



# HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

## KOMIKINA PONO KĪWILA O HAWAI‘I

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

Thursday, March 30, 2023 at 9:35 a.m.  
Conference Rm 016 & Videoconference

To: The Honorable Karl Rhoads, Chair  
The Honorable Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

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

Re: H.B. No. 834, H.D.1, S.D. 1

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.

H.B. No. 834 , H.D.1, S.D.1 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 U.S. 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 H.B. No. 834, H.D.1, S.D.1.

It is important to recognize that ASL is a distinct language and not just translated English, but a language with its own culture and identity. **The HCRC supports H.B. No. 834, H.D.1, S.D.1.**

March 30, 2023

Submitted to the Hawaii State Senate  
COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Honorable Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Honorable Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair

Re: HB 834, HD1, SD1 RELATING TO AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard and Members,

I would like to fervently support HB 834, HD1, SD1 Relating to American Sign Language.

This legislation is very important to acknowledge American Sign Language (ASL) as a bonafide language equal to all spoken languages worldwide. I first learned ASL in 1975 as a counselor for the state of Hawaii Division of Vocational Rehabilitation assigned to work with Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind people with disabilities. It took me perhaps five (5) years to converse with individuals and families using ASL. I realized that ASL is an effective way of communicating clear and effective concepts and feelings.

While American Sign Language is a visual language it has its own grammar, syntax and structure with specific use of space. Like accents of spoken languages, ASL has a Hawaiian Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind signing cultures shared by the local community with nuances specific to where individuals grew up.

I heartily support HB 834 HD1, SD1 to recognize ASL as a fully developed language which would instill pride for each person connecting with others using this language. Kindly vote to pass this important bill.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Eleanor Macdonald, M.Ed., CRC (ret.)



**HB-834-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/27/2023 8:55:47 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/30/2023 9:35:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b>   | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Ed Chevy            | Testifying for Parents<br>Community Network<br>Coordinator and Aloha<br>State for the Deaf<br>Association | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

My name is Ed Chevy. I am proud to be a Deaf American of the United States of America. I'm also proud to be a coordinator of the Parent Community Network for the hearing parents of Deaf children at the Hawaii School for the Deaf and the Blind (HSDB). I helped the parents to learn ASL in order to have communication with their Deaf children. I would like to say that I feel personally proud of my ASL and encouraged the parents to trust me.

From my years of experiences and teaching, the true value of the deaf can only be measured in the presence of Deaf education that we have. I observe ASL to be the power of communication. This kind of ASL that we are all longing for the State of Hawaii to accept language of the 21st century. At the same time, we will well educated, because in it, we can "hear" ourselves.

Me ke aloha poumehana,

E!

**HB-834-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/27/2023 1:16:48 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/30/2023 9:35:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Jamia Green         | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and members of the Committee. My name is Jamia Green and I wholeheartedly support HB834\_HD1/SD1 which recognizes American Sign Language (ASL) as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

I am a hearing African American woman who has been involved in Deaf Education and the Deaf Community for over 20 years. I am fluent in the amazingly beautiful language that is American Sign Language which took many years as well as a dedicated passion, love of, and respect for the Deaf Community, and the continued friendship of several awesome Deaf adults. I completely understand what it means to be a part of the minority therefore, I sincerely empathize with the Deaf Community and the struggles they continue to face.

American Sign Language is NOT English. American Sign Language IS a completely different language just like 'Ōlelo Hawai'i is not English but a language all its own which is passed down and/or taught and practiced over a lifetime. American Sign Language should be fully recognized, celebrated, and cherished.

The passage of this measure brings awareness to the Deaf community's history, culture, and traditions. It also supports the right of Deaf individuals to have full access to education, events, information, and services in their native and/or primary language.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify,

Jamia Green

**HB-834-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/25/2023 11:56:03 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/30/2023 9:35:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Cards Pintor        | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

Aloha,

I support this bill.

