

**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS**

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In reply, please refer to:
File: 24-005

**Testimony COMMENTING of HB2107
RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES**

Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair
House Committee on Water & Land

Hearing Date: 2/9/2024

Room Number: Conf. Room 430 &
Videoconference

1 **Fiscal Implications:** This measure may impact the priorities identified in the Governor's
2 Executive Supplemental Budget Request.

3 **Agency's Position:** The Office of Language Access (OLA) appreciates the intent of this measure
4 and defers to the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) as it may impact their
5 organizational structure and needs. OLA respectfully offers the following comments.

6 **Purpose and Justification:** The purpose of this measure is to appropriate funds to establish the
7 position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within HI-EMA and declares that
8 the general fund expenditure ceiling is exceeded.

9 The Maui wildfires serve as a significant reminder to all of us that disasters and emergency
10 events can occur at any time with little or no warning. They also highlight the need for language
11 access within our diverse community in the state.

12 Hawaii is one of the most culturally diverse states and has one of the highest proportions of non-
13 English speakers in the nation. Many of these non-English speakers are immigrants and migrants
14 with limited English proficiency (LEP). According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018-2022
15 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, approximately 25.73%, or 351,542, of

1 Hawaii's residents aged 5 years and older speak a language other than English at home. Of these,
2 150,743, or 11.06%, indicated that they speak English "less than very well."

3 English proficiency, or the lack thereof, significantly impacts people's safety and wellness,
4 putting them at risk in situations where they are unable to understand written or verbal warnings
5 about dangerous conditions, impending severe weather, appropriate responses to emergency
6 sirens/warnings, and communication with authorities. Therefore, prominently identifying the
7 language access component as a key element in planning and public-facing activities is essential.

8 HI-EMA, as the coordinating agency for emergencies between federal and local agencies, is
9 tasked with a great responsibility in planning for and responding to both natural and human-
10 caused emergencies. Having a dedicated Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator
11 who understands the organizational structure and has expertise in emergency management can
12 enhance and expedite the communication of critical information to persons with LEP.

13 Nevertheless, OLA respectfully defers to HI-EMA on implementation and resource needs.

14 OLA is committed to continuing collaboration with HI-EMA and all state language access
15 coordinators in implementing language access obligations to ensure meaningful access for all
16 persons with LEP in our state.

17 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

JOVANIE DOMINGO DELA CRUZ
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
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IN REPLY, REFER TO:
OCS 24.1049


February 7, 2024

To: The Honorable Linda Ichiyama, Chair,
The Honorable Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair, and
Members of the House Committee on Water and Land

Date: Friday, February 9, 2024

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Place: Conference Room 430, State Capitol & Videoconference

From: 
Jovanie Domingo dela Cruz, Executive Director
DLIR – Office of Community Services

Position: Support

Re: H.B. 2107 - RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

I. OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION

This bill would appropriate funds, in amounts to be identified, to the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency to fund one person to act as a Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Agency for FY 2024-2025.

II. CURRENT LAW

Currently, as far as the Office of Community Services (OCS) is aware, Hawaii has no legislation that provides to have Limited English Language Access Coordinator at the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency.

III. COMMENTS ON THE BILL

The Office of Community Services **supports** H.B. 2107. OCS recognizes that the Maui wildfires have exposed large areas in which our society is unprepared for disasters of multiple dimensions, and that the consequences hit our communities in multiple different ways. People who are disadvantaged tend to be hit the hardest. And they are the people who are usually OCS's core constituents – lower income people, immigrants, the elderly, and others who are disadvantaged. We as a State have a lot of hard work before us to be even remotely prepared for the next disaster that comes our way, from weather, fires, or other threats.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



KENNETH S. HARA
DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
KA 'OIHANA PILI KAUA
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
4204 DIAMOND HEAD ROAD
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96816-4420

STATE OF HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2107,
RELATING TO EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
WATER AND LAND

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

FEBRUARY 9, 2024

Aloha Chair Ichiyama, Vice-Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express our **OPPOSITION** to HB 2107.

