



**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS**

1177 Alakea Street, Room B-100
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
Phone: (808) 586-8730 / Fax: (808) 586-8733
doh.ola@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony COMMENTING on SCR 32/ SR26
REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH'S OFFICE OF LANGUAGE
ACCESS TO ESTABLISH AN AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETER
WORKFORCE WORKING GROUP TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF AMERICAN
SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS IN THE STATE.**

SENATOR JOY A. SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR
SENATOR HENRY J.C. AQUINO, VICE CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date: 3/20/2023

Room Number: 225 & Videoconference

1 **Agency's Position:** The Office of Language Access (OLA) appreciates the intent of the Senate
2 Concurrent Resolution 32/ Senate Resolution 26 and offers the following comments.

3 **Purpose and Justification:** These resolutions request OLA to establish an American Sign
4 Language Interpreter Workforce Working Group to increase the number of American Sign
5 Language (ASL) interpreters in the State and to submit an interim report of its findings and
6 recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the Legislature no later than twenty
7 days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2024 and a final report no later than twenty
8 days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2026.

9 OLA notes that the aspirational and exploratory goal of both resolutions are in line with the
10 mission of OLA, which is to support the recruitment and retention of language interpreters and
11 translators providing services to State and State-funded agencies. The establishment of a
12 working group is an important step toward information-sharing and the development of ideas and
13 action steps to address the language needs in our State.

14 While OLA has the subject matter and technical expertise in spoken language interpreters, OLA
15 does not have the expertise in the area of ASL to chair this working group that would make it
16 meaningful. OLA submits that another agency, specifically the Disability and Communication

1 Access Board (DCAB), is the more appropriate agency to lead this effort. Pursuant to the
2 Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR) §11-218 - COMMUNICATION ACCESS FOR PERSONS
3 WHO ARE DEAF, HARD OF HEARING, AND DEAF-BLIND, DCAB is charged with testing
4 sign language interpreters and issuing the Hawaii State Sign Language Interpreter Credential
5 (HSSLIC) to those who pass the test; posting a recommended fee schedule to guide State
6 agencies; operating a continuing education program for sign language interpreters to maintain
7 their HSSLIC; and providing technical assistance concerning ASL interpreting requirements and
8 other communication access requirements under the ADA. Thus, the efforts of this proposed
9 working group appear to be within the scope of DCAB's mission.

10 Nevertheless, OLA recognizes that these resolutions benefit more than the deaf and hard of
11 hearing community as persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) may also include those
12 individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing and communicate using sign language interpreters.
13 Therefore, OLA would like to remain a member of this working group and is committed to
14 collaborating with DCAB and other members to further improve language access for all.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

March 19, 2023

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Other Distinguished Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Jackie Emmart and I am testifying in support of SR26. I am a nationally-certified American Sign Language Interpreter who has been in practice for nearly twenty years, and I live in Kāneʻohe.

I moved here two and a half years ago from Boston, Massachusetts, and have been warmly welcomed by the Deaf and Interpreting communities to practice here. I do so with gratitude and immense respect for the professional and personal duty that come with being a transplant on Hawaiian soil.

My career has been marked by service; to Deaf and DeafBlind people, to my colleagues, to novice and student interpreters, and to my profession on local, regional, and national levels. I am fortunate to bring with me decades of mentors investing in me and I'm here before you today as former adjunct faculty with Northeastern University (Boston), a mentor of many students and novice interpreters, a professional development creator and presenter, an interpreter coordinator, a former member of the national board of directors for our professional organization of ASL interpreters, and as someone who has a deep investment and interest in growing the pool of qualified interpreters here in Hawai'i.

I fully support the creation of an ASL interpreter workforce working group and I appreciate the thought that went into devising a composition of the group's membership that is representative of the myriad stakeholders who impact, and who are impacted by, the shortage.

While I'd be delighted to further consult beyond this testimony, to include defining what makes an interpreter "qualified," my focus today is on why we need this working group as soon as possible.

Simply put, it is an issue of supply and demand.

- Our community of Hawai'i-based interpreters is already small and within the time frame of less than one year, four interpreters have moved or will move out of state, substantially reducing our workforce.

- Most of us who are here do not just interpret for assignments in Hawai'i. There is a national shortage of ASL interpreters and there are competing needs for our services, which we are able to render nationwide via various virtual platforms.
- The fee structure dictated by the state for at least one state agency is far below the market standard, thus serving as a disincentive to provide services for a vulnerable kama'āina population and resulting in ongoing unfilled requests for interpreting services.

Beyond our current status, there are no ongoing local training opportunities. I was part of an effort in fall 2021 to support local practicing interpreters, and beyond that, there are only one-off professional development seminars that we're able to offer. Nothing exists to grow our pool locally or support the ongoing development of our workforce. We're in need of training incentives that are so mentioned in Senate Resolution 26.

Thank you for your consideration of this working group, and for hearing testimony in support. I am hopeful you will all vote in support of SR 26.

With Gratitude,

Jackie

Jackie Emmart, MS, NIC-A, CF-L2
jacqueline.emmart@gmail.com
Kāne'ōhe, HI

SR-26

Submitted on: 3/19/2023 1:15:45 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/20/2023 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keri Lee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

March 19, 2023

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Other Distinguished Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Keri Lee and I am testifying in support of SR26. I am a nationally-certified American Sign Language Interpreter who has been in practice for nearly twenty years, and I live in Punaluu.

My career has been marked by service; to Deaf and DeafBlind people, to my colleagues, to many students and novice interpreters, a former and current member HRID (Hawaii Registry of Interpreter for the Deaf) our professional organization of ASL interpreters, and as someone who has a deep investment and interest in growing the pool of qualified interpreters here in Hawai'i.

I fully support the creation of an ASL interpreter workforce working group and I appreciate the thought that went into devising a composition of the group's membership that is representative of the myriad stakeholders who impact, and who are impacted by, the shortage.

While I'd be delighted to further consult beyond this testimony, to include defining what makes an interpreter "qualified," my focus today is on why we need this working group as soon as possible.

Simply put, it is an issue of supply and demand.

- Our community of Hawai'i-based interpreters is already small and within the time frame of less than one year, four interpreters have moved or will move out of state, substantially reducing our workforce. Our Deaf, hard of hearing and Deaf Blind individuals suffer when there is a lack of interpreters.

- Most of us who are here do not just interpret for assignments in Hawai'i. There is a national shortage of ASL interpreters and there are competing needs for our services, which we are able to render nationwide via various virtual platforms.

- The fee structure dictated by the state for at least one state agency is far below the market standard, thus serving as a disincentive to provide services for a vulnerable kama'āina population and resulting in ongoing unfilled requests for interpreting services.

Beyond our current status, there are no ongoing local training opportunities. Nothing exists to grow our pool locally or support the ongoing development of our workforce. We're in need of training incentives that are so mentioned in Senate Resolution 26.

Thank you for your consideration of this working group, and for hearing testimony in support. I am hopeful you will all vote in support of SR 26.

With Gratitude,

Keri Lee NIC, HSSLIC V

keriwoo@gmail.com