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GOVERNOR OF HAWAII  
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII



DEPT. COMM. 100-22  
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In reply, please refer to:  
File:

December 23, 2024

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi,  
President and Members of the Senate  
Thirty-second State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 409  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

The Honorable Nadine K. Nakamura,  
Speaker  
and Members of the House of  
Representatives  
Thirty-second State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 431  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear President Kouchi, Speaker Nakamura, and Members of the Legislature:

For your information and consideration, I am transmitting a copy of the Assessment of American Sign Language Interpreting Services and the Interpreter Shortage in Hawaii Report, pursuant to Act 204, Session Laws of Hawaii 2024. In accordance with Section 93-16, Hawaii Revised Statutes, I am also informing you that the report may be viewed electronically at:

<https://health.hawaii.gov/opppd/department-of-health-reports-to-2024-legislature/>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Fink".

Kenneth S. Fink, M.D., M.P.H., M.G.A.  
Director of Health

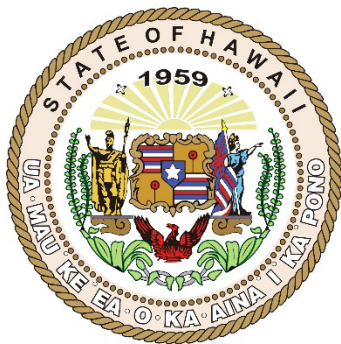
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# **Assessment of American Sign Language Interpreting Services and the Interpreter Shortage in Hawai'i**

## **Report to the Thirty-Third Legislature – 2024 (Final)**

**State of Hawai'i  
Department of Health  
Disability and Communication Access Board  
1010 Richards Street, Room 118  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813**



**December 2024**

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## **Acknowledgement**

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) extends its gratitude and mahalo to the Working Group members who contributed to this report.

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## **Executive Summary**

Tasked by the Thirty-Third Legislature, the Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB), administratively attached to the Hawai‘i Department of Health, convened a working group to address American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting services and the interpreter shortage for individuals with communication disabilities. Both the Legislature and the ASL user community widely recognized the shortage of ASL interpreters in Hawai‘i. Through surveys and interviews conducted among ASL users for this report, DCAB identified multiple contributing factors, providing lawmakers with a clearer understanding and actionable recommendations and solutions to address and remedy the causes of the interpreter shortage.

## Introduction

This report is the product of a Working Group convened by the DCAB, pursuant to Act 204, which was signed into law by Governor Josh Green, MD, on July 5, 2024. The Working Group's primary objectives were to study the state of ASL interpretation services in Hawai'i; and investigate and study any means, methods, processes, or systems that might improve the provision of ASL interpretation services in the State.

The Working Group is composed of representatives from a variety of sectors, including the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Department of Education (DOE), the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, ASL interpreters, and members of the Deaf community from Kaua'i, O'ahu, Maui, and the Big Island (Hawai'i). The findings in this report are derived from data collected through surveys, interviews, and other sources, providing insight into the current needs and gaps in ASL interpreting services across the state.

Published in the *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, Volume 28, Issue 1 (January 2023), the study titled *How Many People Use Sign Language? A National Health Survey-Based Estimate* found that approximately 1,140,000 individuals in the United States who experience hearing loss—ranging from 'moderate' to 'profound' or 'total' deafness—use American Sign Language (ASL). (ResearchGate GmbH. (2008–2024))

Based on this ratio, it is estimated that approximately 2,800 individuals in Hawai'i use ASL. Additionally, data from the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism's visitor arrival reports indicate that around 500 visitors in Hawai'i use ASL on any given day. Both of these groups rely on the services of ASL interpreters. (Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism)

### A. Legal References

In the United States, federal and state laws require public and private entities to provide auxiliary aids and services, such as sign language interpreters, to ensure effective communication for individuals with communication disabilities. Effective communication means that a covered entity's interactions with individuals who have communication disabilities must be equally as effective as those with individuals without such disabilities. This ensures equal access to information, services, and opportunities for all individuals.