Mahalo nui,

Cards Pintor

**HB-834-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/26/2023 12:35:05 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/30/2023 9:35:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Stephen Laracuate   | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha! As a retired Teacher, Student Services Coordinator and Vice Principal at the Hawai'i School for the Deaf and the Blind (HSDB) My wife, Margaret Laracuate (Educational Assistant at HSDB for 19 years) and I, Steve Laracuate, are in full support of this bill to recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a bona fide language. Our primary reason is that we have effectively used ASL to help students in DOE public schools from one end of America to another, from New York City (9 years) to Hawai'i (31 years), to earn High School Diplomas and/or move on to successful careers.

Each Deaf, Hard of Hearing or Deaf Blind student is different, but the one thing in common that helps them to succeed in life is ASL. I can cite hundreds of examples, but I can only choose one for an example when I testify at hearings. This is why I will present different testimony when I support this bill. My current example is recent. I took place in February, 2023, when my wife and I supported two female High School students from HSDB's High School present their science project at the Honolulu District Science Fair.

Both young ladies presented their science project that tested their hypothesis that humans can help tomato plants grow more tomatoes by helping bees to pollinate the tomato flowers with a brush that collected and dusted pollen from one tomato flower to another. There was concern over the past few years that the number of bees all over the world is going down. The reason for the number of bees going down is not fully understood, but the two ladies wanted to see if there was a way they could help the bees and the tomato plants.

This was the first time for both young ladies to be involved in any competition of this sort, let alone present something using ASL. Both are still developing their ASL skills. They were both nervous and practiced how they would present their science project to the judges and their fellow student scientists from other schools. It was important that the young ladies did not look like they were reading from a paper, or look stiff while using ASL, so they rehearsed how they would make eye contact with the folks who viewed their exhibit and explained the pictures they pasted on their exhibit. My wife and I advised them to look relaxed and "professional" as they made their presentation to the judges.

My wife Margaret and I were the HSDB support staff (part-time employees) for the two young ladies, but we and support staff from the other schools were not allowed to stay as the students made their presentations to the judges. Both of them were nervous, but they did very well! We were informed that their presentation to the judges was rated in the top ten, out of

25 schools! For the second round, the judges needed to pick the top 5, but the young ladies did not make it to the top 5 and did not continue to the second round.

Still, HSDB was proud of the two ladies for their first-time performance at the Honolulu District Science Fair! They got a lot a lot of attention from the judges and their fellow student scientists from other DOE schools. Hand Wave! High-ranking DOE officials recommended that the HSDB students come back for 2024. They can do the same project again and try to figure out how they can change the procedure they used so that they can be more successful with the results. Margaret and I were very proud of their performance at the science fair. This great learning experience for the two young ladies was made possible by American Sign Language.



PETER L. FRITZ

T-MOBILE IP RELAY: (808) 568-0077

THE SENATE  
THE THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE  
REGULAR SESSION OF 2023

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
Testimony on H.B. 834 HD1 SD1  
Hearing: March 30, 2023

RELATING TO AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard and members of the Committee, my name is Peter Fritz. I am Hard of Hearing and testifying in support of H.B. 834 HD1 SD1.

This bill recognizes American Sign Language (ASL) as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

I support this bill because:

Recognizing ASL a language supports the rights of deaf and hard of hearing individuals and promotes a more inclusive society.

ASL is the primary means of communication for many deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals. It is their first language.

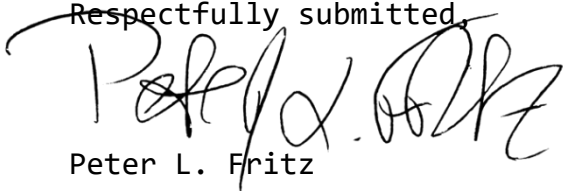
Recognizing ASL as a language acknowledges the deaf community's right to access services and information in a language they understand.

