



# 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  
February 9, 2026 at 1:05 p.m.

By

Debora Halbert  
Vice President for Academic Strategy  
University of Hawai'i System

#### SB 3238 – RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports SB 3238 – Relating to Language Access. The University of Hawai'i (UH) applauds the efforts of the legislature to build on the success of the Department of Education's Seal of Biliteracy program while striving to address language accessibility issues by creating a mechanism to develop a cadre of qualified translators and interpreters. This program would help recognize and deploy the oftentimes untapped talents of many UH students and community members.

Currently, the bill states that the proposed "language access education and workforce development program" shall serve "eligible high school graduates" as well as "members of the community." If the intent of this measure is indeed to provide broad community access interpreter training and certification, we would like to offer the following context and suggestions for your consideration:

- 1) UH Mānoa has the most competitive admissions requirements and the highest tuition and fees in the UH System. While SB 3238 states that the program in question shall be administered by the SEED Office at UH Mānoa, we would also like to point out that Kapi'olani Community College (Kapi'olani CC) possesses expertise and capacity in the area of interpreter training and certification. Kapi'olani CC has developed a series of non-credit interpreter training courses, including versions focusing on the court system and medical settings. Kapi'olani CC has offered its Medical Interpreting course to two Department of Education high schools (Pearl City and Konawaena) with online components. Additionally, Kapi'olani CC is in the process of (a) developing multi-course, non-credit stackable pathways in this area and (b) moving these offerings into fully online formats.
- 2) It is currently unclear whether the bill calls for a credit-based program or a non-credit based credential. Non-credit classes, including those offered through UH Mānoa's Outreach College, are typically far less expensive than credit-based coursework, and those wishing to enroll in such classes are not subject to college admissions requirements. Of course, it is possible to establish an initiative that

provides both credit-based and non-credit opportunities, but it would still be helpful to clarify that point in the measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of measure SB 3238. This legislative effort to expand the pool of trained translators and interpreters in the workforce to serve our multilingual communities is commendable, as is the opportunity to leverage UH's many excellent language programs.

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 6:36:43 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
amy agbayani	Testifying for The Legal Clinic	Support	In Person

Comments:

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani and Committee members:

My name is Amy Agbayani, President of The Legal Clinic Hawai'i, a non-profit community organization providing legal representation and assistance to low-income immigrants and families and emeritus director of UH Manoa student diversity services. My testimony in support of this bill is informed by being a Filipino immigrant myself and working with immigrant communities, DOE, UH, government agencies and community groups.

I strongly endorse SB3238 for it will help meet language access mandates, meet academic educational objectives, develop workforce and career opportunities needed in our community. Our community must acknowledge the contributions, rights, responsibilities of all people in our community, including our limited English proficient residents.

Our state population is diverse, with 18% foreign-born population who come from many countries including Canada and Mexico. The majority of immigrants are from Asia and the Pacific; and 50% of immigrants are from the Philippines. Hawai'i immigrants contribute billions to the state GDP--paying taxes, creating businesses, staffing essential jobs--while often being paid very low wages and lacking access to social benefits. A majority of immigrants are US citizens and many have US citizen spouses and children.

Hawai'i has one of the highest per-capita rates of limited English proficient persons ("LEP persons") in the nation. Of the State's population, 348,139 persons (1 in 4) speak a language other than English at home and 161,055 residents (1 in 9 speak) English "less than very well," and counted as limited English proficient speakers (LEP). Languages spoken by Hawai'i foreign born communities include Ilokano, Tagalog, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Spanish, Samoan, Tonga, Micronesian, Pohnpeian, Marshallese and Chuukese. Communicating in the languages they understand is critical to their ability to access services and resources. Foreign-born residents and Hawai'i residents from the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands experience severe barriers to active participation in the community. LEP are a disadvantaged and vulnerable sector of the community with limited access to information and resources. Many have no information on government services, have limited English proficiency, experience prejudice, cultural misunderstanding and unable to receive government and community resources. We have talented students and faculty to support Hawai'i and the immigrant community that is under attack.

This bill will help the state develop workers to assist LEP in our state receive services to meet equal access mandates. Government, private companies and non-profit organizations need persons who are qualified to provide language access. For example, my own organization, The Legal Clinic depends on services of lawyers and other staff who can communicate with clients detained at the Federal Detention Center. Translators and interpreters were needed after the fires in Lahaina, a community with 30% foreign-born, 40% Filipino and a significant percentage LEP.

UH and DOE have students who can speak or are learning to speak languages in addition to English who may be interested and eligible for this program. UH has faculty and student services to implement a Language Access Education and Workforce development program but needs additional resources to provide training for students from any of the campuses. The UHM SEED program has experience working with grants, academic and student services units at Manoa and other campuses as well as experience working with internships from the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. This program provides a pathway to jobs and careers to serve our state.

I commend the DOE for providing not only instruction to teach English as a second language to foreign born children, but to programs to certify competence in English and 'Olelo Hawai'i and English and a foreign or community language (e.g. Spanish, Ilokano, Japanese). In addition, UH offers numerous classes, including four-year and graduate level courses in various languages. Undergraduate and graduate students at UH campuses will be eligible to increase their language skills and obtain training, internships and other educational opportunities in translation and interpretation. The program will be able to offer credit and non-credit courses. Students participants in the language education and workforce development program can be from any campus, any academic major and become qualified to work with limited English proficient persons. Many occupations and professionals can benefit from having these bilingual skills and training (Health care professionals, Lawyers, Social Workers, Emergency responders, Police, tourism staff), a major. Both government and private organizations need trained bilingual workers to serve the large number of LEP.

I respectfully urge the Committee approve this bill because it help the state meet community needs, mandates for language access and supports DOE UH educational and workforce development objectives.

Mahalo. Amy Agbyani



www.hicir.org | Instagram @hicir  
hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com

## **Testimony of the Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights**

**In SUPPORT of SB3238**

**Relating to Language Access**

**Hearing: Wednesday, February 18, 2026, 1:02 PM, Room 229 & Videoconference**

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

My name is Liza Ryan Gill, testifying on behalf of the **Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights (HCIR)**, a coalition of immigrant-serving and immigrant-led organizations working statewide to advance policies that protect immigrant and migrant communities and strengthen our shared future. HCIR respectfully submits this testimony **in strong support of SB3238**.