#### Federal Laws

Federal protections include Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.), as amended by the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (Public Law 110–325). These laws prohibit discrimination against people with disabilities and mandate the provision of auxiliary aids and services to facilitate effective communication.

## Communication Methods for People with Disabilities

Individuals with vision, hearing, or speech disabilities use various communication methods. For those who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind, information is often received through writing or sign language rather than speech. In the United States, the most commonly used sign language is ASL.

### Recognition of ASL

As of 2023, 46 states, including Hawai'i, officially recognize ASL as a legitimate language in state law, according to the National Association of the Deaf (NAD). Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS) Section 1-13.7 formally acknowledges ASL as a fully developed, autonomous natural language with its own unique grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage. (National Association of the Deaf, 2023, December)

### ADA and Effective Communication

The ADA requires effective communication tailored to the context, nature, length, and complexity of the interaction, as well as the individual's normal communication method. Auxiliary aids and services for the deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind may include:

- Qualified interpreters (sign language, oral, cued-speech, or tactile).
- Video Relay Services (VRS): A free, subscriber-based service where interpreters facilitate communication between sign language users and voice telephone users.
- Video Remote Interpreting (VRI): A fee-based service using video conferencing to connect off-site interpreters for real-time communication.

### Qualified Interpreters

A qualified interpreter, as defined by the ADA, must interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, both receptively (understanding the individual with the communication disability) and expressively (conveying information to them), using necessary specialized vocabulary. While certification is encouraged, it is not required to become a qualified interpreter.

### VRI Performance Standards

Under the ADA, VRI services must meet the following performance criteria:

- Real-time, full-motion video and audio with a high-speed, wide-bandwidth connection ensuring clear and uninterrupted communication.
- High-quality video that shows the interpreter's and user's faces, arms, hands, and fingers clearly, regardless of body position.
- Clear and audible voice transmission.
- Adequate staff training for quick setup and proper operation of VRI equipment.

By adhering to these requirements, covered entities ensure compliance with the ADA and provide equivalent communication access for individuals with communication disabilities.

### Legislative Framework

Act 282 (1999) established the DCAB and outlined its responsibilities under HRS Section 348F-3(3). DCAB is tasked with creating guidelines for communication access services provided to individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind in state programs and activities. These guidelines include:

- Determining interpreter qualifications.
- Setting interpreter payment rates.
- Credentialing interpreters without national certification via a state screening process.

DCAB formalized these procedures in the Hawai'i Administrative Rules (HAR), Title 11, Chapter 218, "Communication Access Services for Persons Who Are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind."

### Testing and Credentialing Fees

Per HRS Section 348F-8, DCAB may establish fees for state credentialing of interpreters. The statewide credential test fee for ASL interpreters is \$360.00, covering:

- The Hawai'i Quality Assurance System (HQAS) performance test.
- The Code of Professional Conduct written test.

### Continuing Education

Interpreters holding the Hawai'i State Sign Language Interpreter Credential (HSSLIC) may maintain their credentials through the HQAS Continuing Education Program, which offers professional development opportunities to enhance interpreting knowledge and skills. Participants can either retake the HQAS test or earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs). The program fee is \$50.00, and credentials are valid for two years.

### Provisional Credentials

Hawai'i issues provisional credentials to interpreters who:

- Hold a valid credential from a recognized entity, issued within the last two years.
- Possess an Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) certification at a level of 4.0 or higher.

Provisional credentials are equivalent to the lowest level credential issued by DCAB and are valid for one credential cycle.

## **B. Recognition of National Credentials**

Hawai'i recognizes credentials awarded by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID) and the NAD. However, since early 2000's NAD no longer issue new credentials:

- K-12.
- Specialist Certificate: Legal.
- Oral Transliteration Certificate.

