



## DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
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FEBRUARY 16, 2021

### TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

#### Senate Bill 537 – Relating to American Sign Language

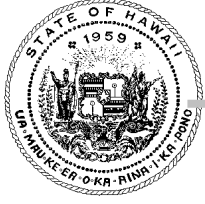
The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 537 relating to American Sign Language (ASL), which recognizes ASL as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

ASL is the primary language of many persons who are deaf or hard of hearing in the United States, including residents of Hawaii, and is often their preferred method of communicating effectively. Even though it has been in existence for over 200 years, recognition of ASL as a full-fledged language did not take place until 1960. Beforehand, ASL was erroneously viewed as a pantomime and a poor substitute for spoken speech. Today, over a dozen states have fully recognized ASL under state law. Despite this, stigmas and misperceptions associated with ASL persist. Recognizing ASL will go a long way in creating more equitable access, including in employment, public awareness, and civic participation. We strongly urge that you move this bill forward.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW  
Executive Director



# HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 411 HONOLULU, HI 96813 · PHONE: 586-8636 FAX: 586-8655 TDD: 568-8692

February 16, 2021

Rm. 225 & Videoconference, 3:00 p.m.

To: The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
The Honorable Les Ihara, Jr., Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services

From: Liann Ebesugawa, Chair  
and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

Re: S.B. No. 537

The Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) has enforcement jurisdiction over Hawai‘i’s laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and access to state and state funded services. The 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.

S.B. No. 537 would add a new section to Chapter 1 of the Hawai‘i Revised Statutes which would recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary and cultural heritage. Just as is the case with languages that are characteristic of ancestry or national origin, ASL is a language that is closely tied to culture and identity.

Over 40 US states recognize ASL to varying degrees, from a foreign language for school credits to the official language of that state's deaf population, with several enacting legislation similar to S.B. No. 537.

It is important to recognize that ASL is a distinct language and not just translated English, but a language with its own culture. **The HCRC supports S.B. No. 537.**

**SB-537**

Submitted on: 2/11/2021 6:50:23 PM

Testimony for HMS on 2/16/2021 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Louis Erteschik	Testifying for Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	No

Comments:

We are in support.

P.O. Box 4777  
Kaneohe, HI 96744

February 16, 2021

The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Human Services  
Hawaii State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street, Room 225  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Re: Support of Senate Bill 537 - Relating to American Sign Language (ASL)

Dear Chair San Buenaventura and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

My name is Debbra Jackson, and I support Senate Bill 537 - Relating to American Sign Language which recognizes American Sign Language as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

As a member of the Deaf and Blind Task Force, person with a disability, credentialed ASL Interpreter, and disability advocate, who has worked with the Deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind population since 1979, I support this bill. Any spoken language is basically what we learn from our parents and environment and is how we communicate with others around us. Experts in linguistics define language as having its own syntax, grammar, vocabulary. Additionally, experts in anthropology also define language as providing a cultural basis for a group of people.

In light of what these experts tell us, American Sign Language (ASL) meets all of these criteria and much more. ASL is similar to spoken languages in that it is not static, but changes over time with new ideas and technology. For example, when I first learned ASL, there was no sign for COVID-19, because it had not been identified at that time. Now with the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a sign developed for it. It was ASL, but with signs for concepts that matched specific things of importance in that region. Having lived in several different places on the Mainland, I have seen many variations of ASL, comparable to dialects of American English spoken around the country. Here in Hawaii, there is also a Hawaiian Sign Language (used by a few older Deaf people), that is being taught by more experienced Deaf people who grew up in Hawaii. However, if we don't preserve that, it may vanish.

Please recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a natural language with its own syntax, grammar, and cultural heritage in Hawaii by passing this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,



Debbra L. Jackson, M.S.  
Member  
Deaf and Blind Task Force

**SB-537**

Submitted on: 2/14/2021 10:07:12 PM

Testimony for HMS on 2/16/2021 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Eva Silva-Ewan	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha Chair Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura and the committees,

My name is Eva Silva-Ewan. I am 13 years old and Deaf. As expected, the legislature will believe that Americans with Disability Act (ADA) covers all the requirements for Deaf person like me with accessibility. I will agree with you about this however there are the parts that you will also know that people do find ways not to obtain an ASL interpreter because it can be very costly.

Putting American Sign Language as part of Hawaii Consitution will strengten the purpose of ADA. COVID19 has a strange way to advoate Deaf consumers of Hawaii by having ASL interpreter with almost all press conference provided by the Governor lge and among the mayors of all counties. It does give us the full accessibility however there are a lot that are not accessble.

The ASL Interpreter was known as Patty Sakal whom I had a last conversation about this bill with my mother at a outdoor restaurant. She had planned to give all her heart to this bill. I urge you to pass this bill in honor of Patty Sakal and her dedication in making acessbility a real one for Hawaii community.

Aloha Pumehana,

Eva Silva-Ewan

**LATE**

**SB-537**

Submitted on: 2/15/2021 6:21:03 PM  
Testimony for HMS on 2/16/2021 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Cheryl Shimizu	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

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February 16, 2021

The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura

Chair

Senate Committee on Human Services

Hawaii State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street, Room 225

Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Re: Support of Senate Bill 537 - Relating to American Sign Language

Dear Chair San Buenaventura and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

My name is Cheryl (Mizusawa) Shimizu, and I support Senate Bill 537 - Relating to American Sign Language (ASL) which recognizes ASL as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

I am Deaf and have been using ASL my whole life. I attended and graduated from the Hawaii School for the Deaf and the Blind. ASL is my native language and is how many Deaf people communicate and have our own culture. I am also am a volunteer teacher

at Lanakila Health Center. They have senior citizens there who are interested in learning ASL so they can communicate with Deaf people in the community.

I urge you to recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a natural language that has its own syntax, grammar, and cultural heritage in Hawaii by passing this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Cheryl (Mizusawa) Shimizu

Deaf Advocate



**SB-537**

Submitted on: 2/15/2021 10:00:50 PM

Testimony for HMS on 2/16/2021 3:00:00 PM

**LATE**

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Vesta Morris	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

February 15, 2021

The Honorable Justin H.  
Woodson

Education  
Capitol  
Room 329

Chair  
House Committee on  
Hawaii State  
415 South Beretania Street,  
Honolulu, Hi 96813

Re: Support for House Bill 1078 - Relating to the Hawaii School for the Deaf and Blind

Dear Chair Woodson and members of the House Committee on Education,

My name is Vesta Morris and I am Deaf. I attend the Hawaii School for the Deaf and Blind (HSDB) for 15 years, and I support HB 1078 Relating to the Hawaii School for the Deaf and Blind.

When I attended HSDB, I had friends and teachers who can communicate with me using American Sign Language (ASL). They understand what it was like to be a deaf student trying to learn. I think it would have been a much better school if there had been deaf educators planning and running HSDB.

There have been many advances in teaching deaf children since I graduated, and it is important that HSDB keep up with those advances. We can only do that by including Deaf people in the planning and development for the future of HSDB.

I encourage you to pass this bill, because it will create a school that will meet the needs of Deaf and Deaf-Blind students. Hearing schools are guided by a Board of Education with professionals who understand how to educate hearing students. We are asking for the same consideration in planning and development of education for Deaf students who attend and graduate from HSDB.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Vesta Morris  
Maui Deaf Friends

President,