**Language access is essential for equity and for Hawai‘i to function well.** Hawai‘i is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse states in the nation. According to a State of Hawai‘i agency Language Access Plan citing the 2023 American Community Survey, **24.2%** of Hawai‘i residents age 5+ speak a language other than English at home, and **10.4%** report speaking English “less than very well.” These are our neighbors, coworkers, elders, students, and family members—many of whom are immigrants and refugees—who must be able to access public education, healthcare, legal services, employment and training programs, and other critical state services in a meaningful way.

**SB3238 builds Hawai‘i’s language access workforce from within our own communities.**

SB3238 recognizes that language access is necessary across public service settings—including **education, healthcare, social services, legal services, agriculture, and government services**—and that Hawai‘i needs a trained and culturally competent workforce of translators and interpreters to meet that need. The bill would establish a University of Hawai‘i-based program, administered by the UH SEED Office in collaboration with academic departments and key partners including the Department of Education and the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations.

**This bill creates standards and training so language access is competent, ethical, and consistent.** Under Hawai‘i’s state Language Access Law (HRS Chapter 321C), state agencies must take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access and provide **competent, timely** oral language services and translations of vital documents where required. SB3238 directly supports that mandate by creating a structured curriculum that includes:

- training in translation and interpretation, including **ethics, standards, and best practices**;



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[hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com](mailto:hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com)

- specialized instruction for interpreting in public service settings; and
- a certificate of completion, with required educational experiences including internship opportunities through DLIR's **Hele Imua** program.

**Reducing reliance on ad hoc, untrained interpretation prevents harm.** When agencies and institutions lack a sufficient pool of qualified interpreters and translators, people often end up relying on ad hoc interpretation (including family members or untrained staff). Research summarized by AHRQ's PSNet notes that professional interpreters are significantly less likely to commit errors translating clinical information than ad hoc interpreters—errors that can carry real-world consequences. SB3238 helps shift Hawai'i away from improvised systems toward a trained workforce that residents and agencies can rely on.

**SB3238 creates a clear career pathway for multilingual students—including Seal of Biliteracy recipients—while recognizing that proficiency is only the beginning.** SB3238 appropriately prioritizes admission for applicants who earned the HODOE **Seal of Biliteracy**, while also allowing other community members to qualify by demonstrating biliteracy proficiency (including through the **Global Seal of Biliteracy** credential). This is exactly the kind of “homegrown pipeline” Hawai'i needs: we can honor and build on bilingual students' skills while providing the specialized training required for professional interpretation and translation in high-stakes public service environments.

Hawai'i has already seen the Seal of Biliteracy grow substantially since its early years, demonstrating both student interest and the potential to build a larger multilingual talent pipeline. For example, UH reported that **37** HODOE graduates earned the Seal in 2017 (the first year), compared to **557** in the class of 2023. SB3238 helps ensure those students—and multilingual community members—have a meaningful next step into college, careers, and service.

**SB3238 strengthens state capacity to meet ongoing language access needs and address known gaps.** The State Auditor has highlighted that Hawai'i has a significant limited-English-proficient population and that interpreters and translators may be needed to navigate a wide range of government activities and services. The Auditor also raised concerns about how Hawai'i builds and verifies interpreter/translator capacity, underscoring why workforce development, training, and clear standards matter. SB3238 is a practical solution: it invests in people and creates structured preparation for this essential work.

**Education and workforce benefits matter too.** Research on multilingual and dual-language learning models shows benefits for language development and student outcomes, reinforcing that



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[hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com](mailto:hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com)

multilingualism is an asset Hawai‘i should cultivate into real opportunities. SB3238 is aligned with that evidence—and with Hawai‘i’s values.

**Funding is essential.** SB3238 would appropriate general funds for FY 2026–2027, including funding to establish **three (3.0) FTE positions**, to ensure the program can be implemented effectively. HCIR urges the Legislature to **fully fund** this program so it can build sustainable, statewide capacity.

For these reasons, HCIR respectfully urges the Committee to **PASS SB3238**.

With gratitude,

Liza Ryan Gill  
Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights (HCIR)



To: The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Education

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President  
Mike Nguyen, Director of Public Policy  
Maria Rallojay, Public Policy Specialist

Hearing: Wednesday, February 18, 2026, 1:02pm, Conference Room 229

RE: **SB3283 Relating to Language Access**

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AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support** of **SB3238**. This measure establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i.

AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan founded by Hawai'i's Community Health Centers and the Queen Emma Clinics. We serve over 66,000 Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dual-eligible residents on all islands. Since 1994, AlohaCare has partnered with providers, government entities, and community-based organizations to meet the evolving needs of our safety net community as Hawai'i's only health plan focused solely on Medicaid-eligible individuals. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for equitable access to quality, whole-person care for all.

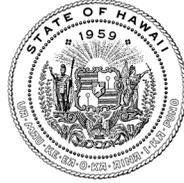
AlohaCare's commitment to whole-person care and health equity includes addressing various social determinants of health. With half our members mainly speaking languages other than English, we understand that language can be a barrier to receiving care. We appreciate the intent of this measure to address this barrier by growing a trained, culturally competent workforce.

With the upcoming implementation of community engagement requirements for various federal programs, such as Medicaid, this measure is also a smart workforce development investment that simultaneously strengthens language access across public systems and expands meaningful career pathways for bilingual residents.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support** of **SB3238**.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY  
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS  
KA 'OIHANA PONO LIMAHANA

February 9, 2026

To: The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair,  
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair, and  
Members of the Senate Committee on Education

Date: Monday, February 9, 2026  
Time: 1:05 p.m.  
Place: Conference Room 229, State Capitol

From: Jade T. Butay, Director  
Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR)

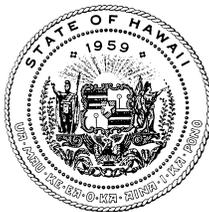
**Re: S.B. 3238 RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS**

The DLIR **supports** this measure provided it does not conflict with the priorities identified in the Governor's Executive Supplemental Budget request. DLIR will defer to the University of Hawaii (UH) as the lead agency on internal implementation matters and bill language should the measure continue through the legislative process.