Recognizing ASL as a language increases public awareness and understanding of the deaf community.

Recognizing ASL as an autonomous language acknowledges the deaf community as a linguistic minority with its own history, culture, and traditions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,



Peter L. Fritz

Honolulu, March 29, 2023

Aloha, dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard and members of the Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Fanny WT Yeh. I moved to live on Honolulu, Hawaii, from Paris, France since mid-July, 2022. I was born deaf in Taiwan and have lived in Brazil, the USA (Maryland, NYC & Hawaii), Indonesia & France. I communicated with people using sign languages in Taiwan, Brazil, the USA and France while I lived there.

I'm writing to give my full support for the Bill HB 834 HD1 SD1 relating to recognize American Sign Language (ASL) as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

Here are the reasons for my testimony as follows:

**BETTER ACCESS:** ASL helps deaf, Deaf-Blind (DB) and Hard-of-Hearing (HH) people to communicate with a wide range of hearing people: including students in mainstream schools, deaf schools or universities and deaf, DB and HH residents and business people in the community. ASL improves the quality of family communication for hearing people with deaf, DB or HH family members. ASL is also used by hearing children of deaf/DB/HH parents, hearing siblings and hearing relatives, hearing adults who are becoming deaf/DB/HH and learning ASL from other deaf individuals, and a growing population of hearing second-language students learning ASL in their school classrooms. ASL provides full equal access to everyday communication for all in the public, employment and social services.

**BETTER PUBLIC AWARENESS:** ASL is used by a significant large number of people in the USA, and to recognize it as an official language would bring better understanding, greater acknowledge and deeper respect for their linguistic heritage. ASL promotes the validation of an identity as a human which will increase public awareness and better understanding of Deaf, DB and HH Community and their needs to be involved in the public and education.

**BETTER CULTURE AWARENESS:** ASL promotes better awareness of and sensitivity to the Deaf, DB and HH community. Learning ASL will develop a strong appreciation for Deaf, DB and HH culture, and can promote understanding and acceptance of the language among others. ASL promotes cultural preservation by demonstrating a unique and distinct language with its own history, culture, and traditions as well to preserve their important aspect of Deaf Education and social services.

**BETTER INTEGRATION IN EDUCATION:** Teaching ASL in public schools helps to give deaf, deaf-blind (DB) and hard-of-hearing (HH) students more opportunities for interactions with hearing classmates. Deaf and HH people proficient in ASL may be interested in becoming ASL teachers since ASL is the third most popular foreign language class taught in schools and universities.

**BETTER CAREER OPPORTUNITIES:** A career path opens to bilingual hearing professionals is interpretation. Demand for ASL interpreters is on the rise: great need to increase the availability of qualified ASL interpreters in the community and mainstream programs in schools and colleges/universities. ASL interpreters are in demand include hospitals, courts, governmental agencies, community services, human and mental health services, local, county and state legislatures.

**BETTER LEARNING CAPABILITIES:** ASL promotes younger population a better listener with more diverse and to boost the individual to become easier to learn another new language. Research has shown that using ASL actually increases a child's verbal skills. Using ASL can actually help to facilitate and encourage language development. ASL provides children with earlier access to other languages.

**POWERFUL BENEFITS:** ASL helps to 1) create a stronger bond between parents and children, 2) improve spatial reasoning, 3) enhance ability to interpret body language, 4) get a better reaction times and peripheral vision, and 5) have a long-term cognitive benefit of learning sig language.

**STRONG BRIDGE:** ASL promotes a strong bridge between the hearing population and the deaf, DB and HH population. ASL is not universal as deaf, DB and HH people from different countries speak different sign languages yet they could understand each other through their natural gestures.

In my professional and personal life, I was the first deaf dance-actor for Honolulu Theater for Youth (HTY) which now they continue to use ASL interpreters in their productions for deaf, DB & HH audiences. After my return in Hawaii since last July, I was invited to give an ASL song "Can You Hear Me" with 400 hearing singer-students from Punahou School & other schools including one from Maui at the Central United Church of Honoulu. It shows how important it is to have ASL for entertainments in the Culture, Arts and Social services.