Following the devastating wildfire on Maui, it became evident that disseminating information to all affected individuals was critical. Many victims, particularly those whose first language is not English, struggled to understand the situation and access available resources. In response, the state worked alongside the Office of Language Services (OLA) to ensure that language barriers were addressed and services were provided to those in need.

The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) acknowledges the existence of language barriers and has actively collaborated with OLA to effectively communicate our messaging. Therefore, HI-EMA opposes HB 2107 as it appears to be redundant. The current services offered by OLA have proven to be a valuable tool in reaching and supporting the diverse communities in Hawai'i whose first language is not English.

HI-EMA opposes HB 2107 as we believe that the services currently provided by OLA adequately address the communication needs of non-English speaking individuals in our state. We value the collaboration with OLA and recognize the importance of their services in ensuring effective and inclusive messaging for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 2107.

James Barros: james.barros@hawaii.gov; 808-733-4300



Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107 - RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND
Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024 | Conference Room 430 | Letter Date: February 7, 2024

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to urge Members of this Committee to support and pass HB2107, which will appropriate funds to establish a new position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator with the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA).

At The Legal Clinic, a nonprofit organization that provides no-cost legal services on immigration matters to low-income Hawai'i residents, we come into regular contact with immigrants who speak little or no English. Our staff involve qualified translators and interpreters to ensure that clients understand all the details of their immigration status, court cases, and government requirements for citizenship applications, visas, and the other services we offer.

It is even more immediately critical before, during, and after a *disaster* that all residents be enabled to understand the nature of the crisis, evacuation orders, and how to access essential food, shelter, and emergency medical care. The recent fires in Maui made evident how important clear communication is during a crisis. In Lahaina, one third or more of displaced residents are believed to be immigrants. Even now, in the ongoing aftermath, many residents have been unable or unwilling to seek assistance, with language barriers playing a significant role.

Nearly one in five residents in Hawai'i is foreign-born. They do not necessarily start out speaking English, and while many become proficient in time, there may be years in which they struggle to understand the dominant language around them. According to statistics from the State's own Bureau of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (2016 report), 84% of foreign-born Hawai'i residents speak another language in their homes. Those who are less than proficient in English experience reduced workforce participation (33% less for those not speaking English at all), limited occupational choices (primarily food service, building cleaning/maintenance, kupuna care, etc.), and much reduced income even with comparable education and experience. They are more vulnerable to exploitation, loss, and family disruption.

Improved language access is a broad goal and federal mandate that has already been acknowledged in State government, but little implemented. HB2107 offers an opportunity for this Committee to be in the forefront of efforts in Hawai'i to address language barriers, and to ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies. The safety and security of all of our state's residents will benefit.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to the successful passage of HB2107!

Respectfully,

Bettina Mok
Executive Director
The Legal Clinic
director@tlchawaii.org



TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB 2107 RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

February 9, 2024

The Hawai'i Friends of Civil Rights

Co-Chairs Amy Agbayani and Pat McManaman

Aloha

The Hawai'i Friends of Civil Rights works to achieve equity, justice, inclusion, uphold civil rights, and eliminate discrimination. We stand in **Strong Support of HB2107**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) advises that well-conceived and effectively delivered emergency messages can help ensure public safety, protect property, facilitate response efforts, elicit cooperation, instill public confidence, and help families reunite. FEMA also advises that all public messaging and communication should be accessible to populations with access and function needs and populations with Limited English proficiency (LEP). Yet, in the face of well-established federal, state, and regulatory guidance and laws, the State failed to provide critical language access resources for Lahania's LEP residents following the issuance of the emergency declaration. Tragically, the State's latest failure mirrors its failures during the COVID-19 emergency.

The law couldn't be clearer. Section 308 of the Stafford Act requires entities receiving funding from FEMA to create a language access plan that: 1) identifies LEP populations, 2) incorporates those populations into the disaster management planning process, 3) ensures that these populations can access disaster relief information, and 4) develops and maintains a database identifying qualified language access assistance programs that could be activated in an emergency. FEMA also provides guidance, training, and funding to assist state and local government emergency management agencies with these compliance issues.