This measure creates a structured pathway to address the need for language interpreters by offering training and paid internship opportunities. These initiatives will help develop bilingual workers to meet the State's language access and workforce needs.

DLIR's Hele Imua program provides residents, including students, with internship opportunities in both public and private sectors. DLIR is prepared to collaborate with UH to offer eligible students work-based learning and workplace exposure through the proposed language access education and workforce development program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter.



**STATE OF HAWAII  
OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS**

1177 Alakea Street, Room B-100  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
Phone: (808) 586-8730 / Fax: (808) 586-8733  
doh.ola@doh.hawaii.gov

February 18, 2026  
Time: 1:02 PM  
ROOM 229 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT  
SB 3238, RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS**

**Testifier: May Mizuno, Executive Director, Office of Language Access**

**Purpose: Establishes a language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i.**

Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, members of the committee on Education, good morning. My name is May Mizuno, executive director of the Office of Language Access. The Office of Language Access (OLA) submits this testimony in strong support of **SB 3238** - Relating to Language Access to establish language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawaii. This bill would help to provide career experience and opportunities for multilingual students, such as those who obtained Seal of Biliteracy from HODOE.

For two decades, our office has monitored the implementation of HRS 321C, and the single greatest barrier to compliance remains the critical shortage of qualified, local interpreters.

Professional training in ethics and standards is essential for public service. Relying on untrained "family interpreters" significantly increases the risk of medical errors, legal appeals, and privacy violations. This program ensures the "Meaningful Access" is also competent access, providing instruction in the best practices necessary for high stakes interpretation.

**SB 3238** addresses a critical and long-standing challenge faced by the State: the

shortage of trained, culturally competent translators and interpreters able to serve Hawaii's linguistically diverse communities, and language access is foundational to equity, civil rights compliance, and public trust.

This bill will bridge the existing gap between the Department of Education's Seal of Biliteracy and the professional workforce. By providing structured, statewide training pathway, we ensure that students' linguistic skills are converted into professional credentials that the State desperately needs, creating meaningful post-secondary career opportunities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT SB3238

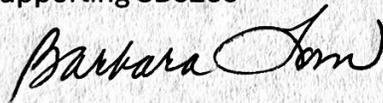
My name is Barbara Tom, and I am the Director of the Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Center. Through our work serving immigrant and migrant families in Waipahu and the surrounding communities, we have witnessed firsthand the serious challenges caused by the lack of adequate language access in Hawaii.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many limited English proficient residents –particularly from the Pacific Islands, Micronesian and Filipino communities did not receive timely or understandable information about testing sites, wrap around services, health service and emergency assistance. We saw these same gaps again during the Maui fire disaster, where families speaking Pacific Island languages and multiple Filipino dialects struggled to navigate relief services due to the absence of qualified interpreters and translated resources. These experiences demonstrated how language barriers can directly impact health, safety and recovery outcomes.

Hawai'i continues to face a shortage of trained and qualified language access professional across community, education and the health systems. For this reason, we strongly support SB3238. At Waipahu High School, we work closely with students who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy and are multilingual. These students represent an untapped and highly capable workforce that can help bridge critical language gaps in our communities. Creating education and workforce development pathways at the university level, including formal training, certification, and paid internships will strengthen the interpreter workforce, expand language access services statewide, and provide meaningful career opportunities for bilingual students. Investing in this pipeline will not only improve equity in public services but also empower local youth to serve their own communities.

Please consider supporting SB3238

Barbara Tom



Director

Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Center

808-392-5946



# HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

## KOMIKINA PONO KĪWILA O HAWAI‘I

830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 411, HONOLULU, HI 96813 · PHONE: (808) 586-8636 · FAX: (808) 586-8655 · TDD: (808) 586-8692

DATE: Monday, February 9, 2026  
TIME: 1:05 PM  
PLACE: Conference Room 229 & Videoconference  
State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street  
EDU

To:

[COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION](#)

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair

Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

From: Alphonso Braggs, Chair

and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

**Re: S.B. 3238 Relating to LANGUAGE ACCESS**

**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).

HCRC strongly supports SB3238 because diversity is Hawai‘i’s greatest strength, and language diversity is a vital part of that. This bill recognizes that the ability to communicate across languages is not just a cultural asset, it is an economic resource that

strengthens our workforce, expands access to essential services, and reflects our values of inclusivity and aloha.

SB3238 establishes a language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i. This program will create a clear pathway for bilingual and multilingual individuals, including graduates who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy, to become qualified translators and interpreters. By doing so, we ensure equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, emergency response, and government programs for all members of our community. This is the next meaningful step in supporting the language access pathway created by the Seal of Biliteracy.

Language access is about fairness and opportunity. It opens doors for individuals and families, and it helps businesses and public agencies serve our diverse population effectively. Investing in language access is investing in Hawai'i's future.

Mahalo for considering this important measure and for supporting a vision of Hawai'i that honors diversity and leads with aloha.



February 8, 2026

Position: **SUPPORT** of **SB3238**, Relating to Language Access

**To:** Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Education

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

**Re:** Testimony in SUPPORT of SB3238, Relating to Language Access

Hearing: Monday, February 9, 2026, 1:05 p.m.  
Conference Room 229, State Capitol

The Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women is dedicated to advancing gender equity and ensuring that all women have equitable access to public resources and opportunities. SB3238 is of significant interest to the Commission because **language access is a critical barrier to full participation** in education, employment, and civic life for many women and their families across our state. We stand in strong support of SB3238. The Commission is committed to dismantling systemic barriers that disproportionately affect women and girls across the diaspora and support legislative measures that **enable economic self-sufficiency**.

Research and best practices indicate that **access to language services** not only improves individual outcomes but also **strengthens** families and communities by fostering economic self-sufficiency and **civic engagement**. By supporting workforce development in this area, the bill **addresses both immediate translation and interpretation service needs** and the long-term goal of **building a more inclusive, multilingual workforce**.

