



**STATE HEALTH PLANNING
AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO

JOSH GREEN, MD
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII

KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOHN C. (JACK) LEWIN, MD
ADMINISTRATOR

February 13, 2026

TO: SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair
Honorable Members

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

RE: **SB 3239 -- RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS**

HEARING: Wednesday, February 18, 2026 @ 3:00 pm; Conference Room 016

POSITION: SUPPORT with COMMENTS

Testimony:

SHPDA strongly supports SB 3239 with comments.

SB 3239 funds the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA) to expand bilingual resources and services so residents with limited English proficiency can receive—and act on—critical emergency information in real time.

From a health system standpoint, language access during disasters is a core safety function. When evacuation orders, shelter rules, medication guidance, and assistance instructions are not understood, the predictable result is preventable injury, delayed care, missed reunification, and avoidable emergency department utilization, especially for older adults, migrant workers, and mixed-status families. On Maui and across our neighbor islands, these risks concentrate in communities that already face barriers to primary care, transportation, and stable housing.

HIEMA's own language access planning framework considers a dedicated Limited English Proficiency Specialist function to coordinate compliance, training, vendor support, and reporting. This bill should therefore include sufficient, explicit funding for a permanent position and consideration towards working with trusted community organizations working with these non-English proficient populations. Trust is a key factor in emergency situations, and these organizations have done much of the groundwork already to establish these relationships.

For these reasons, SHPDA supports SB 3239.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

■ -- Jack Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA

SB 3239 testimony of SHPDA (2026), continued.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'

KENNETH FINK, MD, MGA, MPH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
KA LUNA HO'OKELE



CAROLINE CADIRAO
DIRECTOR

Telephone
(808) 586-0100

Fax
(808) 586-0185

STATE OF HAWAII
EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON AGING
NO. 1 CAPITOL DISTRICT
250 SOUTH HOTEL STREET, SUITE 406
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-2831

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB3239
Relating to Language Access

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY & MILITARY AFFAIRS
Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

Testimony of Caroline Cadirao
Director, Executive Office on Aging
Attached Agency to the Department of Health

Hearing: Wednesday, February 18, 2026, 3:00 P.M., Conference Room: 016

1 **EOA's Position:** The Executive Office on Aging (EOA), an attached agency to the Department
2 of Health supports SB3239.

3 **Fiscal Implications:** Appropriate funds to the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HI-
4 EMA) to expand access to bilingual resources and services for disaster preparedness and
5 emergency response.

6 **Purpose and Justification:** The purpose of this measure is to provide the Hawai'i Emergency
7 Management Agency (HI-EMA) with the resources necessary to meet the language access needs
8 of residents with limited English proficiency (LEP) and to uphold their civil rights under the
9 Civil Rights Act of 1964.

10 Hawai'i is the most ethnically diverse state in the nation. According to the 2022 U.S.
11 Census Bureau, an estimated 24.2% of Hawai'i residents age 5 and older speak a language other
12 than English at home. Approximately 150,000 to 152,600 residents (11.1%–11.4%) have Limited

1 English Proficiency. LEP can significantly impact access to essential services and critical
2 information.

3 Effective communication before, during, and after an emergency is vital. Language
4 access ensures that non-English speakers receive timely and accurate instructions for safety,
5 evacuation, and medical care. This is not only a civil rights requirement - it is a life-saving
6 necessity.

7 **Recommendation:** EOA supports this measure and defers to the Hawai'i Emergency
8 Management Agency on its implementation.

9

10 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



STEPHEN F. LOGAN
MAJOR GENERAL
ADJUTANT GENERAL
KA 'AKUKANA KENELALA

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
KAHU HO'OMALU PŌULIA

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
KA 'OIHANA PILI KAUA
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
4204 DIAMOND HEAD ROAD
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96816-4420

STATE OF HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 3239,
RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC SAFETY & MILITARY AFFAIRS

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

February 18, 2026

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

I am writing to express **SUPPORT** for Senate Bill 3239, which appropriates funds to the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA) - to enhance its capacity to provide bilingual resources and services to residents with limited English proficiency (LEP).