I, as a deaf individual, support this Bill because it would give Deaf, DB and HH people FULL equal access to the everyday communication in the world.

Thank you for your consideration in supporting this Bill.

Sincerely yours and mahalo,

Fanny WT Yeh  
Deaf dancer-founder-director/small businesswoman  
Mobile phone: 808-807-7851

**HB-834-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/29/2023 4:40:04 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/30/2023 9:35:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Eileen Chiwa        | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

My name is Eileen Chiwa and I am Deaf. I frequently use American Sign Language known as "ASL" to communicate with the Deaf as well as with the Deaf Community. Therefore, I support ASL as the official language.

ASL is very essential since the Deaf Community can communicate and understand each other. Every foreign language (English, Japanese, Spanish, French, etc.) has its own, like how it is spoken and written and is used by people who can hear; but ASL has its own visual language, using just hand signs, facial expressions and body movements. And it is widely used by the Deaf as well as the Deaf Community. It is even used by some people who can hear but are stroke victims.

Please support American Sign Language as an official language. Thank you very much for your attention to my testimony.

**HB-834-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/28/2023 4:03:55 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/30/2023 9:35:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Zosimo A Arista     | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

I am in strong support of HB834 HD1 SD1 as ASL is recognized ASL as its own language for people who are deaf.

**HB-834-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/28/2023 11:51:41 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/30/2023 9:35:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Lisa Tom            | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

My name is Lisa Tom and I am a Deaf advocate. I am writing to give my full support for the bill HB834 HD1 SD1, Relating to American Sign Language (ASL) as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

ASL is a complete and complex language that is used by Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind individuals as a primary means of communication. Its complexity, vocabulary, and use in many different settings make it important to recognize as an autonomous language in its own right.

ASL will provide a better full accessibility to everyday communication and educational services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind individuals in the Public and the Government institutions. It also benefits to people with disabilities and general for different communication needs. ASL demonstrates a unique and distinct language with its own history, culture and Deaf education. ASL will increase public awareness and better understanding of the Deaf Community and their needs, and foster more inclusive society.

It is a good example that aligns to SB 2476, Relating to Health - Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) Hawaii. I personally experienced struggles with the language development delay when I was in pre-school. I didn't receive the appropriate language access my hearing peers had because I didn't have good resources that time. ASL really helped me improve better in education and life. I do not want our future DHHDB keiki and individuals go through same experience I had.

Please consider to support HB834 HD1 SD1 and support the rights and well-being of Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind individuals and promote a more inclusive society.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

# **JAN L. FRIED • American Sign Language/English Interpreter**

**• RID Certified-IC, CI, CT • Educator • Consultant •**

28 March 2023

The Senate  
Thirty-Second Legislature, 2023, State of Hawai'i  
Committee on Judiciary  
Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair

Hearing: 30 March 2023 at 9:35a, Conference Room 016

## **Testimony in Support of HB834, HDI, SDI-Relating to American Sign Language**

*Aloha* Chair, Vice Chair and Judiciary Committee Members,

I am an American Sign Language/English interpreter and a professor of American Sign Language—it is without hesitation that I support the formal recognition of American Sign Language (ASL) as a complete and living language. Like *all* the other languages widely used and recognized in Hawai'i, ASL has its own grammar, vocabulary, vibrant literature, and long-standing cultural heritage. In 1965 linguistic bodies officially accepted that ASL met all the standards of a language. Hawai'i should too.