Applicants must be at least 18 years old and possess a bachelor's degree. RID certifications are maintained through current annual membership fees:

- Certified Membership: \$220.00
- Seniors (55+): \$140.00

In partnership with RID, the Center for the Assessment of Sign Language Interpretation (CASLI) administers exams required for RID certifications, including:

- CASLI Generalist Knowledge Exam (CGKS): Includes Fundamentals of Interpreting and Case Studies portions.
- CASLI Generalist Performance Exam: Evaluates interpreting skills.

RID members are eligible for discounted testing fees.

## **C. Interpreter Screening Test Systems**

### Quality Assurance System Test

Participating states are Arkansas, Hawai'i, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. Each state has their own statutory requirements to become a certified sign language interpreter. RID recognizes interpreters who previously held NAD certifications if they are registered and meet RID requirements.

### Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf

RID offers two active national certifications:

- National Interpreter Certification (NIC)
- Certified Deaf Interpreter (CDI)

Three certifications are currently under moratorium:

### Educational Certificate

The Educational Certificate is designed for interpreters who specialize in providing services within educational settings, particularly K-12 environments. This certification ensures that interpreters have the specific skills required to interpret effectively for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in classrooms. While this certification is not a national standard, it is recognized by various states and educational institutions as a key credential for interpreters working in schools. Typically, individuals who earn the



Educational Certificate demonstrate proficiency in both American Sign Language (ASL) and educational interpreting practices, helping them meet the unique needs of students in an academic environment.

#### Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) Certification Program

The Texas Department of Health and Human Services offers three levels of certification for sign language interpreters: Basic, Advanced, and Master. These certifications are designed to evaluate and credential interpreters based on their proficiency and expertise.

#### Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA)

The Boys Town National Research Hospital's EIPA Center offers certification for ASL interpreters seeking employment in K-12 classroom settings. (Boys Town National Research Hospital)

### **D. Interpreter Rates: ASL Interpreter Fee Schedules**

ASL interpreters work as independent contractors and are responsible for maintaining their certifications or credentials. Fees for services are generally determined by the interpreter's certification level, years of experience, specialized training, and other relevant factors.

Under HRS Chapter 348F and HAR Chapter 11-218, the DCAB has established a recommended fee schedule. This schedule serves as a guideline for state agencies to understand standard rates and billing practices when hiring interpreters.

#### Guidance for Covered (Hiring) Entities

When hiring a sign language interpreter, the covered (hiring) entity must consider the communication preferences of the individual who is deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind. However, per HAR §11-218-8(b):

"If no preference is stated, providers with the highest level of credentials shall be hired first, followed by providers with lesser levels of credentials."

This ensures that the most qualified interpreters are prioritized, promoting effective communication.

### **E. The Role of ASL Interpreting Services in Accessibility**

Interpreting services are essential for facilitating communication between Deaf or hard of hearing individuals and hearing individuals. These services are not just a convenience; they are a fundamental right that ensures equal access to information, health-care, education, and participation in social and professional activities. ASL

interpreters translate spoken language into sign language, enabling Deaf individuals to engage fully in conversations, events, and critical services that are often inaccessible without such assistance.

**Key roles of interpreting services include:**

- **Facilitating Communication:** Interpreters provide accurate translations, allowing Deaf individuals to fully participate in conversations, meetings, medical appointments, and public events.
- **Promoting Equal Access:** Interpreting services are a legal and ethical obligation under the ADA, ensuring that Deaf individuals have the same access to services and information as hearing individuals.
- **Enhancing Participation:** In educational settings, interpreters play a crucial role in ensuring that Deaf students can access the curriculum, engage with peers, and participate in extracurricular activities.
- **Supporting Independence:** Interpreters enable Deaf individuals to independently navigate everyday activities, such as doctor's visits, job interviews, and community engagement, without needing to rely on family or friends.
- **Cultural Competence:** Qualified interpreters bring cultural awareness to their work, helping to ensure communication is not just accurate, but also meaningful and respectful of Deaf culture.
- **Improving Safety and Understanding:** In high-stakes situations, such as emergencies or legal proceedings, interpreters help ensure that Deaf individuals fully understand important information, safeguarding their rights and well-being.