As this bill highlights, Hawai'i is home to a significant foreign-born population—approximately 260,000 individuals, making up 18% of the State's population. Many of these residents speak languages other than English at home, including Ilokano, Tagalog, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Samoan, Tongan, and several Micronesian languages. Over 10% of the population have limited English proficiency, creating barriers to accessing critical emergency services.

HIEMA has an established language coordinator and aims to leverage collaboration with other state agencies to build a network of language support – to help save lives and foster community resilience. This effort will enhance outreach and coordination, ensuring that critical messages reach all members of our community, regardless of language barriers.

We respectfully request that standard language be included in this measure, provided it does not negatively impact the priorities of the Governor's executive budget. This ensures alignment with statewide fiscal planning while advancing critical language access initiatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 3239.

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



**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: 3:00 PM

ROOM 016 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT

SB3239, RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

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

Purpose: Appropriates funds for the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency to increase access to bilingual resources and services for residents with limited English proficiency.

Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Lee, members of the committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs, good afternoon. 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 SB3239 – Relating to appropriating funds for the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency to increase access to bilingual resources and services for residents with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). This bill would help to ensure that all residents of Hawai'i, regardless of their proficiency in the English language, have meaningful access to state-funded programs and services like emergency related services.

In Hawai'i, nearly one in four residents speaks a language other than English at home. When language barriers exist, they act as a wall between the people and essential services like healthcare, emergency alerts, and legal protection.

SB3239 will ensure that emergency notifications are disseminated in non-English languages spoken in the state, saving lives during natural disasters. Also, by streamlining translation and interpretation standards across departments, the State reduces the risk of costly litigation and administrative errors. In addition, SB3239 would align state practices with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, protecting Hawai'i from federal funding risks.

The OLA is committed to providing technical assistance necessary to implement the provisions of this bill. However, for these mandates to be effective, consistent funding and inter-agency cooperation are paramount. SB3239 provides the framework to turn meaningful "access" to government service from a buzzword into a reality for our LEP communities.

Language should never be a barrier to justice or safety. By passing SB3239, this Committee affirms its commitment to the diverse fabric of our islands and ensures that our government speaks to *everyone*.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

SB-3239

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 10:31:38 AM

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

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

Comments:

Testimony of Pacific Gateway Center

In SUPPORT of SB3239

Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair

Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Feb 18, 2026

Dear Chair Carol Fukunaga, Vice Chair Chris Lee, and members of the Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs.

My name is Matthew B. Johns, the Executive Director of Pacific Gateway Center, and I submit this testimony in support of SB3239, which supports HI-EMA’s ability to provide multilingual emergency communications and resources so residents with limited English proficiency can access timely and accurate emergency information and services.

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.

SB3239 is a public safety measure. In emergencies and disasters, communication is not optional—it is life-saving. Residents need to understand evacuation instructions, shelter locations, medical guidance, food and water distribution updates, and how to access recovery resources. When emergency messaging is not accessible across languages, communities can miss warnings, misunderstand instructions, delay seeking help, or be unable to navigate recovery systems. These gaps create preventable harm and deepen inequities.

Hawai‘i’s linguistic diversity means emergency preparedness must be inclusive by design. SB3239 strengthens statewide resilience by ensuring HI-EMA can communicate effectively with all residents and connect families to assistance during and after emergencies. Language access reduces confusion and misinformation, improves compliance with safety directives, and builds trust so communities engage with emergency systems earlier and recover faster.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee PASS SB3239.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Matthew B. Johnson

Pacific Gateway Center

SB-3239

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:12:01 PM

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

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

Comments:

Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Lee and members

My name is Amy Agbayani, President of The Legal Clinic Hawaii 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. I strongly endorse SB 3239 for it will increase language access capacity to meet HI-EMA’s mission. Our community acknowledges the contributions, rights, responsibilities of all people in our community, including persons with English Language proficiency. My testimony in support of this bill is informed by being an immigrant myself and working with immigrant communities, government agencies and immigrant groups.

