

**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS**

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In reply, please refer to:
File: 24-007

**Testimony COMMENTING of HB2107 HD1
RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES**

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

Hearing Date: 2/26/2024

Room Number: Conf. Room 308 &
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.

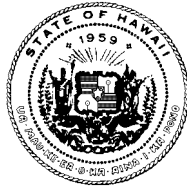
8 HI-EMA, as the coordinating agency for emergencies between federal and local agencies, is
9 tasked with a great responsibility in planning for and responding to both natural and human-
10 caused emergencies. Having a dedicated Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator
11 who understands the 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
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 24, 2024

TO: The Honorable Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 2701 HD1 – RELATING TO DISASTER SERVICES.**

Hearing: February 26, 2024, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308, State Capitol & Video Conference

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this measure, provides comments, and defers to the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA), the Office of Language Access (OLA), and the Office of Community Services (OCS).

PURPOSE: This bill appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Access Coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

The Committee on Water & Land amended the measure by:

- (1) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000, to encourage further discussion; and
- (2) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

We learned during the COVID-19 pandemic response and again during the Maui Wildfire response that information needs to be available in real-time in multiple languages. Hawaii's rich and diverse multiethnic resident and visitor populations require that all emergency management information be translated and interpreters made available during all stages of an

emergency management incident, starting with preparation. During multiple emergency management incidents in the past few years, the leadership of the Office of Language Access and committed community providers have provided most of the language assistance services in the immediate aftermath and have had to cobble together resources and strategies to meet the needs of impacted residents. The Office of Community Services also funded a multilingual access line for Maui residents who needed interpreters.

Additional resources are needed for HIEMA, OLA, OCS, and community providers to maintain and build capacity for a robust communication strategy in the face of emergencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

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 HD1
RELATING TO EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

FEBRUARY 26, 2024

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice-Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express our **SUPPORT** of HB 2107 HD1.

The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency **fully supports** HB 2107 HD1 as a crucial measure to enhance our state's preparedness and response capabilities. Language barriers can significantly impede effective communication during emergencies, potentially putting lives at risk and hindering the delivery of essential services.

The devastating wildfire on Maui underscored the importance of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their language proficiency, have access to timely and accurate information during crises. By formalizing and expanding the language services provided by the Office of Language Access (OLA), this bill will help to streamline communication efforts and ensure that critical information is effectively disseminated to all members of our community.

I urge legislatures to prioritize the passage of this bill to better equip HI-EMA with the necessary tools and resources to effectively communicate with and support all members of our community during emergencies. This proactive measure will undoubtedly enhance our ability to protect and serve all residents and visitors of Hawai'i in times of crisis.

HI-EMA supports HB 2107 HD1 with the following conditions:

- Request that the position be a non-civil service position, which would allow for immediate hire and flexibility, ensuring that language services can be quickly mobilized to support emergency response efforts.
- This bill does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive budget.

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 HD1.

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



TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF H.B. 2107, HD1 RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

To: Chair Kyle T. Yamashita, Vice-Chair Lisa Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee on Finance

From: The Hawai'i Friends of Civil Rights
Co-Chairs Amy Agbayani and Pat McManaman

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, HD1**

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 need and populations with Limited English proficiency (LEP). Yet, in the face of well-established federal, state, and regulatory guidance and laws, the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HiEMA) failed to provide critical language access resources for Lahaina'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.



Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107 - RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair and Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 26, 2024 | Conference Room 308 | Letter Date: February 24, 2024

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

HB2107 offers an important and unprecedented opportunity for Hawai'i to serve its significant multilingual community during and after emergencies, and to prevent further injustices which have plagued our limited English-speaking populations (LEPs) during recent disasters. HB2107 will appropriate funds to establish a new position of Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator with the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA).

Not only would this be a game-changer for Hawai'i and the numerous nonprofits that have scrambled to fulfill this role during disasters, but it would be lifted as a model strategy on a national platform. The National Partnership for New Americans is closely following the progress of this bill and engaging national media in promoting such policies. A HIEMA language access coordinator could work with community service providers and faith-based groups year round to establish emergency response processes and resources for multilingual communities.

While we agree that the State's Office of Language Access (OLA) is a fantastic resource for language support, it is not designed to actually deliver and implement the language services for the State that are required by federal mandate. OLA alone certainly can't provide the relief and resources needed during and after emergencies. This critical need has been met by nonprofits and vendors who serve immigrants and multilingual communities year-round, and it is not sustainable—especially without the leadership and funding to build the required capacity to do it well.