A language access coordinator will help to assure that in any future disaster, HiEMA will: 1) have a plan in place, 2) provide interpreters on the ground as needed, 3) translate vital information related to the disaster and, in collaboration with the Governor who is charged with

coordinating the public release of information during emergencies, establish websites or other information portals that include English and translated vital information. Other agencies providing supplemental support materials, such as the Departments of Human Services, Health, and Labor would also post their translated documents to the same website as directed by the Governor.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this critically important measure.



PACIFIC GATEWAY CENTER

February 8, 2024

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES**
COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND
Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB2107, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Pacific Gateway Center is the designated Immigrant Resource Center for Maui (including Moloka'i and Lana'i), Kauai, and O'ahu. Inherent in this role is our commitment to alleviate barriers to language access that ensures our limited-English proficient community has equitable access to programs, services and opportunities. Our Hawaii Language Bank provides interpreters and translators to the community.

Our first-hand experiences with the immigrant community, coupled with valuable lessons learned following Covid-19 and the Maui fires, inform us that having a designated **point of contact** within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency to coordinate multiple language needs shifts the injustice that the linguistically vulnerable confront in need for accurate communications in times of emergencies.

Compliance obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, directs agencies to ensure meaningful access to information and provide language assistance services. Having an LEP Coordinator within HiEMA could lead to a coordinated, system-wide response with a protocol among public and private community stakeholders disseminating timely access to good and trusted information in times of disasters.

I strongly urge you to pass HB 2107 that assures all Hawai`i residents, including Limited English Proficiency individuals, have multilingual accessibility to State information.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to the successful passage of HB2107.

Mahalo for your support and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent vertical stroke in the middle.

Matthew Johnson
Executive Director

HB-2107

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 7:39:30 AM

Testimony for WAL on 2/9/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kami Yamamoto, MPH	National Alliance for Filipino Concerns	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am the education officer and part of the National Executive Board for the National Alliance for Filipino Concerns, or NAFCON. As a national alliance of grassroots organizations, institutions, and small businesses, our work is centered on our pillars of 1) preserving and celebrating the the rich Filipino culture, 2) empowering our community through community integration in the US and the Philippines, 3) promoting access to sustainable and culturally humble healthcare to working class Filipinos, and 4) engaging our communities to participate in actions to protect the rights and welfare of Filipinos in the US and for economic prosperity and peace in the Philippines.

Since August, we have been working with the Hawai'i Workers Center to understand comprehensively the situation on the ground. As NAFCON, we stand with the organizations supporting HB 2107 and SB2781 to advocate for the needs of the community members that we work with to receive crucial information in an efficient & culturally relevant manner. This was severely lacking in the aftermath of the Lahaina fires, and will continue to happen if we aren't taking into consideration that the communities we serve need timely & accurate information, and we have the responsibility to address those needs.

Myself and other members of NAFCON attended the Hawak Kamay Filipino community resource events last year. I talked to several community members themselves who were denied many times by FEMA or Red Cross and didn't understand why; they also didn't know that they could continue to challenge their denial. More recently, we have heard that some Filipino community members that we met in Lahaina shared that they are struggling with their insurance claims because of the lack of language accessibility. They are being taken advantage of by insurance companies and their homes are assessed for low amounts because many of them are also under-insured.

Timely services for migrants and those with limited English-proficiency could have filled in those gaps so our community members weren't further isolated in the aftermath of a crisis. In NAFCON's Bayanihan Response to Disasters campaign framework, we believe that community based disaster response is what will build the infrastructure to prepare for disasters before they happen and move towards long term recovery. This means creating a plan alongside those who are impacted the most every step of the way. Navigating the disaster response is alienating for many, and help will be provided unconditionally by community based organizations but we also need government entities on the same page: we cannot continue to leave behind the people who keep Hawai'i's economy, workforce,

and community afloat. Language access is more than translation work – it is ensuring that those who will be most impacted by policy decisions are aware and informed of their rights. We hope that passing HB 2107 and SB2781 is a step in the right direction.