A dedicated program at the University of Hawaii would **help cultivate local professionals** skilled in language access, ethics, and best practices, thereby expanding the availability of culturally and linguistically appropriate services statewide.

I respectfully urge this Committee to **pass SB3238**, in support of this important investment in workforce development and the expansion of language access services.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB3238 - RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

### Senate Committee on Education

Sen. Donna Mercado Kim, Chair

Sen. Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

February 8, 2026

Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

The Legal Clinic (TLC) strongly supports SB3238, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i. TLC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing immigrant justice in Hawai'i through immigration legal services, community education, and policy advocacy. Ensuring equitable access to justice and public services for individuals with limited English proficiency is central to our mission and to the well-being of the communities we serve.

Language barriers remain a significant obstacle for many immigrants and migrants in Hawai'i. Limited access to qualified interpretation and translation services can prevent individuals from understanding their legal rights, accessing public safety protections, and meaningfully engaging with government agencies. These barriers often result in delayed or denied access to critical services, misunderstandings in legal proceedings, and reduced trust in public institutions.

SB3238 offers a sustainable solution to these challenges. Research and national best practices consistently demonstrate that increased language access improves outcomes in legal and public safety settings. Accurate and culturally competent interpretation reduces miscommunication, promotes procedural fairness, and supports due process. Strengthening language access also enhances public safety by encouraging individuals to report crimes and cooperate with investigations without fear that language barriers will prevent them from being understood or treated fairly.

SB3238's focus on workforce development is well-aligned with community needs. Collaboration with public service agencies and community organizations will help ensure that training reflects real-world service demands. At TLC, much of our legal services work depends on third-party interpreters, and we anticipate continued demand for these language services in the years ahead. We particularly encourage recruitment and training of interpreters with specialized knowledge of legal terminology and understanding of the unique and often sensitive circumstances faced by immigrants, refugees, and survivors of crime navigating the legal system.

SB3238 represents an important investment in fairness, access to justice, and the effectiveness of Hawai'i's public service systems. We appreciate the Legislature's commitment to language access and look forward to supporting the successful implementation of this important initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christina Sablan', written in a cursive style.

Christina Sablan

Community & Policy Advocate

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:27:30 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Matthew B. Johnson	Testifying for Pacific Gateway Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Pacific Gateway Center

In SUPPORT of SB3238

Committee on Education

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair

Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Feb 18, 2026

Dear Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle N. Kidani, and members of the Committee on Education.

My name is Matthew B. Johnson, the Executive Director of Pacific Gateway Center, and I submit this testimony in support of SB3238, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i and appropriates funds.

Founded in 1973, Pacific Gateway Center (PGC) is a Hawaii-based nonprofit dedicated to empowering immigrants, refugees, and other underserved communities to achieve economic self-sufficiency and integration. Originally established to support Southeast Asian refugees, PGC has expanded over the past five decades to provide workforce development, small business support, agriculture programs, and social services to individuals from more than 100 countries. Central to this mission is ensuring meaningful language access, which allows clients to fully understand their rights, access critical services, pursue employment and business opportunities, and engage confidently in their communities. Without culturally and linguistically appropriate support, many

newcomers face significant barriers to success, making language access essential to advancing equity, economic mobility, and long-term stability for immigrant families.

SB3238 addresses a real gap in Hawai‘i’s ability to meet language access needs statewide. Hawai‘i has a State Language Access Law (HRS 321C) requiring meaningful, timely language services, and agencies develop Language Access Plans—but workforce capacity gaps remain. Families with limited English proficiency still face barriers to accessing critical services, including education, healthcare, legal assistance, tax help, and social services.

This bill would create a clear, structured pathway for multilingual students to develop professional skills and credentials, turning bilingual ability into trained workforce capacity. Programs like HDOE’s Seal of Biliteracy recognize bilingual proficiency, but there is no consistent statewide pathway that connects that achievement to professional interpreter/translator training and ethical standards. SB3238 helps build that bridge—supporting students to become college- and career-ready while strengthening Hawai‘i’s ability to deliver language access that is accurate, consistent, and safe.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee PASS SB3238.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Matthew B. Johnson

Pacific Gateway Center



COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Sen. Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Sen. Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair

HEARING:  
Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 1:02 PM  
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference  
State Capitol

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 3238, RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

Aloha Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, Sen. Hashimoto of Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Veronica Mendoza, Founding Executive Director of Roots Reborn and a founding coalition member of El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui - The People in Action Maui. Roots Reborn strongly supports **SB 3238**, Relating to Language Access, which establishes a language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawaii and appropriates monies.

Roots Reborn is a grassroots, multicultural immigrant-justice and disaster-response organization serving migrant and immigrant communities on Maui and beyond. Born out of the August 2023 wildfires, we immediately stepped in to move aid, navigate systems alongside families, and build the trusted relationships that still anchor our work today. What began as wildfire response has grown into essential infrastructure for immigrant communities facing overlapping crises—from recovery and housing instability to shifting federal policies, increased enforcement, and rising fear.

In our work we have identified risks to our community presented by unnecessary barriers, such as the current significant unmet need for qualified bilingual assistance. In our work helping Maui wildfire survivors navigate disaster recovery, health care, and legal representation, we have identified lack of qualified bilingual assistance as a significant barrier. At the time of the wildfires, about one-third of Lahaina residents were foreign born, and 36% aged five and older spoke a language other than English at home. Roots Reborn has helped close some of the gap with disaster management and legal program language assistance. However, the need for bilingual assistance, especially for mental health and physical health treatment, is preventing survivors from receiving the care that they need to recover from the disaster. This is why SB 3238 is so greatly needed.

Senate Bill 3238 creates a pathway to increase Hawai'i's language access workforce by drawing upon our existing communities. It supports multilingual students by creating training opportunities, career experience, and professional pathways to become trained, qualified interpreters/translators and bilingual professionals. Being bilingual is not the same as being trained to interpret or translate. Professional language access requires specialized skills, confidentiality standards, and ethics. Establishing a statewide program helps ensure language access is competent, ethical, and consistent. We **urge you to support SB 3238** and to vote to pass it out of this committee.