Our state population is diverse, with 18% foreign-born population who come from many countries including Canada, Mexico and Japan. The majority of immigrants are from Asia and the Pacific with 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. 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 (or around 1 in 4) speak a language other than. English at home and 161,055 residents or 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 Cantonese, Ilokano, Tagalog, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Samoan, Tonga, Micronesian, Pohnpeian, Marshallese and Chuukese, Communicating in the languages they understand is critical to their ability to access services and resources. Many foreign-born residents including those 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.

This bill will help HiEMA and other government agencies provide LEP in our state receive services and meet language access mandates. Government, private companies and non-profit organizations need persons who are qualified to provide language access. Translators and interpreters were needed after the fires in Lahaina, a community with 30% foreign-born, 40% Filipino and a significant percentage LEP. The recent weather emergency announcement should be available in multiple languages to insure safety with assistance from government agencies. HI-EMA coordinates and has partnerships with other agencies (eg health services) during emergencies as well as preparation and after emergencies.

In addition to strongly supporting SB 3239, I am also supporting SB2109 requesting funds for a statewide public education and communications plan for emergency preparedness. SB2109 is broad and could include a communication plan that is multilingual and serves LEP persons in the state. It should be noted that language access resources for HiEMA is important but that other state agencies must also address language access needs, e.g. the majority of bilingual service needs are in the area of health and the Department of Health administers SHIPDA and the Office of Language Access, units that can provide language translations and interpretations if provided funds to contract with non profit and for-profit organizations that can hire bilingual staff. Bilingual persons are urgently needed at Hi-EMA, the Department of Health and other state agencies.

I respectfully request support for SB 3239 and other communication bills supporting language access for disadvantaged community members who are not proficient in their language.



COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Sen. Carol Fukunaga, Chair

Sen. Chris Lee, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 3:00 pm

Conference Room 016 & Videoconference

State Capitol

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 3239, RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

Aloha Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Lee, Senator 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 3239**, Relating to Language Access, which appropriates funds for the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency to increase access to bilingual resources and services for residents with limited English proficiency.

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 3239 is so greatly needed.

As a Maui-based disaster-response organization serving migrant and immigrant communities, the appropriation of funds for the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency to increase access to bilingual resources and services for residents with limited English proficiency is necessary, timely, and responsive to community needs. We **urge you to support SB 3239** and to vote to pass it out of this committee.

Sinceramente,

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

Veronica Mendoza

Maui Roots Reborn, *Founding Executive Director*

El Pueblo en Accion Maui, *Founding Coalition Member*



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

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights

In SUPPORT of SB3239

Relating to Language Access

Hearing: Wednesday, February 18, 2026, 3:01 PM, Room 016 & Videoconference

Aloha Chair Fukunaga, Vice Chair Lee, 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 SB3239**.

SB3239 supports HI-EMA’s ability to provide multilingual emergency communications and resources and helps ensure residents with limited English proficiency (LEP) can access timely, accurate emergency information and services. During disasters and emergencies, clear communication is a life-safety issue.

WHY SB3239 IS IMPORTANT

Hawai‘i is linguistically diverse. Many residents speak languages other than English at home, and LEP communities need accessible emergency information. Emergency preparedness and response work best when everyone receives the same urgent information at the same time—especially information about evacuation routes, shelters, food and water distribution, medical care, and recovery assistance.

Without language access, some families may miss warnings, misunderstand instructions, delay seeking help, or be unable to navigate recovery systems. These are preventable harms that can lead to inequitable outcomes for immigrant and multilingual communities.

1. Language access saves lives.
Emergency alerts and instructions must be understandable for all residents so everyone can act quickly and safely.
2. Improves public safety outcomes.
Multilingual emergency communications reduce confusion, misinformation, and delayed response—helping residents follow guidance, find services, and avoid dangerous situations.
3. Ensures equity in preparedness and recovery.
LEP residents should not be left behind. Many critical recovery steps involve complex forms and instructions (FEMA and other assistance programs, housing aid, insurance, replacement documents). Interpretation and translation support improves access and



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

outcomes.

