

ACT 69

H.B. NO. 813

A Bill for an Act Relating to Language Access.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. Hawaii is a melting pot of diverse nationalities and cultures. Diversity defines Hawaii's residents and makes this State a unique place to live.

According to the 2000 United States Census, over twelve per cent of the State's residents speak English "less than very well." These residents face daily challenges, whether it is struggling to consult with a school counselor about their child's performance at school or to understand a notice regarding public housing benefits.

In a movement to reinforce Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act barring discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin, President Clinton issued an executive order on August 11, 2000, directing all federal agencies to publish written policies on how recipients can provide access to persons of limited English proficiency and improve language accessibility to its programs.

The legislature finds that as one of only four states to enact a statewide law on language access, Hawaii is on the leading edge of breaking down language barriers to enable its diverse population, particularly persons who are limited in their English language proficiency, to gain equal access to much-needed government services at no extra charge. Whether the State provides access to its services and programs through an interpreter or translates key documents needed to access its services, residents with limited English proficiency benefit by being able to fully participate in the community as self-sufficient and productive members of the community. Ongoing education and efforts are needed to ensure that language access becomes the norm in the provision of government services.

The purpose of this Act is to designate the month of August as "Language Access Month" to promote awareness of language access for government services and emphasize the importance of and need for language access in Hawaii's diverse society.

SECTION 2. Chapter 8, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated and to read as follows:

"§8- Language access month. The month of August shall be known and designated as "Language Access Month" to promote awareness of language access for government services and emphasize the importance of and need for language access in Hawaii's diverse society. This month is not and shall not be construed as a state holiday."

SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.¹

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

(Approved May 22, 2009.)

Note

1. Edited pursuant to HRS §23G-16.5.