Sinceramente,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Veronica Mendoza', written over a horizontal line.

Veronica Mendoza  
Maui Roots Reborn, *Founding Executive Director*  
El Pueblo en Accion Maui, *Founding Coalition Member*

**Testimony of Terrina Wong  
In SUPPORT of SB3238**

My name is Terrina Wong and I submit this testimony in support of SB3238, a bill that establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i.

I recently retired as the Deputy Director of Immigration and Social Services at Pacific Gateway Center. I served as Chair of the Language Access Advisory Council of the Office of Language Access and as a presenter to Waipahu High School’s Multilingual Marauders under the tutelage of its teacher, Jeremiah Brown. I also served on many ad hoc language access committees during Covid-19 and the Maui Wildfires. I was authorized to conduct immigration legal services as an Accredited Representative with the Department of Justice for Pacific Gateway Center since 2018 to ensure access to justice for low-income immigrants. As such, my daily interaction with the foreign-born provides me with first-hand knowledge of the importance of having trained interpreters and translators to support this vulnerable sector of our community.

I am testifying as an individual and do not represent the University of Hawaii and I am pleased to offer this testimony on behalf of myself as a civically engaged and concerned individual citizen for the well-being of our community.

As the language of the bill identifies, language access is not a luxury—it is foundational to social justice to ensure equitable access to programs, services and opportunities in education, healthcare, legal services, and emergency government programs. In a state as diverse as Hawaii, our multilingual population is one of our greatest strengths; however, this strength can only be realized when we bridge the communication gap with a trained, culturally competent workforce.

The norms of our State inherently value our multilingual, multicultural community. However, we also recognize that the 1 out of 5 foreign-born residents in Hawaii are disproportionately at-risk and we must find ways to ensure our community who speaks English “less than very well” have access to good and trusted information.

SB3238 provides a structural framework to address the shortage of qualified interpreters and translators. We must learn from the pandemic and the Maui wildfires that have taught us we were not able to satisfactorily meet the needs of the limited English proficient due to the shortage of qualified interpreters and translators. The bill’s emphasis on the Department of Education’s Seal of Biliteracy is a practical way to keep local talent in the islands. It transforms a student’s existing linguistic skills that honor their heritage languages and proficiency in English into a marketable professional asset, providing a clear bridge from high school to a career in public service or healthcare.

The integration with the Hele Imua internship program through the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations ensures that participants receive hands-on experience in public service settings, including agriculture and social services, while potentially receiving the financial support necessary to complete their education.

Ensuring that every resident can understand their doctor, participate in their child's education, and navigate the legal system is a matter of statewide concern and constitutional duty. This bill creates a "win-win" scenario: it strengthens our workforce development and ensures that our most vulnerable non-English speaking residents are treated with the dignity and clarity they deserve.

I urge you to support this measure. Our methods of communication of critical information must be accessible and equitable to all Hawaii residents. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Terrina Wong

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 8:37:57 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dr. Jeffrey Miguel Acido	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:**

My name is Dr. Jeffrey T. Acido. I am an instructor at Leeward Community College and the Coordinator—and sole full-time faculty member—of the Filipino Studies Program. I am writing in **strong support of SB 3238**.

This bill is deeply needed. In my work with students, I see firsthand the tremendous talent and potential of Hawai‘i’s bilingual learners. A significant number of my students are Ilokano-Filipino and speak both English and Ilokano. These linguistic abilities are a major asset to Hawai‘i, particularly in critical fields such as healthcare, education, and public services.

However, I want to be clear: **speaking Ilokano does not automatically mean one is able to translate professionally between Ilokano and English**. Interpretation and translation require specialized training, ethical standards, and precision. SB 3238 is important because it allows us to professionalize language services—being careful, intentional, and selective about who is qualified to translate in high-stakes settings.

I share this not only as an educator, but as a son. I have taken my Ilokano-speaking father to medical appointments where no Ilokano translator was available. When translation was provided, it was often done in Tagalog instead. For my father, hearing critical medical information in his **native Ilokano**, not an adjacent language, is essential for understanding, trust, and dignity.

SB 3238 affirms that our languages matter. It ensures respectful, culturally appropriate services while strengthening Hawai‘i’s multilingual workforce. This bill gives our communities dignity and ensures better outcomes in health, education, and beyond.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 3238.

**Mahalo,**

Dr. Jeffrey T. Acido

Instructor, Leeward Community College

Coordinator, Filipino Studies Program



**Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Senate Members of the Committee on Education,**

My name Patricia Halagao, and I am writing in strong support of SB 3238, which seeks to establish a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i.

I am a professor of Education and Co-Director of the Center for Philippine Studies at the University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa. I am testifying as an individual; I do not represent the University of Hawai‘i. I am also a former member of the Hawai‘i State Board of Education, where I spearheaded the adoption of the Seal of Biliteracy (Policy 105-15) and the Multilingualism for Equitable Education Policy (Policy 105-14) in 2016.

HB 2005 closely aligns with my professional work to uplift communities through education, language, and culture. As one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse states in the nation, Hawai‘i has a responsibility to ensure that all residents—regardless of English proficiency—can effectively navigate state systems. This requires meaningful access to language services, including bilingual assistance, interpretation, and translation, across state agencies. Such services are essential for accessing critical state-provided resources related to education, legal services, employment, healthcare, and agricultural assistance.

HB 2005 builds on the strengths and assets of Hawai‘i’s multilingual communities by enabling them to support one another. I strongly believe HB 2005 is especially effective because it addresses multiple needs simultaneously: it expands access to high-quality language services while also creating employment and career pathways. Professional interpreting and translation require specialized skills and rigorous training, and this bill ensures the establishment of a strong, standards-based training program to prepare qualified professionals.

Importantly, this program would create meaningful career experience and opportunities for our multilingual students, including those who earn the Seal of Biliteracy through the Hawai‘i Department of Education. I am proud to share that between 2017 and 2025, HIDOE has awarded the Seal of Biliteracy to over 3,000 students across more than 100 languages. Beyond the well-documented academic benefits of multilingualism, this workforce development program would allow our students to make even broader social impact and civic contributions.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support SB 3238. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

**Sincerely,**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia Halagao". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P".