4. Strengthens trust and earlier engagement.

When communities receive accurate, multilingual, culturally competent messaging, they are more likely to engage with emergency systems early, seek help sooner, and comply with safety directives.

5. Aligns emergency communications with Hawai‘i’s broader language access responsibilities.

Hawai‘i has a State Language Access Law (HRS 321C) requiring meaningful, timely language services. Emergency management should reflect that standard in practice, especially given the high stakes during disasters.

RECOMMENDATION

HCIR respectfully urges the Legislature to pass SB3239 and ensure adequate funding to build sustained capacity for multilingual emergency communications across key channels, including:

- Alerts and warnings
- Websites and social media updates
- Hotlines
- Shelter communications and signage
- Recovery resources and application support

For these reasons, HCIR respectfully urges the Committee to PASS SB3239.

With gratitude,

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



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB3239 - RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS

Senate Committee on Public Safety & Military Affairs

Sen. Carol Fukunaga, Chair

Sen. Chris Lee, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 18, 2026 | Conference Room 016 | Letter Date: February 17, 2026

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

The Legal Clinic (TLC) is a nonprofit community organization providing legal representation and assistance to low-income immigrants and families. Our mission is to advance justice for all immigrants in Hawai'i through legal services, education, and advocacy. We strongly endorse SB3239, which will increase language access capacity to support HIEMA's mission.

Our community recognizes the contributions, rights, responsibilities of all people, including those with limited English proficiency (LEP). Our testimony in support of this bill is informed by both lived and professional experience. Many TLC staff and board members, including TLC's President, are immigrants ourselves. We draw from our own experiences as immigrants and from our work with immigrant communities, government agencies, and immigrant-serving organizations across the state, including in times of crisis and recovery – from the Lahaina fires to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hawai'i's population is diverse, with 18% of residents foreign-born, coming from countries including Canada, Mexico, Japan, and many others. The majority of immigrants are from Asia and the Pacific, with nearly 50% from the Philippines. Immigrants contribute billions of dollars to Hawai'i's GDP - paying taxes, creating businesses, and staffing essential jobs - while often earning low wages and lacking access to social benefits.

Hawai'i has one of the highest per-capita rates of LEP persons in the nation. Approximately 348,139 residents - about 1 in 4 - speak a language other than English at home. An estimated 161,055 residents, or 1 in 9, speak English "less than very well," and are considered LEP. Common languages spoken by Hawai'i's foreign-born communities include Cantonese, Chuukese, Ilocano, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Marshallese, Samoan, Spanish, Tagalog, and Tongan.

Communicating in languages people understand is essential to their ability to access services and resources. Many foreign-born residents including those from the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands, experience severe barriers to full participation in the community. LEP individuals are a disadvantaged and vulnerable sector of the community with limited access to information and resources. Many lack information on government services, experience prejudice and cultural misunderstanding, and are unable to access government and community resources due to language barriers.

SB3239 will help HIEMA and other government agencies ensure that LEP persons in our state receive services and that language access mandates are met. Government, private companies and non-profit organizations need qualified persons to provide language access, especially in times of emergency. Translators and interpreters were needed after the fires in Lahaina, a community with 30% foreign-born residents, 40% Filipino, and a significant LEP population. The recent weather emergency announcement should have been available in multiple languages to ensure public safety.

HIEMA coordinates and has partnerships with other agencies, including health services, before, during, and after emergencies. Strengthening language access capacity within HIEMA is therefore critical to providing equitable and effective emergency response statewide.

In addition to strongly supporting SB3239, we also support SB2109, which requests funds for a statewide public education and communications plan for emergency preparedness. SB2109 is broad and could include a multilingual communication plan that serves LEP persons in the state. While strengthening language access resources for HIEMA is important, other state agencies must also address language access needs. For example, many bilingual service needs arise in health-related settings. The Department of Health administers the State Health Planning and Development Agency (SHPDA) and the Office of Language Access (OLA), units that can provide translation and interpretation services if provided funds to contract with nonprofit and for-profit organizations that employ bilingual staff. Bilingual personnel are urgently needed at HIEMA, the Department of Health, and other state agencies.