During the COVID pandemic, it was the same handful of nonprofits and independent language service providers who stretched their resources to inform LEP communities about the dangers of COVID infection and transmission, and the opportunities to get vaccinated and tested at no cost. Through these efforts, we jointly contributed to prevent an even higher rate of infection and death among immigrant and LEP populations in Hawai'i. Having a language access coordinator working with us during that time, and during and after the Maui fire disaster, would have most likely saved even more lives and provided relief more quickly for thousands.

The Legal Clinic is a nonprofit organization that provides free legal services on immigration matters to low-income Hawai'i residents. We regularly work with clients who speak little or no English, who due to language barriers struggle to access important information and resources. Immediately following the Maui fires, we brought bilingual speakers with us to Maui, to help survivors obtain replacement documents which they needed in order to demonstrate eligibility for disaster relief resources and even to travel off island. It's estimated that over 33% of Lahaina residents were foreign-born.

It is 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. 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. 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.

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
director@tlchawaii.org



PACIFIC GATEWAY CENTER

February 24, 2024

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

COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair

Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair, House Committee on Finance

Hearing Date: February 26, 2024

Conference Room 308 & Videoconference

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa,

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 written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "J" and "S" at the end.

Matthew Johnson
Executive Director



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

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 26, 2024

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

The Hawaii Coalition for Immigrant Rights (HCIR) **fully supports 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.

Establishing a Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator position within the Hawai‘i Emergency Management Agency is not just a proactive step; it's a smart investment for Hawaii. While upfront costs may be associated with funding this position, the long-term benefits outweigh them. Without a designated coordinator, the state may find itself scrambling to secure interpreters and translate materials in multiple languages during a crisis, which can be time-consuming and expensive. Additionally, the lack of proper language support can lead to misunderstandings, delayed response efforts, and even legal liabilities.

By investing in a Limited English Proficiency Language Coordinator now, Hawaii can save significant resources for the future. This coordinator can develop comprehensive language access plans, establish partnerships with language service providers, and ensure that essential information is readily available in multiple languages before disasters. This proactive approach enhances the state's emergency preparedness and response capabilities and minimizes the financial burden associated with ad-hoc language assistance efforts.



Providing equal access to emergency services and resources for individuals with limited English proficiency is not just a matter of compliance; it's a matter of equity and safety. Prioritizing language access can better protect our communities and LEP population and ensure that everyone has the information and support they need to stay safe during emergencies.

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-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2024 11:42:32 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Barbara	Waipahu Safe Haven Immigrant/Migrant Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107 HD1

RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES

Hearing Date: February 26, 2024

Dear Members of the House of Representative Committee on Finance,

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 Center

KAIBIGAN NG LAHAINA



February 25, 2024

Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Rep. Lisa Kitagawa, Vice-Chair
Members of the House Committee on Finance

Re: H.B. 2107 H.D. 1 – Relating to Disaster Services

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice-Chair Kitagawa and Members of the Committee on Finance,

Kaibigan ng Lahaina is a community organization established after the August 8, 2023, Lahaina Wildfires with the mission to promote and facilitate the relief, recovery and revitalization of the Filipino community in Lahaina. We are the only Filipino-based organization to be founded by Lahaina residents of Filipino ancestry/descent. We would like to offer testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of H.B. 2107.

One of our tasks as an organization has been to identify challenges of the Lahaina Filipino community. While the devastation of the Lahaina fires has been apparent in a multitude of ways, the challenges in our community to provide accurate and timely information to our limited English-speaking community members or have other language preferences have been one particular area of concern for us. As we now know that a high percentage of the lives lost on August 8, 2023 were of Filipino or other ethnic immigrant descent, and while there was very little communication on the day of to provide adequate warning about the severity of the disaster, we believe that if a similar incident shall occur in the future, that immediate and accessible information in Tagalog, Ilocano, Cebuano and also Spanish, Tongan, Samoan, Chuukese, Vietnamese, etc. would provide the necessary means to provide life-saving measures.