By recognizing ASL you:

- Acknowledge and validate its legion of users. According to numerous accounts, ASL is the 3rd or 4th most studied language in the US. Deaf Community members see themselves as part of a cultural and linguistic minority that has experienced historical linguistic and educational oppression nearly identical to that experienced by Kanaka Maoli who use 'Olelo Hawai'i.
- Recognize the right Deaf people have to communicate in a language that is the primary language of instruction at Schools for the Deaf (including the HI School for the Deaf and the Blind) and in programs supporting Deaf students. It is the predominant sign language used in the US, Canada and throughout the Pacific. Consistent access to information in a preferred language encourages people to participate and be included in all aspects of their lives. Representation matters.
- Add Hawai'i to the list of 45 other states that formally recognize ASL in their state laws. It is time. The HIDOE already includes ASL on its roster of World Languages and provides graduating high school seniors the opportunity to earn the Seal of Biliteracy in ASL. Additionally, the University of Hawai'i System has offered ASL since the mid-1990's as one of the languages students can study to satisfy their language requirement for their degree.

I appreciate this opportunity to encourage the committees to support HB834, HDI, SDI. Your actions will have a profound and positive impact.

Respectfully,  
*Jan L. Fried*

Jan L. Fried, CI and CT  
Professor and Nationally Certified ASL/English Interpreter

**HB-834-SD-1**

Submitted on: 3/29/2023 7:31:04 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/30/2023 9:35:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Sherry Shimizu      | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Testimony of Sherry Shimizu

Submitted to the Hawaii State Senate,

Committee on Judiciary (JDC)

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair

Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair

Thursday, March 30, 2023

Time 9:35 AM

Hawaii State Capitol CR 016 & Videoconference

Re: SB 610 / HB 834 HD1 - Relating to American Sign Language

Chairperson, Vice-Chair, Members:

My name is Sherry Shimizu, I am a graduate of Pearl City High School and received a bachelor of science degree at Rochester Institute of Technology in New York with a major in Packaging Science or better known as Engineering and minor is Criminal Justice. I am a resident of Pearl City, Senatorial District 16.

I am testifying today to express my very strong support for SB 610 / HB 834 HD1, which will recognize American Sign Language, or ASL as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammatical structure, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage. This bill is very important to me personally, because I have been Deaf in one ear and Hard-of-hearing in the other ear all of my life. My parents, siblings, other family members and friends are also either Deaf and or Deaf-Blind, so we all use ASL in our everyday conversation.

ASL is not Hawaii Sign Language nor merely signed English, because most people in other countries recognize ASL is predominantly used in North America. Furthermore, ASL was already recognized here as a world language for public school language requirement purposes

according to Act 152, Session Laws of Hawaii 2016. The recognition of ASL as an official state language in Hawaii will ensure Deaf, Hard-of-hearing, and Deaf-Blind children and adults have “access to their language to take part in society. Recognizing this language results in more equitable access. This includes employment opportunities and more awareness in the public, especially when more Deaf (and Hard-of-hearing and Deaf-Blind) people assume leadership roles.” (Source: Catalleya Storm, author of “Why sign language should be an official language” [hearinglikeme.com](http://hearinglikeme.com))

Hawaii is unique with multiple cultures and since we recognize ‘Ōlelo Hawai’i (spoken language) as Hawaiian Language that is not pidgin nor creole, I want to emphasize ASL is a Language that is not gesture. Just like ‘Ōlelo Hawai’i (spoken language) has proper pronunciation for vowels and consonants and the Hawaiian alphabet consists of 13 letters, ASL has fingerspelling letters only used in North America. Fingerspelling in ASL is distinct from the fingerspelling in British Sign Language, even though both languages use the same English vowels and consonants. We also know in Hawaii, there are many influences from other countries historically, however we still recognize the differences in spoken and written format between English and Hawaiian languages; similarly to locals signing in ASL, we recognize signs used in the community to communicate and comprehend each other across the 8 islands naturally with ease without any singular, specific external force.

Please help us pass this bill at a state level and join most other states on the mainland in recognizing American Sign Language as one of the official languages in Hawai’i. Mahalo for your support and sincerely, Sherry Shimizu