In summary, interpreting services play a fundamental role in promoting accessibility and inclusivity for Deaf individuals. By facilitating communication across different contexts, interpreters help create environments where all individuals can participate equally and fully.

# Analyzing the Status of ASL Interpreting Services in Hawai'i

The availability and quality of ASL interpreting services in Hawai'i are shaped by a combination of factors, including increasing demand, the availability of qualified interpreters, and the unique challenges presented by the state's geographic isolation and cultural diversity. This report examines the current state of ASL interpreting in Hawai'i, focusing on:

## A. Availability of Services:

- **Existing Infrastructure:** Hawai'i has a range of interpreting services, including private agencies, freelance interpreters, and institutional providers (e.g., hospitals, schools). However, access to qualified interpreters is uneven across the islands, with urban areas such as Honolulu having more resources compared to rural areas or the neighbor islands.
- **Hospitals:** Many clinics and hospitals in Hawai'i offer ASL interpreting services, but availability can vary. Larger hospitals, especially in urban areas like Honolulu, typically provide in-person interpreters or VRI if requested. However, smaller, or rural hospitals, especially on neighbor islands, often struggle to provide timely access to interpreters, particularly in emergency situations.

Clinics and hospitals have private contracts with interpreter referral agencies to ensure effective communication with their patients. Requests are made through their Patient Relations offices.

- **Schools:** Public schools are required to provide ASL interpreting services for Deaf students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). While some schools employ full-time interpreters, others rely on contractors. The availability and quality of interpreters vary widely by district, with a significant shortage of qualified interpreters in educational settings across the state. One major factor contributing to this shortage is the inability of schools to offer competitive pay, which has made it difficult to fill staff positions.
- **Hawai'i DOE awarded to two Interpreter Referral Agencies to provide Educational Communication Access Services for Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (Statewide):**

The two (2) statewide Request for Proposals (RFP) estimates out of 258 schools, eighty-one (81) students require ASL interpreter services. The availability of freelance ASL interpreters to accept job assignments outside of Monday to Friday school hours are limited for the general population.

- **Hawai'i DOE Positions:** The Hawai'i DOE has fifteen (15) statewide positions for Educational Interpreters. Currently:

Three (3) positions are filled:

- One (1) on the island of O‘ahu.
- Two (2) on the island of Hawai‘i.

This highlights the significant need for qualified Educational Interpreters in Hawai‘i’s school system.

- **Increasing Demand:** The demand for ASL interpreting services has risen in recent years due to greater awareness of Deaf rights and the growing need for accessibility in various sectors, including health-care, education, and community events.

To meet the increasing demand, the Department of Health, Family Health Services Division awarded multiple interpreter referral agencies that includes spoken language interpreters to ensure effective communication between a child/family and a health-care/Early Intervention provider(s)(doctor, nurse, therapist, care coordinator, etc.).

In addition, the Department of Human Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Services to the Blind awarded contracts to two Interpreter Referral Agencies to provide Communication Access Services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf-Blind for their clients with communication disabilities ages 14 and above to prepare for, obtain, maintain, or advance in competitive employment in integrated work settings. ASL interpreter services are provided in various settings: vocational counseling, self-advocacy training, vocational/technical training, credential attainment, higher education, benefits counseling, and workplace readiness training.

To offset the increasing demand of on-site ASL interpreter services, public and private entities are utilizing video remote interpreter services. The Department of Accounting General Services (DAGS), State Procurement Office (SPO) procures and manages price list and vendor list contracts for VRI services on behalf of Executive branch agencies, and any of the other twenty chief procurement officer (CPO) jurisdictions, including the Judiciary and the Legislative branches and the counties.