Additionally, the aftermath of the fires has caused for increased confusion and frustration about processes and expectations regarding relief and recovery efforts. Accounts immediately after the fires at congregate sheltering facilities like the War Memorial Gymnasium, brought forth images of confusion, despair and hopelessness in the faces of many of our immigrant community attempting to initiate relief assistance with the American Red Cross, FEMA and other entities providing valuable support. These sentiments were addition to the trauma that they were experiencing just days after the fires. Even now, many of our community members fail to utilize available resources as reliable language access remains to be vacant or inconsistent at locations such as the Disaster Relief Center operated by FEMA and the County of Maui. As we move toward attempting to house FEMA non-eligible resident into intermediate housing through State of Hawaii and philanthropic agencies, we identify that Limited English language coordination will be a tangible necessity to serve these community members. The presence and priority of language access in wake and aftermath of

disaster could potentially provide the necessary and equitable assistance to immigrant communities facing immediate and imminent challenges due to a natural disaster. We appreciate the efforts that have come from smaller government and philanthropic agencies to respond to this need, however, we believe Limited English Language coordination at higher levels of government such the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Therefore, we resolutely support the intent of this measure and essential appropriations to this measure asking for the passage of H.B. 2107.

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

Sincerely,

Debbie Andres-Arellano

Eric Arquero

Ryan Corpuz

Sieny Corpuz

Cindy Lulu

Tiffany Somera

Nestor Ugale, Jr.

Board Members for Kaibigan ng Lahaina





HAWAII WORKERS CENTER

(503) WORKERS

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

Defending and Respecting the workers of
Hawaii'i

hawaiiworkerscenter@gmail.com
Mail: 2252 Puna St., Honolulu, HI 96817
hawaiiworkerscenter.org

February 25, 2024

**Executive Board
Committee**

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Board Chair

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Executive Director

Sergio Alcubilla III, Esq.

Hawaii'i State House of Representatives

Committee on Finance

Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair

Rep. Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

RE: STRONG SUPPORT for H.B. 2107 Related to Disaster Services

Dear Chair Rep. Yamashita, Vice-Chair Rep. Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee on Finance:

The Hawaii'i Workers Center (HWC) envisions a Hawaii'i in which all workers are empowered to exercise their right to organize for their social, economic and political well-being.

It is a resource of information, education, training and organizing for Hawaii's workers.

The HWC stands in strong support of H.B. 2107 which appropriates funds to establish the position of Limited English Proficiency Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii'i Emergency Management Agency.

Having this position within HI-EMA especially critical for our immigrant communities and for residents that are limited English proficient. The need for such a coordinator was not only apparent during the pandemic in which many needing language access faced additional challenges navigating resources but more recently, in the devastating Maui wildfires just a few months ago. The immigrant and migrant communities were hit hard but language access was an afterthought rather than a priority. As a result, thousands in the community were left in the dark regarding important resources, sources of assistance, and other vital information critical to disaster response.

A language access coordinator will help ensure that language will not be a barrier in an emergency or disaster. We ask that you please support and pass H.B. 2107.

Sincerely,

Sergio Alcubilla
Executive Director



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866-295-7282 | aarp.org/hi | hiaarp@aarp.org |
[Twitter.com/aarphawaii](https://twitter.com/aarphawaii) | facebook.com/aarphawaii

The State Legislature House of Representative Committee on Finance
Monday, February 26, 2024
Conference Room 308, 2:00 p.m.

TO: The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
FROM: Keali'i S. Lopez, State Director, AARP Hawai'i
RE: Support for S.B 2781, SD1 -Relating to Disaster Services

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice-Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Keali'i Lopez, and I am the State Director for AARP Hawai'i. AARP is a nonpartisan, social impact organization that advocates for individuals aged 50 and older. We have a membership of nearly 38 million nationwide and nearly 140,000 in Hawai'i. We advocate at the state and federal level for the issues that matter most to older adults and their families.