**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES**

COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND

Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair

Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Coalition for Immigrant Rights (HCIR) fully supports HB2107/SB2781, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance.

Following the Maui wildfire, HCIR convened a Maui Emergency Response call with over 80 participants from immigrant-and-migrant-led organizations, community groups established as a response to the wildfire, and state and federal agencies to support and advocate for immigrant, migrant, and limited-English proficient survivors affected by the disaster. The meeting underscored the pressing need for language access. In response, an ad hoc committee was formed to work with various organizations to improve language access practices in response and recovery and ensure the community we are serving has equal access to navigating the available resources and assistance.



Before the Maui Wildfire, HCIR, Pacific Gateway Center, and other immigrant service providers collaborated to launch the Assisting Immigrants Deserving Equity (AIDE) cohort within the Office of Community Services-funded Immigrant Resource Center as part of our commitment to expand access and enhance support for the immigrant community in Hawai'i. When the Maui Wildfire occurred, we recognized an urgent need to redirect our efforts toward assisting the immigrant community in Maui. HCIR organized and conducted training sessions to establish a multilingual hotline. This hotline served as an effort for an equitable opportunity for recovery for individuals seeking assistance and resources in their native languages.

The absence of language interpreters and in-language public-facing materials after the Maui Wildfire was unnecessary. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic, proactive, and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Thank you for your support and consideration,

Maria Rallojaj

Policy and Communications Coordinator

HB-2107

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 8:15:36 AM

Testimony for WAL on 2/9/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Terrina Wong	Pacific Gateway Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As Director of Social Services at Pacific Gateway Center, I strongly support HB2107 as a key step towards ensuring a coordinated effort to provide language access to 1 out of 5 in our community who are foreign-born and need access to communications from trusted sources. The well being of our entire community must be inclusive and as mandated by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. We need an implementation checklist, a protocol that can be initiated, facilitated, and executed by a Language Access Coordinator within HiEMA to ensure our local government communicates effectively in ways that are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

Covid-19 and the Maui fires have taught us important lessons on critical gaps in the system that excludes immigrants and the limited English proficient in receiving timely and accurate communications in language. We deal each day with their loss, confusion, anxiety, loss of confidence in our community as a result. They are a vital part of our community and we can do much better. HB2107 is a step in the right direction.

Mahalo.

Terrina Wong

HB-2107

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 8:49:07 AM

Testimony for WAL on 2/9/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Genesis Gil	Roots Reborn Lahaina	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107

RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND

Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair

Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB2107, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency (LEP). During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator

within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Roots Reborn is a grassroots organization that was formed in the aftermath of the Lahaina fires to bridge the gap of language access. It is one of many that rose to action in the absence of a Language Coordinator in the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency. To streamline future disaster response it is critical that a language coordinator be established in HEMA. Our organization has been a pillar to the immigrant community by providing services. We have been boots on the ground since day one listening to their traumas and challenges of being LEP. In talking to Roots Reborn Community members and Lahaina residents about HB2107 they share their support that we have interpreted.

There is testament about LEP's receiving delayed assistance because of the language barrier creating further trauma in a vulnerable community,

- “I support this bill because there is a need for language access here on Maui, especially after the wildfires, I know a lot of people that did not get the help they needed on time because of the language barrier.” - Joel Morquecho
- “We found it difficult to go to the offices or places where they were helping people with emergency needs. It was hard for me and my wife to understand what they were asking of us. We found it so difficult to get the help we needed, to get medical attention, to understand the requirements, and the options available because we do not speak English at all. We ask for your support in funding this type of program so we can get our basic needs met.”- Nicolas Hernandez
- “Recovery has been such a frustrating time for me because I do not speak English at all. We could not get the help we need. The people who were in charge did not speak Spanish at all. With all the trauma it has been emotional” - Maribel Padilla