## B. Quality of Services

- **User Satisfaction:** Feedback from the Deaf community highlights mixed experiences with interpreting services. While some Deaf individuals report positive experiences with skilled, culturally competent interpreters, others face issues with availability, professionalism, and reliability.
- **Certification:** ASL interpreters are encouraged to earn certification from recognized organizations like the RID or the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI). Certification ensures interpreters have met the minimum professional standards and possess the skills necessary for effective service delivery.

- **Hawai'i State Sign Language Interpreter Credential (HSSLIC):** The DCAB issues a state credential to interpreters who pass the HQAS test or hold a credential from a DCAB-recognized organization.
- **Continuing Education Units Program:** To maintain the HSSLIC credential, ASL interpreters must earn continuing education credits through training that is approved by the DCAB every two years. However, an exception is made if the ASL interpreter submits proof of CEU credits through the RID.

### C. Challenges Faced:

- **Interpreter Shortage:** Hawai'i is experiencing a significant shortage of ASL interpreters, exacerbated by factors such as the absence of local training programs, the high cost of living, and the state's geographic isolation. These challenges make it difficult to attract and retain qualified interpreters.
- **Awareness and Advocacy:** There is an ongoing need for greater awareness about the importance of ASL interpreting services. Increased advocacy is necessary to promote understanding of Deaf individuals' rights to accessible communication and to encourage more robust support agencies that provide On-Demand Remote VRI services.
- **Legislative Support:** Policies that prioritize funding for Interpreter Training Programs (ITPs) and establish stronger accessibility standards are essential. Legislative action can play a key role in improving the availability and quality of ASL interpreting services.

The status of ASL interpreting services in Hawai'i presents both opportunities and challenges. While there are ongoing efforts to improve accessibility and quality, significant barriers remain—particularly the shortage of qualified interpreters and the need for more comprehensive training programs. Addressing these challenges will require collaboration between the Deaf community, policymakers, and educators to ensure that all individuals in Hawai'i can access the services they need.

## Surveys of Key Stakeholder Groups

DCAB conducted surveys of five key stakeholder groups to gather their perspectives on the status of ASL interpreting services in Hawai'i. These stakeholders include interpreter agencies, covered (hiring) entities, ASL students from the University of Hawai'i and its community colleges, as well as the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened, and ASL interpreter communities. Each group was selected for its direct involvement and influence in this area. The data collected aims to highlight key trends, challenges, and opportunities from their viewpoints, offering a comprehensive understanding of the current situation. This analysis will inform future decisions and strategies, ensuring that all relevant voices are considered in the decision-making process.

### A. Interpreter Agencies

There are three local interpreter referral agencies that contract with independent contractors to provide ASL services. Of these three agencies, two participated in the survey, while one declined to take part.

**Agency Location:** Both respondents' agencies are located on O'ahu.

- One agency has referral employees in O'ahu, Washington, and Massachusetts to provide wider time zone coverage.

**Agency Service Areas:**

- Both agencies serve clients across all Hawaiian Islands: Kaua'i, O'ahu, Maui, Moloka'i, Lāna'i, and Hawai'i (Big Island).

**Relationship with the Deaf Community:**

- One respondent described the relationship as "Good," highlighting their consumer-driven approach.
- The other expressed uncertainty, as they do not have direct interaction with the Deaf community and primarily work with ASL interpreters and interpreting agencies.

**Relationship with ASL Interpreters:**

- Both agencies reported a "Good" or "Excellent" relationship with ASL interpreters in Hawai'i, although one noted that the relationship is not always perfect.

**Relationship with Hiring Entities:**

- Both respondents rated their relationship with hiring entities as "Good" or "Excellent," with one noting a historically high fill rate, though the agency has recently faced challenges due to a shortage of interpreters.

**Relationship Between ASL Interpreters and Hiring Entities:**

- One respondent rated the relationship as "Good," but elaborated that they work separately with both ASL interpreters and hiring entities.

- Another respondent mentioned that the relationship depends on the specific interpreters involved.

#### **Finding ASL Interpreters:**

- Both respondents find it "Easy" to "Difficult" to fill interpreter requests, with one agency struggling to fill 40% of requests recently. The difficulty is attributed to a shortage of interpreters.