We respectfully request support for SB3239 and related measures that strengthen communication and language access for disadvantaged community members who are not proficient in English.

Submitted on behalf of The Legal Clinic and Board
President Amy Agbayani,



Christina Sablan
Community & Policy Advocate

To: Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs
Re: **SB3239 – Relating to Language Access**
Hawai'i State Capitol & Via Videoconference
February 18, 2026; 3:00 PM

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

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, I am writing in **SUPPORT of SB3239**. This bill would appropriate funds for the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency to increase access to bilingual resources and services for residents with limited English proficiency (LEP).

During the pandemic, non-profit organizations like ours worked hard to help LEP families in Hawai'i access the pandemic relief benefits that they qualified for. While working on this outreach, we learned that there was a lack of meaningful language access for LEP families, and that the federal government does not provide translations¹ in many of the languages that are the most spoken by LEP families in Hawai'i² – such as Ilocano, Marshallese, Tongan, and Chuukese.

In the aftermath of the Lahaina wildfires, we again found a lack of resources to address the language needs of Hawai'i's residents, causing many of them to miss out on essential assistance. According to the language services coordinator for FEMA, who coordinated language access response after both the Lahaina and Paradise, California, fires, "the diverse cultures of Maui and the fact that many people did not feel comfortable dealing with government agencies, made the response in Lahaina unique."³

As one of the states with the highest portion of foreign-born residents,⁴ we believe Hawai'i needs to devote more resources than most other states do to ensure language access to essential government services. This bill would be a great step in that direction.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Please pass this bill.

Sincerely,

Nicole Woo
Director of Research and Economic Policy

¹ United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/translated-applications>

² Hawai'i Data Exchange Partnership, https://hawaiiexp.org/quick_data/datastory/el

³ <https://www.civilbeat.org/2024/03/people-who-dont-speak-english-lost-money-and-help-in-lahaina-response/>

⁴ Statista, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/312701/percentage-of-population-foreign-born-in-the-us-by-state/>

SB-3239

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 9:00:33 AM

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

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

Comments:

in support

SB-3239

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 10:45:02 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kai Lorinc	Testifying for NFRA	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

SB 3239

Relating to Language Access

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I rise in strong opposition to HB 2622 (HD1) and SB 3239.

Hawai'i families are struggling. Rent is unaffordable. Insurance premiums are climbing. Utilities are rising. Infrastructure is deteriorating. Public safety resources remain stretched thin.

And yet, instead of addressing these urgent crises, this Legislature is proposing to expand administrative spending within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency without presenting:

- A defined appropriation amount
- A five-year fiscal projection
- A cost cap
- A sunset clause
- Evidence of current noncompliance
- Evidence of funding loss risk

This bill asks taxpayers to fund expanded bilingual services without demonstrating that existing systems are failing or that federal compliance cannot already be met within current structures.

Emergency preparedness is serious. So is fiscal responsibility.

If federal compliance is required, meet the minimum required standard. Do not create open-ended general fund obligations without clear guardrails.

Every dollar appropriated here is a dollar not spent on:

- Fire mitigation infrastructure
- Water system resilience
- Road repair
- Police staffing
- Housing supply

Legislators cannot continue to treat the general fund as an expandable resource without consequences.

Voters are watching spending priorities closely. They will remember who voted to expand administrative overhead while households are tightening their own budgets.

Before advancing this bill, members should ask themselves:

Can I explain this vote to a family choosing between groceries and rent?

If the answer is not clear and defensible, this bill should not move forward.

I urge the committee to defer SB 3239.

Respectfully,

Kai Lorinc

National Federation of Republican Assemblies (NFRA)

National Director Hawai'i

Testimony of Jeremiah Brown in SUPPORT of SB3239

Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair

Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Feb 18, 2026

Dear Chair Carol Fukunaga, Vice Chair Chris Lee, and members of the Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs.

My name is Jeremiah Brown, and I submit this testimony in support of SB3239, which supports HI-EMA's ability to provide multilingual emergency communications and resources so residents with limited English proficiency can access timely and accurate emergency information and services.