It is important that we put our folks first,

- “We need to invest in our people on Maui. A lot of people here did not get the help they needed after the disaster because of the lack of a translator. Currently, we are still dealing with not fully understanding the help that is out there.” - Maricela Martinez Martinez
- “It is necessary that these services are provided during these hard times, to know that someone can support you brings peace and security. To know someone is advocating for you and your necessities.” - Isabel Quezada

According to the Census 32% of Lahaina's population is foreign born. This is severely underreported as not everyone completes the survey. A large portion of Lahaina residents are LEP's. We ask that you listen to our community and take the appropriate measures to prevent these experiences from happening again. Every resident deserves basic communication despite the linguistic barrier.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to the successful passage of HB2107!

Thank you for your support and consideration,

Genesis Gil

Joel Morquecho

Nicolas Hernandez

Maribel Padilla

Maricela Martinez Martinez

Isabel Quezada

Roots Reborn



Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND
Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Suzanne Zeng, and I am President of Language Services Hawaii, a Hawaii company who provides interpreters and translators to hospitals, courts, various state agencies, and private firms. Allow me to give a bit of background to why I support this bill for a Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator position in the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency.

After the Maui wildfires, I found myself in zoom meetings almost daily with mostly non-profits who were reaching out to help the victims as soon as they could. The biggest issue we came across were the immigrants who needed help but did not understand English well enough to know what to do and where to go. Many lost their passports and other important documents that allowed them to be here and travel. Many were undocumented and did not know where to turn. The lack of English proficiency prevented many of the victims in seeking for the help they deserved. The worst part is Language Access seemed to be an afterthought to state agencies trying to help on the ground. Bilingual volunteers came to assist, but there was a lack of coordination among the agencies, and volunteers did not have the proper training to interpret for larger meetings, such as for the DOE meeting with parents, or at Mayoral meetings. Non-profits and the state's Office of Language Access used their own budgets to pay for professional interpreters when the various state agencies failed to provide them, even though by law, they were under obligation to do so.

Two months after the fires, my company won the contract with FEMA to provide interpreting services. During our discussions, they asked me what languages I thought were needed for this recovery. I expected government officials to have known this by then, since it had been two

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LanguageServicesHawaii.com



months. If it wasn't for my meetings with the non-profits and the Hawaii Coalition for Immigrant Rights, I would have not known either. We provided Spanish, Ilokano, Tagalog, Tongan, Marshallese, Pohnpeian, Vietnamese, and Chuukese. Our interpreters worked with HiEma at the Disaster Recovery Center (DRC) to keep a daily count of the number of people the interpreters assisted and in what languages.

The following data shows the number of people the interpreters assisted in their respective languages during the hours shown in the week ending November 4, 2023. This is almost THREE months after the fires occurred. Many of these victims started coming in after they heard there were speakers of their languages at the DRC. Please note that we did not supply interpreters in most of these languages and three language interpreters were there only twice a week.

Weekly Total	Today's Date:	Week ending 11/4/2023									Total
		Location: Lahaina DRC									
Language	8:00 am to 9:00 am	9:00 am to 10:00 am	10:00 am to 11:00 am	11:00 am to 12:00 pm	12:00 pm to 1:00 pm	1:00 pm to 2:00 pm	2:00 pm to 3:00 pm	3:00 pm to 4:00 pm	4:00 pm to 5:00 pm	5:00 pm to 6:00 pm	Who Completed Form:
Spanish	2	9	18	21	20	24	18	15	11	3	141
Tagalog	19	27	26	17	9	25	14	16	4	0	157
Ilokano	0	43	71	72	39	79	75	70	13	0	462
Tongan	1	5	8	21	13	12	10	14	2	1	87
Hawaiian	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Samoan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chuukese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marshallese	0	1	2	0	4	9	7	1	0	0	24
Vietnamese	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Pohnpeian	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	4
Japanese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Madarin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cantonese	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portuguese	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
ASL	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	5
Total ----->	22	85	129	133	85	150	127	118	33	4	886

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Two weeks after this, we had a total of 478 encounters and 330 encounters the week after that.

