal that we are deaf.

I also think it would be crucially more valuable to have one's disability printed on official state identification, such as a driver's license or state ID. If a disability is clearly indicated on an official ID, law enforcement would be required to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and adjust their communication methods appropriately. This would also protect deaf people from being falsely accused of giving consent when we did not understand what was being said. I believe IDs should allow descriptions such as blind, deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing, possibly with standardized symbols to prevent fraud. This information should be on official IDs—not on separate "special" cards that officers may not recognize or may refuse to verify. Time is critical during police encounters, and officers often lack the patience or training to look up separate documentation.

Importantly, this should remain a choice. Some disabled individuals may not want their disability listed, and that decision should be respected. But the option should exist.

Currently, many deaf people rely on the Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) for assistance. However, DCAB now has only three staff members and insufficient funding. They cannot meet the needs of the entire disabled population in Hawai'i.

Allowing disability identification on IDs would reduce unnecessary miscommunication and ease the burden on underfunded agencies. I have a friend in New York City where disability status is printed on IDs, and she has told me it makes her daily life significantly easier. This type of identification could also help in other situations, such as access to public spaces. For example, dogs are banned at Ala Moana Beach Park, but disabled individuals may rely on service animals. Clear, official identification could prevent disabled people from being fined or harassed while still allowing enforcement of public health rules.

Respectfully Submitted,

Maile Paongo

SB-2851-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 9:46:03 AM

Testimony for JHA on 3/31/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christine L. Andrews, J.D.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As the parent of a hard-of-hearing adult child for whom an interaction with law enforcement could be harmfully escalated due to her hearing disability, I respectfully request your support for this measure.

Mahalo.