As a teacher who works closely with multilingual students and their families, I have seen the importance of timely, accurate information during emergencies. During the pandemic, it became clear that we as a state needed to do better at distributing information to the community in languages other than English. Complicated quarantine policies were not clearly communicated and families sent their children to school when they should have stayed home. Parents who lost their jobs were unable to apply for unemployment insurance. Consent forms for vaccination clinics at schools were only available in English. We should learn from our experience with the pandemic and the Maui wildfires to avoid these kinds of issues in the future.

SB3239 is a public safety measure. In emergencies and disasters, communication is not optional—it is life-saving. Residents need to understand evacuation instructions, shelter locations, medical guidance, food and water distribution updates, and how to access recovery resources. When emergency messaging is not accessible across languages, communities can miss warnings, misunderstand instructions, delay seeking help, or be unable to navigate recovery systems. These gaps create preventable harm and deepen inequities.

Hawai'i's linguistic diversity means emergency preparedness must be inclusive by design. SB3239 strengthens statewide resilience by ensuring HI-EMA can communicate effectively with all residents and connect families to assistance during and after emergencies. Language access reduces confusion and misinformation, improves compliance with safety directives, and builds trust so communities engage with emergency systems earlier and recover faster.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee PASS SB3239.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Jeremiah Brown
Waialua, Oahu

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Sen. Carol Fukunaga, Chair

Sen. Chris Lee, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at 3:00 pm

Conference Room 016 & Videoconference

State Capitol

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 3239, RELATING TO LANGUAGE ACCESS.

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

My name is Christine Andrews and I am a long-term resident of Wailuku, Maui. I 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. I write to you today in **strong support of SB 3239**, Relating to Language Access, which appropriates funds for the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency to increase access to bilingual resources and services for residents with limited English proficiency.

As a resident of Maui, and someone who regularly volunteers to serve its immigrant and migrant community, the provisions made under SB 3239 are long past due. A March, 2024 Civil Beat article, “People With Limited English Lost Money And Help In Lahaina Response”¹ documents how lack of access to translation and interpretation services in the aftermath of the fires was a barrier to recovery for many survivors. According to Pacific Gateway Center, quoted in the article, over one-third of Lahaina residents, pre-disaster, were foreign born, and 36% aged five or older spoke a language other than English at home. I cannot help but wonder whether some of the loss of life during the fire, and some of the barriers to recovery thereafter, could have been prevented if Hawaii Emergency Management Agency had had better bilingual resources and services for residents with limited English proficiency. This measure helps to remedy that shortcoming and better serve all our residents.

I **strongly support SB 3239** and call upon all the members of the Committee, and especially Senator Hashimoto, to vote in support of the measure. Let us do what we can to protect and prepare all our community members.

In honor of Lahaina,

Christine Andrews, JD
Wailuku, Maui

¹ Madeleine Valera, Honolulu Civil Beat, “People With Limited English Lost Money And Help In Lahaina Response,” March 10, 2024.

SB-3239

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 1:43:18 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deanna Espinas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in support. Thank you.

SB-3239

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:31:25 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Judith Mura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Judith Mura. Strongly Support SB3239

SB-3239

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:32:12 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mariana Monasi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing today to express my deep support for the possibility of our State Emergency Management Agency to provide emergency information in multiple languages. During the Lāhaina fires, many of the homes that burned down were those of Filipino folks in multi-generational homes. We need emergency information to reach all of our residents.

Mahalo

SB-3239

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 11:32:18 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marcela Montalto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Appropriating funds for the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency to expand bilingual resources and services is essential to protecting the safety and well-being of all residents. During emergencies such as wildfires, hurricanes, and other natural disasters, timely and accurate information can save lives. Residents with limited English proficiency must be able to understand evacuation orders, safety instructions, and available assistance. This bill ensures that emergency communications are accessible, equitable, and effective, helping prevent confusion, reduce harm, and strengthen Hawai'i's overall emergency preparedness and resilience.

LATE

SB-3239

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 5:55:25 PM

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

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

Comments:

I Support SB3239.

Mahalo,

Kanani Kai

Member Indivisible Hawaii.