The importance of having a language plan for limited English speakers during and after a disaster cannot be understated. I have heard so many stories from Limited English speakers of the problems they encountered during this disaster due to a lack of language access. We need a better coordinated approach so this does not happen again. This is why I am asking you to support this bill to fund a Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator position within HiEMA to study and design a language access strategy for any future emergencies.

Sincerely,

Suzanne M Zeng,
President

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Nadezna Ortega
Executive Director
Tagnawa
tagnawaformaui@gmail.com

February 8, 2024

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB2107 - Limited English Language Access Coordinator for Disaster Services

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Tagnawa, a grassroots nonprofit organization committed to supporting Filipino survivors of the Lahaina fires. We wholeheartedly endorse and strongly advocate for the passage of HB2107, a crucial piece of legislation that addresses the critical need for language access coordination in disaster services.

The devastating impact of the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire highlighted the gaps in our emergency response system, especially concerning limited English proficient individuals. Tagnawa's disaster relief efforts revealed that the standard one-size-fits-all model of disaster assistance did not work. Many survivors fell through the cracks. We found that many of our Filipino community members were immigrants, many of whom were recent immigrants, elderly, with limited English proficiency. Hence, they had difficulty accessing emergency resources and services immediately after the fires.

The absence of language interpreters at shelters and the lack of remote interpretation options underscored the pressing need for a coordinated response. Fortunately, the community stepped in to bridge this gap. Our organization, Tagnawa, was on the ground talking to Filipino survivors, providing interpretation and translation assistance, and linking the Filipino community with the resources and services they needed.

HB2107, which proposes the appropriation of funds to establish a limited English language access coordinator within the Hawai'i emergency management agency, is a significant step toward rectifying these issues. This coordinator will play a pivotal role in ensuring that limited English proficient populations are seamlessly integrated into disaster management planning processes. It aligns with section 308 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act, emphasizing the importance of identifying and assisting these populations during emergencies.

Our organization recognizes the challenges faced by state and county agencies in coordinating disaster relief efforts, and we believe that a dedicated coordinator will enhance communication and streamline support for affected individuals. By appropriating funds for this position, HB2107 acknowledges the public interest and addresses the pressing needs of our diverse communities.

In conclusion, we urge you to support and pass HB2107 to establish a limited English language access coordinator within the Hawaii emergency management agency. This vital step will

contribute to a more inclusive, effective, and empathetic disaster response system, ensuring that no member of our community is left behind during times of crisis.

Thank you for your time, attention, and commitment to the well-being of our communities.

Sincerely,

Nadezna Ortega
Executive Director
Tagnawa

HB-2107

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 10:22:11 AM

Testimony for WAL on 2/9/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ethan Higa	Pacific Gateway Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Ethan Higa and I am the Deputy Director of Immigration Legal Services at Pacific Gateway Center.

I strongly support HB2107 as a means to ensure that all Hawai`i residents, including Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals, have multilingual accessibility to State information, especially in times of disaster.

We live in a state where 1 of 5 people are born outside of the US. During the initial Covid-19 and Maui fire responses, critical gaps in our system revealed that immigrants and the LEP are excluded in receiving timely and accurate communications in their own languages. At Pacific Gateway Center, we deal with many LEPs who come to us feeling lost, anxious, confused, misinformed, and unsure of what to believe. I believe the Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator would reduce confusion, elevate collaboration, ensure consistency of messaging, and effectively provide the cultural and linguistic bridge from the government to the limited English speaking residents of our home. This coordinator would be instrumental in ensuring the execution of a comprehensive implementation checklist and protocol to communicate effectively in culturally appropriate ways in languages people understand.

Lastly, having a dedicated Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator will enhance our ability to comply with legal requirements, including federal and state laws such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which mandates that recipients of federal funds provide language assistance services to individuals with limited English proficiency.

Immigrants and LEPs are a vital part of our community and we need to make sure that they are not left behind in accessing life-saving services. HB2107 positively moves language access in the right direction.

