

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

Friday, February 24, 2023
Conference Room 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: S.B. No. 610

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. 610 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 S.B. No. 610.

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 S.B. No. 610.**



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
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February 24, 2023

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Senate Bill 610 – Relating to American Sign Language

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 610 – Relating to American Sign Language.

American Sign Language is a complex visual-spatial language that is a linguistically complete and natural language. With signing, the brain processes linguistic information through the eyes. The shape, placement, and movement of the hands, as well as facial expressions and body movements, all play important parts in conveying information. American Sign Language is the backbone of American Deaf Culture.

Pursuant to the goal of increasing the number of competent sign language interpreters in the State, DCAB issues the Hawaii State Sign Language Interpreter Credential (HSSLIC) to interpreters who pass the Hawaii Quality Assurance System (HQAS) test or who possess a valid credential issued by an entity recognized by DCAB. Sign language interpreters interpret between two distinct languages – a sign language and a spoken language – by conveying equivalent and conceptually correct messages from one language to another. Senate Bill 610 would recognize that American Sign Language is a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director

SB-610

Submitted on: 2/22/2023 7:45:09 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2023 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ed Chevy	Testifying for Aloha State Association of the Deaf	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha! My name is Ed Chevy. I am Deaf citizen of the United States of America. I wholeheartedly support SB610 (Relating to ASL). I've always said to my country, "Communication is **POWER!!!** "

I am NOT communication impaired. I have 100% access to communication. The AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (ASL) is a language. Language tends to be the study of contradictions, but not ASL.

Helen Keller said Deaf is isolated from people. Actually, Deafness was a greater affliction than blindness. We asked never ever judge Deaf people having ASL.

This is a 21st century, America is going to be a different country. We learn, we change, we move on and we get better. Please support SB610. It's a future...I promised you.

SB-610

Submitted on: 2/21/2023 6:55:51 PM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2023 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cards Pintor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support this bill.

Mahalo nui,

Cards Pintor

SB-610

Submitted on: 2/22/2023 2:01:22 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2023 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sherry Shimizu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Sherry Shimizu

Submitted to the Hawaii State Senate,

Committee on Judiciary

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair

Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair

Friday, February 24, 2023

Time 9:30 AM

Hawaii State Capitol CR 016 & Videoconference

Re: SB 610 - 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, 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 and other family members are also either Deaf or Hard-of Hearing, 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 and Hard of hearing 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 people assume leadership roles.” (Source: Catalleya Storm, publisher of “Why sign language should be an official language” 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 written 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 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 to recognize American Sign Language as one of the official languages in Hawai’i. Mahalo for your support and sincerely, Sherry Shimizu

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 S.B. 610

Hearing: February 24, 2023

RELATING TO AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard and members of the Committee, my name is Peter Fritz. I am testifying **in support** of S.B. 610.

ASL, or American Sign Language, is a complete and complex language that is used by deaf individuals as a primary means of communication. Its complexity, vocabulary, and use in many different settings make it important to recognize it as a language in its own right.

ASL is a primary means of communication for many deaf individuals. It is their first language.

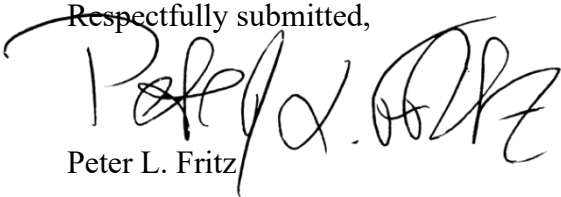
Recognizing ASL as an autonomous language acknowledges the deaf community as a linguistic and cultural minority with its own history, culture, and traditions.

Recognizing ASL as a language will increase public awareness and understanding of the deaf community and their needs.

Recognizing ASL as an autonomous language supports the rights and well-being of deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter L. Fritz", written over a printed name.

Peter L. Fritz

February 24, 2023

Submitted to the Hawaii State Senate
COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

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

Re: SB 610123, RELATING TO AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard and Members,

I would like to whole heartily support SB 610, Relating to American Sign Language.

This legislation is crucial to acknowledge American Sign Language (ASL) as a bonafide language equal to all spoken languages of other cultures. I first learned ASL in 1975 as a counselor for the 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 their 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 unique Hawaiian Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind signing culture shared by their local community with nuances specific to where individuals grew up in the islands. This beautiful, expressive language needs to be acknowledged like all other spoken languages with their unique folklore and culture.

I, without reservation, strongly support SB 610 to recognize American Sign Language as a fully developed language. Kindly pass this very important bill.

Mahalo in advance,

Eleanor Macdonald, M.Ed., CRC (ret.)
District 13

SB-610

Submitted on: 2/22/2023 8:12:14 PM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2023 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Meriah Nichols	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

ASL is absolutely a language, rich and complex and with it's own structure and history. I am frankly shocked that this is even up for voting! I respectfully ask for ASL recognition as a fully developed, autonomous and natural language.

Mahalo,

Meriah Nichols

Honolulu, Hawaii, February 23, 2023

Aloha, dear Senator Karl Rhoads,

My name is Fanny WT Yeh. I moved to live on Oahu, 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, where I communicate with people in each country's sign language.

