

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

ADMINISTRATION

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February 10, 2026

The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
The Honorable Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair
and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

The Honorable Lorraine R. Inouye, Chair
The Honorable Brandon J.C. Elefante, Vice Chair
and Members of the Senate Committee on Transportation

State Capitol, Conference Room 225
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Chair Inouye, Vice Chair McKelvey, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Senate Committee Health and Human Services and Senate Committee on Transportation:

SUBJECT: S.B. No. 2851 - Relating To Deaf Individuals
HEARING: Wednesday, February 11, 2026, 1:15 p.m.

The City and County of Honolulu, Department of Customer Services (CSD) respectfully offers **comments** to S.B. No. 2851 for your committees' 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 DMV supports the intent of the proposed legislation, we appreciate the opportunity to provide the following comments regarding 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.

An adequate amount of time will be required to initiate and coordinate efforts with the State Department of Transportation, the City and County of Honolulu's Department of Information Technology, and the counties of Hawai'i, Kaua'i, and Maui, regarding implementation of all necessary administrative procedures and updates; funding to support additional staffing; and funding for information technology upgrades.

CSD respectfully requests that the administrative, enforcement, and resource impacts on the motor vehicle registration system be carefully considered as this measure undergoes deliberation.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on S.B. No. 2851.

Sincerely,

for Kimberly M. Hashiro
Director

SB-2851

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 7:44:28 PM

Testimony for TRS on 2/11/2026 1:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louis Erteschik	Testifying for Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

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.

February 11, 2026

Testimony of Eleanor Macdonald
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services &
Senate Committee on Transportation

Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Honorable Senator Lorraine R. Inouye Chair

Re: SB 2851 Relating to Deaf Individuals

Dear Chairs Sen. San Buenaventura, Sen. Inouye and Members,

I would like to strongly support SB 2851 to allow motor vehicle owners who are deaf to add a special code or symbol to their car registration indicating that they are deaf. I would like to amend this bill to include individuals who are hard of hearing who choose or elect to also receive a special code or symbol on their car registration indicating that they are hard of hearing.

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 being communicated. A police officer may think that they are not following orders if the driver is deaf or hard of hearing. This inaccurate communication 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 legislation .

Mahalo,

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

PETER L. FRITZ
T-MOBILE RELAY: (808) 586-0077
EMAIL: PLFLEGIS@FRITZHQ.COM

To: The Senate Committee on Health and Human Services; The Senate Committee on Transportation

Hearing Date: February 11, 2026

RE: Testimony in support of SB 2851, Relating to Deaf Individuals

Chair San Buenaventura, Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committees:

I am submitting testimony in support of SB 2851, which allows motor vehicle owners who are deaf to add a special code or symbol to their car registration. This information will only appear when a police officer checks the vehicle information during a stop. The purpose of this system is to inform officers that the driver is deaf before they approach the vehicle, helping to prevent dangerous misunderstandings during traffic stops.

However, I have concerns regarding the current language of the bill, specifically its exclusion of individuals who are hard of hearing. The current language limits the scope of the bill to individuals with profound hearing loss, which could inadvertently leave out a significant portion of the population who face similar communication barriers in noisy environments. I respectfully propose two amendments to the bill:

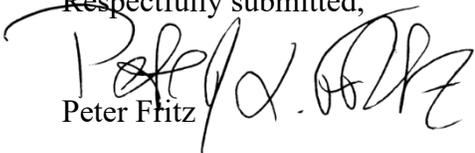
First, I recommend that the language be amended to include individuals who are hard of hearing. Second, I suggest that the medical threshold for the designation be adjusted from 82 decibels to 41 decibels. This 41-decibel standard is consistent with the one used in New Jersey Senate Bill 1000, now in effect as P.L. 2024, c.12. The current threshold of 82 decibels limits the scope of the bill to individuals with profound hearing loss. A threshold of 41 decibels would include a broader group of individuals who face communication barriers in high-noise environments.

This issue is personally relevant to my safety. Due to significant background traffic noise, I am unable to hear speech clearly during a traffic stop. The sounds of passing vehicles and environmental noise interfere with my ability to hear verbal commands from an officer. If the officer is unaware of my hearing status, my use of American Sign Language or other physical cues to facilitate communication may be misinterpreted as a lack of cooperation or a potential threat. This bill would allow an officer to receive a digital notification of my hearing status prior to approaching the vehicle, enabling the officer to utilize visual communication methods and preventing potentially dangerous misunderstandings.

I respectfully request the Committees pass SB 2851 with the inclusion of the hard of hearing community and the adjusted 41-decibel threshold as reflected in the New Jersey law.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,


Peter Fritz

SB-2851

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 6:46:23 PM

Testimony for TRS on 2/11/2026 1:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lynn Murakami Akatsuka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB 2851 for the safety of the deaf motor vehicle owner as well as the law enforcement officer's immediate attention about the individual's disability when communicating or approaching the vehicle.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of SB 28511

SB-2851

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 5:54:04 AM

Testimony for TRS on 2/11/2026 1:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nikki Kepoo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members,

I am a mother of a deaf child and a daughter to a fallen officer. As someone who is immersed in both worlds I am in full support of this bill.

I urge you all to pass SB2851 in hopes for our communities to better understand each other and hopefully ease tensions during any interaction. It is critical for both our deaf and our officers to start off on the right foot.

We continue to work with HPD to better train their officers but also encourage our deaf community how to interact.

Please pass bill SB2851 in hopes of making a much safer future.

Mahalo,

Nikki

February 9, 2026

Submitted to the Hawaii State Senate
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, and COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

SB 2851 Relating to Deaf Individuals

Dear Honorable Chairs and Members of the Senate,

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

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 1:15:14 AM

Testimony for TRS on 2/11/2026 1:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry Support

2851 SB RELATING TO DEAF INDIVIDUALS.

SB-2851

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 11:32:34 AM

Testimony for TRS on 2/11/2026 1:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

February 10, 2026

Dearest Honorable Senators San Buenaventura (Chair), McKelvey (Vice Chair), and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services (HHS); Inouye (Chair), Elefante (Vice Chair), and Members of the Senate Committee on Transportation (TRS):

Aloha, I am typing to you all today to express my support for SB 2851 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. Ideally, I and many other Deaf people prefer to have "Deaf" printed on our State and/or Driver's License, however, this is the first step, so I hope you all pass this legislation.

Sincerely,

Sherry Shimizu

LATE

SB-2851

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 5:13:11 PM

Testimony for TRS on 2/11/2026 1:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

Because Deaf/HoH people want this, i am also in support..

I do hope it will be optional for the Deaf/HoH individuals to opt-in or opt-out.