Mahalo,

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES**

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024

Dear Members of the House of Representative Committee,

I am writing in support of HB2107 as it appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Center realized during the Pandemic that our COFA community and other limited English speakers from the Pacific Island community were not able to receive information on a timely basis. Again, during the Maui wildfire disaster, we are faced with the same situation with families needing interpretation and assistance to navigate and access services. We have been sending COFA interpreters to Maui since September to address the need identified, however, having someone to coordinate language access services from the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will aid families in a timelier manner during a disaster.

Waipahu Safe Haven Center fully supports HB2107 and look forward to its passage.

Thank you for your consideration,

Barbara Tom,

Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Resource Ce

HB-2107

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 7:52:10 PM

Testimony for WAL on 2/9/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dianne Deauna	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107

RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND

Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair

Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB2107, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

As a Filipino immigrant, I'm aware the 40% of the non tourist population in Maui is Filipino and how a lot of our kababayans struggled to get support in the aftermath of the wildfires. Please help them access the help they need by passing this bill.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to the successful passage of HB2107!

HB-2107

Submitted on: 2/6/2024 10:41:14 PM

Testimony for WAL on 2/9/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Thaddeus Pham	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

As a public health professional and concerned citizen, I write in **STRONG SUPPORT** of HB2107, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai‘i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawai‘i has limited English proficiency. During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawai‘i's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawai‘i Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Mahalo for considering this important bill to better protect and serve all communities in Hawai‘i.

Thaddeus Pham (he/him)

HB-2107

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 9:50:05 AM

Testimony for WAL on 2/9/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nanea Lo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND
Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB2107, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, they face disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to the successful passage of HB2107!

me ke aloha 'āina,

Nanea Lo, Mō'ili'ili, O'ahu

HB-2107

Submitted on: 2/7/2024 1:28:49 PM

Testimony for WAL on 2/9/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leslee Matthews	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Testimony in STRONG SUPPORT of HB2107

RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND

Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair

Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB2107, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

During the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfires, the vulnerabilities faced by Hawai'i's population with limited English proficiency were starkly highlighted. Among the one out of nine individuals in Hawai'i grappling with language barriers, the chaos of disaster exacerbates their plight. Evacuation orders, emergency relief instructions, and access to crucial services become daunting tasks when language stands as a barrier. The aftermath brings further challenges, as navigating state and county programs for assistance becomes an arduous process for those who cannot fully understand the information provided.

The wildfires on Maui magnified these challenges, particularly evident in the absence of language interpreters at shelters. As flames encroached and evacuations became imperative, the lack of clear communication posed grave risks to those already facing linguistic barriers. It was the collective resilience of Hawai'i's professional and community interpreters that filled this void, stepping up amidst the crisis to ensure critical information reached those in need.

Yet, relying solely on the ad-hoc efforts of interpreters is not a sustainable solution. The events of that fateful day underscore the urgent need for a structured and coordinated approach to language access during emergencies. Establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency is paramount. Such a role would ensure a systematic and planned response, guaranteeing that language barriers do not further endanger lives during times of crisis. By proactively addressing this issue, Hawai'i can better protect all its residents, regardless of their language proficiency, when disaster strikes.

Leslee D. Matthews, Esq., MSW

Founder & Managing Attorney

Speak Out & Up Law, LLC

Wailuku, Maui, Hawai'i

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND
Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair**

Hearing Date: February 9, 2024

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB2107, which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Access Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

One out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency (LEP), and 36% of Lahaina's population speak a language other than English at home. During disasters, like the Maui wildfires, the LEP community faces disproportionate risks due to challenges in understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and accessing essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. The aftermath of a disaster often brings barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs. The absence of language interpreters at shelters during the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfire underscores the critical need for a coordinated response. Hawaii's professional and community interpreters filled the void, demonstrating the community's resilience. However, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

I help to oversee a multilingual hotline with interpreters in Spanish, Ilocano, Tagalog, Tongan, Marshallese, and Chuukese. This hotline was created to provide immediate interpretation for Maui fire survivors and provide in-language information, resources, and referrals because the lack of language access was very apparent. The hotline received calls from people needing in-language help for a variety of needs, both basic and complex. People did not know where to get food, how to get housing, how to apply for financial assistance, and much, much more because that information was not provided to them in a language they could understand. For example, callers in multiple languages received eviction letters from the Red Cross at the non-congregate shelters because they were not informed in their language that they must check in with the Red Cross every two days. The hotline interpreters explained the process to the callers in their language, and those callers were able to check-in and, as a result, remain in the NCS.