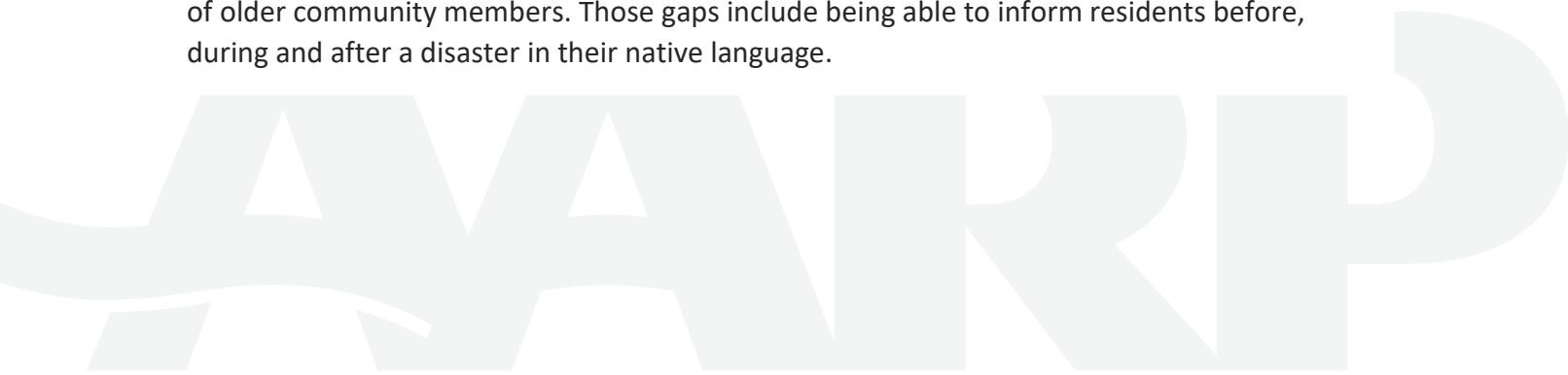
AARP supports H.B. 2107, HD1, which appropriates funds to establish a limited English language access coordinator within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency.

The Maui wildfires and other incidents involving fires, storms, and extended power outages have shown that kupuna are the most vulnerable and most likely to die in a disaster. Nearly three-quarters of the 100 identified victims of the Lahaina fire were age 60 and older. Many of Hawaii's older residents are immigrants and speak a language other than English at home.

Hawai'i is above the national average in non-English speaking households. About one in four households here speak another language compared to one in five nationally.

AARP Hawai'i and other groups serving kupuna learned first-hand about the need for translation in serving older communities during the pandemic. A big factor in Hawaii's high COVID vaccination rate is the use of translators, especially in senior housing projects, to explain the need for vaccination and how to get vaccinated to residents in their own language.

Ensuring older adults are properly served by disaster preparedness and emergency planning requires us to acknowledge — and address — the gaps that exist between local emergency management teams and the organizations and municipal offices that work with and on behalf of older community members. Those gaps include being able to inform residents before, during and after a disaster in their native language.



When emergency managers, state and local officials, and other community leaders understand the diverse needs of older adults — by working with them and one another — the plans, projects, and procedures they design and deploy will be more effective at protecting residents from harm and saving lives.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **support of H.B. 2107, HD 1.**

HB-2107-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2024 7:31:36 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christy MacPherson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and members of the House Committee on Finance,

I am in STRONG SUPPORT of HB2107 HD1.

Mahalo for your consideration.

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB2107
RELATED TO DISASTER SERVICES
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair**

Hearing Date: February 26, 2024

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

I am writing in **support of HB2107 HD1**, 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.

With a full time Language Access Coordinator, HI-EMA would be able to update their language access plan, begin holding stakeholder meetings with immigrant and migrant leaders, create procurement procedures/MOUs with translation/interpretation services, and create more evergreen language accessible materials.

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,

Liza Ryan Gill
Tantalus, HI

HB2107

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

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair

Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 26, 2024

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, 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.

During the recent wildfire that devastated our town of Lahaina, and because I am trilingual (fluent in Ilocano, Tagalog, and English and a bit of Spanish), I had a first-hand experience of helping FEMA by providing translation services to individuals whose first language is not English at one of the disaster relief centers and during the Hawak Kamay event at the Lahaina Civic Center. At those times, I realized how important that such services should be provided.

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,

Cornelio "CJ" Ancheta

HB-2107-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2024 11:09:33 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Austin Haleyalpiy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am sort of taken back that it has had to take the state a pandemic and a natural disaster to bring a bill like this forth. I have worked for non-profit agencies during both of these events, and as the son of COFA citizens, it was hard seeing my communities suffer especially due to lack of language access. I would never resent my loved ones, but if I ever came close, it was during these times where I was spread thin trying to assist in whatever way I could. Most of the work I put in, I was never compensated for. That wasn't of importance when it comes to matters of life and death. It seems dramatic when I talk about these times in with this tone, but that was a reality for a lot of people like me doing work in the community both as a full-time job, and as just a concerned member of the community wanting to help.