Patricia Halagao

## TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SB3238 Relating to Language Access

**TO:** Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee on Education

**FROM:** Helena Manzano

**DATE:** February 9, 2026

Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in **strong support of SB3238**. I provide this testimony as an individual with years of professional experience working to ensure Hawai`i residents have fair and equal access to state programs, services, and benefits.

Language should not be a barrier in navigating and fully participating in our state systems. While we already have a State Language Access Law (HRS 321C), we face a practical challenge: the demand for language assistance services far exceeds our current supply of qualified interpreters and translators. To make our laws work as intended, we need a structured and sustainable pathway to effectively equip those who provide these services.

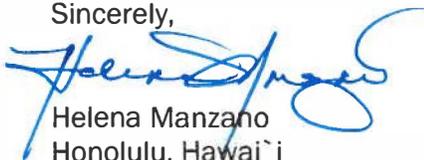
My support for this bill is based on three points:

- **Bilingualism is only the starting point.** There is a common misconception that being bilingual is enough to be an interpreter or translator. Professional or “qualified” interpreting and translating require a solid grasp of ethical standards, adherence to confidentiality, and working knowledge of specialized techniques and terminologies. In my experience, relying on untrained individuals is not only inefficient—it is a liability. It introduces bias and subjectivity that can lead to serious mistakes or compromised outcomes, particularly in healthcare, education, human services, and legal proceedings.
- **Our local talent pool.** Since 2017, the Hawai`i Department of Education has seen a 54% average annual increase in students earning the *Seal of Biliteracy*. With over 3,000 students already recognized for their language skills, SB3238 creates the necessary path to turn that classroom success into a professional career in Hawai`i.
- **A workforce solution for the State.** By establishing this program at the University of Hawai`i, we create a “pipeline” of trained and qualified language assistance providers. This builds state capacity to serve the public effectively and maintain compliance with the law.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo for your time and for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Helena Manzano  
Honolulu, Hawai`i

Email. yve\_manzano@yahoo.com

## Testimony in Support of SB3238- Relating to Language Access

February 4, 2026

Senate Committee on Education

Aloha Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle Kidani, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jeremiah Brown, and I am the multilingual learners program coordinator at Waipahu High School. I am writing in strong support of SB3238, which establishes a statewide Language Access Education and Workforce Development Program at the University of Hawai'i.

In my role as an educator, I work closely with multilingual students and their families. I have also run student translator programs at my school. Through these experiences, I have seen firsthand both the incredible linguistic assets our students bring to their schools and communities and the real need for structured training, ethical guidance, and clear pathways into professional language access work.

In each of the past three years, over 100 students have graduated from Waipahu High School with the Seal of Biliteracy. These students demonstrate high levels of proficiency in English and at least one additional language, and many already serve informally as translators and interpreters for their families, attending doctor's appointments, helping fill out forms, and even file tax returns. While their willingness to help is admirable and often necessary, they shouldn't be placed in those roles as a qualified, trained interpreter or translator would be more appropriate.

SB3238 directly addresses this need, a need that was made clear during the pandemic and the aftermath of the Maui wildfires. By creating a structured, statewide program that builds on the Seal of Biliteracy and provides training and paid internship opportunities, this bill validates students' linguistic skills while also protecting the communities they serve. It transforms what is currently informal, uneven, and often uncompensated labor into a professional pathway that benefits both students and the State of Hawai'i.

This bill also sends the important message that students' home languages and cultural knowledge are strengths that are valued, needed, and worthy of investment. For many multilingual students, especially those from immigrant families, this recognition can be life-changing. It connects school success to meaningful career opportunities and directly supports Hawai'i's language access obligations across state agencies.

From my experience in schools, I can say with confidence that there is both student interest and workforce need for a program like the one proposed in SB3238. My school alone sends out dozens of multilingual graduates into the workforce every year. This bill builds on existing successes, such as the Seal of Biliteracy, and thoughtfully extends them into higher education and workforce development.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support SB3238. Mahalo for your time, your consideration, and your continued commitment to equity, access, and opportunity for Hawai'i's diverse communities.

Respectfully,

Jeremiah Brown  
Multilingual Learners program coordinator  
Waipahu High School

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB3238  
RELATING TO Language Access  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

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

Hearing Date: February 18, 2026

Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the Committee on Education,

My name is Dina Yoshimi, and I submit this testimony in support of SB 3238, a bill that establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i.

I have been a faculty member at the University of Hawai'i Mānoa for 33 years, and have been the Director of the Hawai'i Language Roadmap Initiative since the launch of the Hawai'i Language Roadmap in September 2013. The Roadmap played a key role in supporting the creation of the Seal of Biliteracy, and has subsequently provided educational and workforce development opportunities for Seal of Biliteracy candidates and high school bilinguals across the state, including training in career skills for participating in a multilingual workforce. Today I am testifying as an individual and do not represent the University of Hawai'i.

The linguistic heritage of our bilingual students as well as the hard-earned proficiency of our students who commit the hours required to master an additional language is an invaluable asset to the state. The DOE has provided the Seal of Biliteracy as a meaningful and valuable recognition of these students' abilities. The recognition is meaningful in that it is the only way our state communicates to bilinguals and proficient learners that their linguistic talent is worth celebrating and maintaining. The recognition is valuable in that employers who see the Seal of Biliteracy on a resume know that the student has demonstrated proficiency in English and an additional language at least at a functional level of fluency. (Without the evidence-based Seal of Biliteracy, the claim is based on the applicant's subjective judgment of their own abilities.) I know a number of students who have been hired for their language skills in the local workforce based on their status as Seal of Biliteracy recipients.

The state needs a program to nurture this growing pool of talent. There are now thousands of students who have earned the Seal of Biliteracy, and hundreds more who have earned the internationally-recognized Global Seal of Biliteracy through testing opportunities provided by the Roadmap. The program proposed by this bill provides a welcome

opportunity for these individuals to continue to develop their skills to serve the multilingual needs of the state. As the language of the bill identifies, language access is not a luxury—it is a fundamental requirement for ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, legal services, and emergency government programs. In a state as diverse as Hawaii, our multilingual population is one of our greatest strengths; however, this strength can only be realized when we bridge the communication gap with a trained, culturally competent workforce.

