

ACT 152

S.B. NO. 2981

A Bill for an Act Relating to Education.

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

SECTION 1. American Sign Language is a vital part of the linguistic heritage of the State that benefits and enriches hearing-impaired and non-hearing-impaired individuals. American Sign Language interpreters are routinely provided at private and state functions and events. Introduction to American Sign Language at an early age helps hearing-impaired individuals become confident in their identity and sets the stage for their personal success.

Although American Sign Language is the fourth most-popular language at colleges and universities in the United States, it is not currently recognized as a foreign language in Hawaii. This lack of recognition makes it difficult for Hawaii public schools to meet the needs of hearing-impaired students and to help students who are interested in studying American Sign Language in college to prepare for their studies. Forty-two states currently recognize American Sign Language as a foreign language and have incorporated it into public school curricula. The department of education uses the term “world language” in its course descriptions and graduation requirements.

The purpose of this Act is to recognize American Sign Language as a world language and to allow students who pass courses in American Sign Language to receive credit for those courses toward satisfaction of graduation requirements for world language.

SECTION 2. Chapter 302A, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by adding a new section to part II to be appropriately designated and to read as follows:

“§302A- **American Sign Language.** For purposes of this chapter, American Sign Language shall be recognized as a world language, and any public school may offer a course in American Sign Language. A student who successfully completes a course in American Sign Language shall be entitled to receive credit for that course toward satisfaction of a world language requirement of the public school at which the course is offered.”

SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.¹

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

(Approved June 29, 2016.)

Note

1. Edited pursuant to HRS §23G-16.5.