There were times where we literally had to go door to door to either disseminate information, or to pass out masks and hand sanitizers, and just about every house that we went to spoke a language other than english. There were a lot of times where young teens/adults, even children would have to come and speak with us because their caretakers were not proficient in English. Luckily we had staff that were fluent in a lot of the languages that were prominent in the communities we worked in , myself included. We saw community partners also take on language access by putting together announcements and flyers in the various languages of the LEP communities we served. Had there been someone at the state level to ensure all these are protocols and put into place already. our community orgs could have been able to just focus on providing the services that are in their kuleana. The funds that would be appropriated for this action would be the best investment made as it would show that the state cares for all it's people. Not just those who speak English. That there are plans in place in case of emergencies for LEP communities who already have a hard time accessing resources as it is.

Language access is literally a right. It is not a privilege.

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

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

As a first-generation immigrant, and with many of my family members also being first-generation and Limited English Proficient (LEP), I understand the challenges faced by individuals in our community during times of crisis. After the Lahaina fire, I found myself interpreting for my affected family members so that they could access the resources and assistance they needed. The dissemination of crucial information and updates was only available in English, creating significant barriers for our LEP communities.

It's imperative to recognize that one out of nine people living in Hawaii has limited English proficiency. During disasters, individuals with LEP face disproportionate risks due to difficulties understanding evacuation orders, emergency relief information, and essential services like emergency medical care and shelter assistance. Moreover, the aftermath of a disaster often brings additional hurdles for these individuals 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 highlighted the critical need for a coordinated response to language access during emergencies. While Hawaii's professional and community interpreters stepped in admirably, demonstrating the community's resilience, establishing a dedicated Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to addressing language barriers during crises.

In conclusion, I strongly support HB2107 and urge its passage to ensure that all community members, such as my family, can effectively receive critical information and access necessary resources during emergencies.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Maria Rallojaj

HB-2107-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2024 10:39:17 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tamara Paltin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Chair Yamashita and Vice Chair Kitagawa,

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on HB2107 HD1. I am in strong support of this measure having seen first hand the difficulties in helping our entire community with the diversity of culture and language here in Hawaii. We are working currently on assisting the State Department of Human Services to host a community townhall aimed at taking steps to move FEMA ineligible survivors out of non-congregate sheltering to cut down State's expenses for sheltering and it has been extremely difficult to coordinate the various languages to reach all of the FEMA ineligible our South Pacific Islander residents, COFA, filipino (tagalog, ilocano and visayan) and latino speakers and others. This would make future disasters much smoother for all our residents.

Mahalo for your service to our communities,

Tamara Paltin

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I am a Lahaina wildfire survivor. Since the day of the fires, I have not stopped assisting members of my family and friends who have limited English proficiency. There has been a constant need. I have not only translated for them when it comes to matters of government and disaster agency aid and recovery, but I also have had to help them navigate through this post disaster world we are trying to survive in here in Lahaina. Having language access means that not only will we have support from our government, but we will have a committed advocate that would help us through future disasters. For this reason, I hope that you consider providing your support to this very important bill. Not being able to reach out and communicate and provide for our immigrant community during a time of emergency would be another disaster in itself.

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,
Debra Arellano

HB-2107-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 10:48:57 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Iris Mendoza	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

I personally observed the vulnerability of LEP communities during the Maui wildfires. They encountered significant challenges due to the absence of materials in their language right from the start of the disaster. In addition to losing loved ones, homes, and livelihoods, these communities continue to struggle with limited resources due to the lack of systematic language support. This has led to homelessness and severe trauma, which has been extensively documented. These communities have contributed significantly to Hawaii and deserve protection and equitable access to resources, as mandated by law. It is crucial for Hawaii to prioritize ensuring this support for them by having organization during emergencies that ALSO include coordination for LEP communities.

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,

Iris Mendoza

HB-2107-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 10:54:54 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2024 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

me ke aloha 'āina,

Nanea Lo

HB-2107-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 12:49:15 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joel Montoya	Roots Reborn	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing this letter in support of HB2107, which concerns the legislature allocating funds to establish the Limited English Proficient Language Coordinator position within the Agency. We see it as extremely important due to the need that exists to obtain appropriate information and, above all, in timely, accurate and understandable medical attention, filling out forms and applications for support programs in what was the wildfires of Maui for many people has been difficult and sometimes impossible, support for this legislature would give us more confidence and security for the protection of those most in need.

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

Joel Montoya

HB-2107-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 1:16:31 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
AnnDionne Selestin	Roots Reborn	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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Limited English Language Access Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency will ensure a systematic and planned approach to language access during emergencies.

Growing as an immigrant and being the translater for my parents, I have my shares of confusions in not understanding important documents, resources and many more. We matter too, we need help as well . We are all different, but we are all equal !.

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,

AnnDionne Selestin