SB3238 provides a structural framework to address the shortage of qualified interpreters and translators. The bill's emphasis on the Department of Education's Seal of Biliteracy is a practical way to keep local talent in the islands. It transforms a student's existing linguistic skills into a marketable professional asset, providing a clear bridge from high school to a career in public service or healthcare.

The integration with the Hele Imua internship program through the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations ensures that participants receive hands-on experience in public service settings, including agriculture and social services, while potentially receiving the financial support necessary to complete their education.

Ensuring that every resident can understand their doctor, participate in their child's education, and navigate the legal system is a matter of statewide concern and constitutional duty. This bill creates a "win-win" scenario: it strengthens our workforce development and ensures that our most vulnerable non-English speaking residents are treated with the dignity and clarity they deserve.

I urge you to support this measure. Thank you for your time and consideration.

# Testimony in Support of SB2328- Language Access Education & Workforce Development Program (UH)

Committee on Education

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

Hearing Date: Feb 18, 2026

Dear Chair Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Michelle N. Kidani, and members of the Committee on Education.

My name is Jeremiah Brown, and I am the multilingual learners program coordinator at Waipahu High School. I am writing in strong support of SB2328, which establishes a statewide Language Access Education and Workforce Development Program at the University of Hawai'i.

In my role as an educator, I work closely with multilingual students and their families. I have also run student translator programs at my school. Through these experiences, I have seen firsthand both the incredible linguistic assets our students bring to their schools and communities and the real need for structured training, ethical guidance, and clear pathways into professional language access work.

A teacher at Kealekahe High School has also been running a student translator program for several years, demonstrating that there is a statewide talent pool and that there are programs in place that can be built on to create a pipeline of students interested in this work.

In each of the past three years, over 100 students have graduated from Waipahu High School with the Seal of Biliteracy. These students demonstrate high levels of proficiency in English and at least one additional language, and many already serve informally as translators and interpreters for their families, attending doctor's appointments, helping fill out forms, and even file tax returns. While their willingness to help is admirable and often necessary, they shouldn't be placed in those roles as a qualified, trained interpreter or translator would be more appropriate.

SB2328 directly addresses this need, a need that was made clear during the pandemic and the aftermath of the Maui wildfires. By creating a structured, statewide program that builds on the Seal of Biliteracy and provides training and paid internship opportunities, this bill validates students' linguistic skills while also protecting the communities they serve. It transforms what is currently informal, uneven, and often uncompensated labor into a professional pathway that benefits both students and the State of Hawai'i.

This bill also sends the important message that students' home languages and cultural knowledge are strengths that are valued, needed, and worthy of investment. For many multilingual students, especially those from immigrant families, this recognition can be life-changing. It connects school success to meaningful career opportunities and directly supports Hawai'i's language access obligations across state agencies.

From my experience in schools, I can say with confidence that there is both student interest and workforce need for a program like the one proposed in SB2328. My school alone sends out

dozens of multilingual graduates into the workforce every year. This bill builds on existing successes, such as the Seal of Biliteracy, and thoughtfully extends them into higher education and workforce development.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support and pass SB2328. Mahalo for your time, your consideration, and your continued commitment to equity, access, and opportunity for Hawai'i's diverse communities.

Respectfully,

Jeremiah Brown  
Multilingual Learners program coordinator  
Waipahu High School

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:24:44 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Judith Mills-Wong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill to prepare more qualified translators and interpreters.

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
Sen. Donna Mercado Kim, Chair  
Sen. Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 1:02 PM  
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference  
State Capitol

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 3238, RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

Aloha Chair Mercado Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, Sen. Hashimoto of Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Andrews and I am a long-term resident of Wailuku, Maui. I am also an attorney licensed in the state of Hawaii for over 25 years and a founding coalition member of El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui – The People in Action Maui. Earlier in my career I was also certified by the Japanese government in level one Japanese language interpretation. I am writing in **strong support of SB 3238**, Relating to Language Access, which establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawaii and appropriates funds.

Early in my career, I was the founding Program Manager of the Maui Economic Development Board's Women in Technology Project, where I worked on equity in STEM as a workforce development issue for many years, and wrote over ten peer-reviewed papers on best practices in the field. In that capacity, I identified barriers to workforce development, those elements in the training to workforce pipeline that led to shortages of skilled workers, especially in our neighbor island community. As a volunteer with El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui – The People in Action Maui, I have also witnessed how the unmet need for bilingual assistance impacts our community as a whole, with people unable to access legal services, health care resources, and social services as the result of lack of language access.

It is important to note that trained, qualified interpreters with appropriate skills, confidentiality standards, and ethics are very needed. I remember when I was a volunteer with the Family Court Monitoring Project some years ago, observing an interaction between the court and a Japanese national visitor, who was before the court on charges of domestic violence. A staff member of the hotel where he was staying served as his "interpreter" for the day. This was not appropriate, as she was not a trained or qualified interpreter for courtroom work. I witnessed the court ask a question of the accused, and the hotel staff providing the accused the question on behalf of the court. I also witnessed the accused make extremely inappropriate statements in Japanese, berating the court and also making statements that, essentially, the victim deserved it, and that the whole thing of being in court was nonsense. I then witnessed the hotel staff give a completely different interpretation than what the man said. She was very polite, apologetic, and deferential. I hoped that the court picked up on the man's body language, tone, and facial expression and recognized that the interpretation was inaccurate.

This experience of witnessing such inaccurate and inappropriate interpretation in front of a family court judge in a case of domestic violence was shocking to me. I hope that it highlights for the Committee the importance of the goals of SB 3238 to provide professionally trained interpreters. I request that you support language access and **vote in support of SB 3238**.

Mahalo for all you do for your constituents and community,

Christine Andrews, JD  
Wailuku, Maui

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 1:41:50 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Deanna Espinas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this measure.