#### **Educational and Training Resources for ASL Interpreters:**

- Both agencies identified a need for a 4-year BA/BS in ASL/English interpreting, Continuing Education Units (CEUs), and mentorship programs.

#### **Non-Certified ASL Interpreters:**

- Both respondents find it "Difficult" to hire non-certified interpreters, with one emphasizing they only hire certified interpreters, though they are using more non-certified interpreters due to the shortage.

#### **ASL Interpreter Shortage:**

- Both respondents believe there is an ASL interpreter shortage in Hawai'i. Contributing factors include interpreters relocating out of state, lack of training programs, high cost of living, and the appeal of Video Relay Service (VRS) or out-of-state work.

#### **Potential Solutions for the Interpreter Shortage:**

- Suggestions include creating a local ASL training program, offering mentorship, targeting youth sign language users to join interpreting, supporting internships, and strengthening local interpreting programs.

To see the full results of the survey: [ASL Interpreting Agencies Final.pdf](#)

## **B. Covered (Hiring) Entities**

Covered (Hiring) entities have the obligation to provide effective communication for people with communication disabilities. Covered entities have the option to contact an interpreter referral agency to assign an ASL interpreter or contact and negotiate with an ASL interpreter for the fee-based service.

The survey gathered responses from twenty-eight (28) covered entities across various sectors in Hawai'i, primarily state agencies (92.86%), with a few county entities. The data provides insight into the challenges and practices related to securing ASL interpreting services.

#### **Service Areas:**

- O'ahu is the most served island (89.29%), followed by Hawai'i (Big Island) (53.57%) and Maui (50%).

- Less frequently served islands include Moloka'i (42.86%) and Lāna'i (35.71%).

**Use of Interpreting Agencies:**

- 70.37% of entities typically hire interpreters through agencies rather than directly.

**Relationships with Interpreting Agencies:**

- Most entities report positive relationships with interpreting agencies: 58.82% rate them as "Good", and 23.53% as "Excellent".
- A few entities mentioned challenges with last-minute requests or cancellations but generally find agencies responsive and professional.

**Familiarity with Ethical Standards:**

- A majority of entities are not familiar with ASL interpreters' ethical principles, with 53.57% reporting no familiarity and 25% being slightly familiar.

**Difficulty in Securing Interpreters:**

- 77.77% find it relatively easy to obtain ASL interpreters through agencies, though 22.22% noted occasional difficulty, particularly with last-minute or complex requests.

**Direct Hiring of ASL Interpreters:**

- 66.67% of entities do not hire interpreters directly, relying instead on agencies. Of those that do hire directly, 25% find it easy, but scheduling can be difficult due to limited availability.

**Use of Video Remote Interpreting (VRI):**

- 76% of entities rarely face the need for VRI instead of in-person interpreters, but 8% reported frequent reliance on VRI, particularly when in-person interpreters are unavailable.

**Handling Complaints About Interpreter Qualifications:**

- 45.45% of entities address complaints by contacting the interpreting agency, while others would follow internal processes or reach out to the contractor directly.

**Confidence in Interpreter Qualifications:**

- 56% of entities are confident that interpreting agencies assign qualified interpreters for their assignments, though 44% are uncertain about the process.

**Perception of Interpreter Shortage:**

- 38.46% of respondents believe there is a shortage of ASL interpreters in Hawai'i, citing reasons such as low availability on certain islands, high cost of living, and interpreters leaving for mainland opportunities.

**Solutions for the Interpreter Shortage:**



- Suggested solutions include expanding training programs, offering incentives to attract new interpreters, and increasing outreach efforts to promote ASL interpretation as a viable career. Some also suggested leveraging remote interpreting services more effectively and improving pay and working conditions to retain interpreters.