An LEP Language Access Coordinator is necessary to ensure there is a language access protocol in place during emergencies and to make certain that everyone receives vital and culturally sensitive information and help in a language they can understand. By establishing a dedicated language access coordinator, this bill will improve communication, accessibility, and assistance for our vulnerable populations.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to the successful passage of HB2107!

Thank you for your support and consideration,
Emma Leialoha-Bell

February 8, 2024

House Committee on Water & Land
Rep. Linda Ichiyama, Chair
Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Vice-Chair

Re: Testimony in Strong Support of HB 2107 - Relating to Disaster Services

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice-Chair Poepoe and members of the committee:

My name is Eric Arquero, a resident of Lahaina, Maui. My counterparts and I are organizers of Kaibigan ng Lahaina a Filipino-based organization striving to bring equity and resources to our Filipino and immigrant community.

the Lahaina wildfire placed extreme challenges for our community, which is magnified for our community members who's first language is not English. Immediately after the fires I volunteered at the Red Cross shelter at War Memorial in Kahului which housed over 300 displaced Lahaina residents. The rush to bring needed resources was plentiful, but one of the missing resources that was direly needed were language translators. If not for organizations like Maui Economic Opportunity (MEO), many of the displaced victims would have been left trying to navigate relief and recovery efforts. Even now as we've settled into recovery assistance from FEMA and charitable organizations, many immigrants shy away from seeking the available help due to limited language access. In fact, our latino community on Maui use a WhatsApp to communicate with each other in Spanish to not just create community but to share pertinent information.

Language access in disaster situations would be an incredible gain for our community and the State of Hawaii as well. I ask that you prioritize this important measure so that language access is not an afterthought in disaster response but so that emergency agencies can be prepared to provide notices in the wide-array of languages that make up our communities. This would instill dignity for people to act responsibility and integrity in the system to acknowledge those who may be the most vulnerable to life-saving information.

While this bill relates to one position in HiEMA, it would make a world of difference to know that disaster response is readily available for all our community members. Mahalo for the chance to submit testimony in support of this needed legislation.

Eric Arquero
earquero47@icloud.com

HB-2107

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 9:00:12 AM

Testimony for WAL on 2/9/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Agnes Malate	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

HAWAI'I STATE LEGISLATURE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEE ON WATER AND LAND

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of HB2107

February 9, 2024 | 9:00 am

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe and Members of the Committee,

FilCom CARES was established to provide equitable access to health care for Filipinos and other vulnerable groups during the pandemic. We recognize the importance of language access to government services and resources.

FilCom CARES strongly supports SB2107, which would establish a limited English language access coordinator within 20 the Hawaii emergency management agency.

Sincerely,

Agnes Malate, PhD

Co-chair, FilCom CARES

HB-2107

Submitted on: 2/8/2024 4:02:08 PM

Testimony for WAL on 2/9/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Courtney Spencer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of HB2107. Considering the high population of non-English speakers living and/or visiting the Hawaiian Islands, the necessity of adequate interpreters is adamant. This is especially true during times of disaster, evacuation, or safety measures. The use of interpreters would be beneficial during these times as they would ensure that all individuals involved have access to medical assistance, food supplies, housing, and financial assistance. The funds requested for a limited English language access coordinator through this act would be beneficial to the Hawaiian island's local and visiting populations and ensures the safety of all those involved in disaster relief should such a situation occur.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify,

Courtney Spencer