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee,

My name is Debra Andres Arellano, and I am writing to express my strong support for SB 3238. I submit this testimony drawing upon my 15 years of experience as an educator and a former board member of Kaibigan ng Lahaina, a culturally responsive disaster response organization founded after the Lahaina wildfires. I am currently an Instructor of Ilokano Language for UH Maui College, however, I am submitting this testimony today as a private citizen.

As a former administrator, I can attest that our primary duty has always been to the families in our community. However, we have never been able to fully nurture our multilingual students in a way that allows them to support our community because we have never received the necessary support from the state through an established fund or pathway.

Throughout my career, I have seen an increase in Ilokano heritage learners gaining interest in learning their native language, but there is currently no clear avenue for gainful employment for these students once they reach proficiency. Since 2017, the HODOE has awarded the State Seal of Biliteracy to over 3,000 students, but there is still no established pathway for these graduates to transition into the workforce as qualified interpreters and translators. These students represent a "valuable pipeline," yet their linguistic wealth remains an underutilized resource.

SB 3238 provides the solution by establishing a language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawaii. This program will create meaningful career opportunities and develop a qualified bilingual workforce to serve Hawaii's diverse communities. By providing a structured curriculum and paid internship opportunities, this bill transforms a student's linguistic skills into a marketable professional asset.

The Lahaina wildfires underscored that language access is a fundamental requirement for equitable access to healthcare and emergency services. While we have language access laws, state agencies often struggle to provide services because the demand for qualified professionals far outstrips the current supply.

In addition, professional translation requires specialized training in ethics and technical standards that goes beyond mere bilingualism. I respectfully urge you to pass SB3238 to invest in our heritage learners and fulfill our state's commitment to meaningful language access.

I respectfully urge you to pass SB 3238 to invest in our local talent and fulfill our state's commitment to meaningful language access.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Debra Andres Arellano

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:29:31 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Mariana Monasi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We live in a multicultural place, with lots of different languages, therefore I support the creation of a fund the education and workforce centered initiative that would expand language access statewide.

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:29:31 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Judith Mura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Judith Mura stongly support SB3238

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:31:12 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Marcela Montalto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Establishing a language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai‘i is a vital step toward ensuring equitable access to essential services for all residents. Hawai‘i is one of the most linguistically diverse states in the nation, and many individuals face barriers when accessing healthcare, education, legal services, and government programs due to limited English proficiency. By investing in training and workforce development, this bill will help build a qualified pipeline of interpreters and translators while creating meaningful career opportunities for local residents. This program will strengthen public service delivery, improve community outcomes, and support a more inclusive and responsive Hawai‘i for everyone.

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 12:04:30 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Carolyn Weygan-Hildebrand	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Greetings! Multilingualism is a "currency" that Hawaii, and its premiere public university, should have encouraged a long time ago with what this bill seeks. Recognition and supporting language competencies will make graduates more competent whether they choose the public or private sector or both. It will make Hawaii better at building communities and more able at diversifying the economy. Mahalo.

**LATE**

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 1:20:03 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Marnelli Joy Ulep	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Kim, Vice Chair Kidani, and members of the Senate Committee on Education,

My name is Marnelli Joy B. Ulep, and I submit this testimony in support of SB3238, a bill that establishes a statewide language access education and workforce development program at the University of Hawai'i.

I am a resident of Waipahu and have worked in higher education for over 15 years. I provide this testimony on behalf of myself as an individual citizen.

Language access is not a luxury; it is a fundamental requirement for equitable access to healthcare, education, and legal services. In a state as linguistically diverse as Hawai'i, bridging communication gaps with a trained, culturally competent workforce necessary.

SB3238 provides the opportunity to address this shortage by transforming existing linguistic skills into professional assets. By utilizing the HODOE Seal of Biliteracy, it leverages the HODOE's existing recognition to create opportunities that can contribute to a student's career and provide hands-on experience.

This bill creates a "win-win" scenario by strengthening local workforce development while fulfilling our mandate to provide meaningful access to all residents, regardless of the language they speak.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**LATE**

**SB-3238**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 5:31:20 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/18/2026 1:02:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kalae	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm writing in support of SB 3238 because Hawai'i really needs more trained interpreters and translators. Across schools, hospitals, courts, and other public services. We already have a lot of bilingual students and community members, and this bill creates a clear pathway for them to get proper certification for a skill they already have that can be recognized with a certificate through UH.

**LATE**

**Written Testimony in Support of 2005 HB RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS**

Krystina Begonia, MD

Regarding 2005 HB RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

9/17/2026

My name is Krystina Begonia, MD and I am a resident of Kalihi, primary care physician at a Federally Qualified Health Center on O’ahu, and descendant of Filipino and Samoan immigrants. I am testifying on how the lack of funding for language access training and workforce in Hawai’i affects my patients’ health and ability to access healthcare that they deserve.

Majority of my patients require an interpreter in order to have a comprehensive and clear understanding of their physical and mental conditions—the information needed to make confident decisions about their health. When there is no interpreter available for visits of patients who do not speak English fluently (especially for languages of Chuukese, Marshallese, Visayan, Ilocano), patients receive substandard care. It is common for patients to get referred to specialists at outside hospitals and health care facilities—many return to say that they did not understand their options because an interpreter was unavailable. Some health facilities rely on family members to provide interpretation, but to provide a high standard of care (which every patient deserves), a trained certified medical interpreter is necessary. It can be difficult for family members, many who have limited English and/or medical proficiency, to adequately provide interpretation of complex medical details. It can also be difficult to maintain the health confidentiality that patients deserve when family members are involved.

I wanted to share my story because language access is a right every patient should have. Language access is power. It allows patients to access health care, to advocate for themselves in hospitals and in their housing, to be informed and be able to fully understand their options. Language access allows me to do my job well as a physician—to provide good care to my community. Language access allows parents to partner with health care providers to keep their families healthy.

Increasing resources and funding for training and increasing the workforce of interpreters in Hawaii is a way to help ensure adequate language access for all in our community spaces.

Thank you for reading my testimony. Your consideration of these matters and solutions is very much appreciated.