I'm writing to give my full support for the Bill SB610 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:

STRONG BRIDGE: ASL is the bridge for connecting us to the world of those who have an impaired hearing or a verbal ability. ASL is the native language of the Deaf Community and provides full access to everyday communication. ASL is not universal as deaf people from different countries speak different sign languages yet they could understand each other through their natural gestures.

BETTER ACCESS: ASL interpreting helps deaf and hard-of-hearing (HH) people to communicate. Being proficient in ASL allows you to communicate with a wide range of hearing, HH and deaf people - including students in mainstream and deaf schools or universities and deaf or HH residents and business people in the community. ASL improves the quality of family communication for hearing people with deaf or HH family members. ASL is also used by hearing children of deaf parents, hearing siblings and relatives of the deaf, hearing adults who are becoming deaf and learning ASL from other deaf individuals, and a growing population of hearing second-language students learning ASL in their school classrooms.

BETTER CULTURE AWARENESS: ASL promotes better awareness of and sensitivity to the deaf and HH community. Learning ASL will develop a strong appreciation for deaf culture, and can promote understanding and acceptance of the language among others.

BETTER INTEGRATION IN EDUCATION: Teaching ASL in public schools helps to give deaf and 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, local, county and state legislatures.

BETTER LEARNING CAPABILITIES: ASL helps you to become a better listener, more diverse, to boost your business, and 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 infant, 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.

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

Thank you for your consideration of supporting this Bill.

Sincerely yours and mahalo,

Fanny WT Yeh
Deaf dancer-director/artist/small business owner
Mobile phone: 808-807-7851

SB-610

Submitted on: 2/23/2023 8:09:54 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2023 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Isabel Mejia Ramos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

February 23, 2023

Aloha, Senator Karl Rhoads,

I am writing to give my full support for SB610 relating to recognizing American Sign Language (ASL) as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage.

There is no question that ASL is a fully developed language as there is plenty of research documenting that fact. Additionally, hundreds of post-secondary institutions throughout the U.S. offer ASL classes for credit and accept ASL as an option to meet foreign language requirement. The Modern Language Association ranked ASL as the third most popular foreign language studied at colleges and universities in the U.S. Even Harvard University accepts ASL to fulfill their language requirement. It is not just postsecondary institutions that have recognize ASL as a bona-fide language – hundreds of secondary institutions offer ASL for high school credit – including Hawai'i DOE.

If anyone needs more evidence as to ASL being a bona-fide language, all they have to do is search for states on the mainland that have recognized ASL. They will find that ASL is currently recognized as a world language by 45 states.

Finally, the United Nations has recognized the importance and legitimacy of sign languages throughout the world by announcing that September 23 is celebrated as International Day of Sign Languages.

In closing, I strongly support SB610 and hope that Hawai'i will become the 46th state to recognize ASL as a bona-fide language.

Thanks for your full support for this Bill.

Mahalo.

Isabel Mejia Ramos

JAN L. FRIED • American Sign Language/English Interpreter

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

23 February 2023

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

Hearing: 24 February 2023 at 9:30 AM, Conference Room 016

Testimony in Support of SB610 -Relating to American Sign Language

Aloha Senators Rhoads and Gabbard and JDC 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 HODOE includes ASL on its roster of World Languages and provides graduating high school seniors the opportunity to earn the Seal of Biliteracy in ASL. 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 SB610. Your actions will have a profound and positive impact.

Respectfully,
Jan L. Fried

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

SB-610

Submitted on: 2/23/2023 10:28:45 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2023 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nikki Kepoo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am a mother of a deaf child who communicates with his family and friends through ASL. As a parent, communication is essential to their character building, inclusion, and ultimate access. My oldest is fluent in not only English, but Hawaiian and sign. Hawaiian is our native right for our ohana as ASL is the native right to my son, the community, and our ohana. We are one and as Hawaii recognizes 'ōlelo Hawaii, I implore you to pass this to recognize ASL as well.

I strongly urge your support to this measure and to help my son and our communities embody true access and inclusive environments.

mahalo,

Nikki-Parent

SB-610

Submitted on: 2/24/2023 12:31:11 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2023 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
LisaAnn Tom	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a Deaf advocate, I am writing to give my full support for the bill SB610, 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 is my first language and I use it in my everyday communication with people in general.

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 insititutions. 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, education and tradition as well to preserve the important aspect of their Deaf America culture and Deaf education. ASL will increase public awareness and better understanding of the Deaf Community and their needs, and foster more inclusive society.

Please consider to support SB610 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.

LisaAnn Tom

SB-610

Submitted on: 2/24/2023 7:57:34 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/24/2023 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristine Pagano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this bill to add a new section to Chapter 1 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes which would recognize American Sign Language (ASL). ASL originated in the early 19th century, a natural and visual language that has its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary and cultural heritage that is communicated daily in education, news, and events. ASL has gained academic recognition through Gallaudet University and schools for the deaf that are mandated placement under laws and worldwide recognition through television shows and movies with Deaf actors breaking barriers. Hawaii can break barriers by adding a new section for American Sign Language. The achievement of a new section to Chapter 1 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes that would recognize ASL increases employment opportunities for persons who utilize and communicate in ASL, increases the development and availability of ASL courses for credit, and provides a solid language base for deaf children to develop their cognitive and academic education for the full integration, independence and quality of life in society. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this late testimony.