To see the full results of the survey: [Hiring Entities Final.pdf](#)

## C. ASL Students

The University of Hawai'i (UH) system includes three universities and seven community colleges across the state. UH at Mānoa, Kapiolani Community College, and Hawai'i Community College offer ASL courses, ranging from ASL Level 101 to ASL Level 202.

Of the four private universities in Hawai'i, none offer ASL courses, except for Brigham Young University-Hawai'i (BYU-Hawai'i), which is currently offering ASL courses in the Fall 2024 semester. However, this will be the last semester that BYU-Hawai'i offers ASL courses before discontinuing them indefinitely. Other private universities in Hawai'i, including Chaminade University of Honolulu, Hawai'i Pacific University, and the University of Phoenix-Hawai'i, do not offer ASL courses.

Seventy-four (74) students currently enrolled in ASL courses responded to a survey. Ninety-six percent (96%) attend the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, while the remaining four percent attend other UH campuses or have graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the University of Texas at Austin.

### Demographics:

- Location: Most respondents (95.95%) live on O'ahu, with a small representation from Kaua'i (1.35%) and Hawai'i (2.7%).
- Education Level: Most respondents are pursuing undergraduate degrees, with 43.84% holding a bachelor's degree, 47.95% in other educational stages (mostly undergraduates), and a small number holding Associate's, Master's, or Ph.D. degrees.

### ASL Course Enrollment:

- Current Course: The largest group (52.7%) is taking ASL 101 (beginner level), followed by 37.84% in ASL 201 (intermediate level). A few students are in higher-level courses or have completed them.
- Course Format: The majority (83.56%) attend in-person ASL classes, while a smaller portion (15.07%) takes the course virtually.

### Interest in a Bachelor's Degree in ASL/English Interpreting:

- 35.14% of students report being "very interested," and 22.97% are "interested" in pursuing a bachelor's degree in ASL/English interpreting. Additionally, 35.14% of students are "somewhat interested" in this degree option. A smaller percentage, 6.76%, indicated that they are not interested in this program.

- Reason for Interest: Many respondents see it as an excellent opportunity to enhance career prospects, particularly in health-care, education, and interpretation. Others, however, feel their current degree paths are too far along for a degree switch.

### **Motivation for Taking ASL Courses:**

- Learning a New Language: 83.78% are taking ASL primarily to learn a new language, while 55.41% are taking it "just for fun." Many also cite personal connections to the deaf community or career-related needs (e.g., health-care or education).
- Career Goals: A significant number (32.43%) are taking ASL courses to pursue careers in health-care, and 31.08% view it as useful for education. Some respondents also aspire to work as ASL interpreters, though this remains a less common goal (16.22%).

### **Factors Influencing Course Enrollment:**

- Interest in Deaf Culture: A strong interest in Deaf culture is a driving factor for 79.73% of respondents.
- Broaden Employment Skills: 58.11% of respondents see ASL as an important skill for broadening career prospects, particularly in fields requiring communication with diverse populations.
- Class Availability: Limited class offerings are a major barrier to enrollment, with 81.08% of respondents noting a shortage of class sections.

### **Interaction with Deaf Communities:**

- Interaction Frequency: Most students interact with Deaf sign language users either occasionally (37.84%) or regularly (18.92%), though 13.51% report no interactions at all.

### **Career Considerations in ASL Interpretation:**

- Interest in Becoming an Interpreter: 32.43% of students would consider pursuing a career as an ASL interpreter, while 50% remain open to the idea depending on future circumstances. A notable portion, 17.57%, are not interested in this career path.
- Job Opportunities: Many respondents recognize the high demand for ASL interpreters in Hawai'i and see this as a potentially stable career option, especially in areas like health-care and education.

### **Barriers to ASL Course Enrollment:**

- Background in ASL: Most students have limited previous exposure to ASL (60.81% are learning ASL for the first time in college). Only a small number are fluent (4.05%) or have prior ASL experience from high school (10.81%).
- Course Format Preference: Given that most respondents prefer in-person courses, there seems to be a strong demand for face-to-face instruction rather than online or hybrid models.

### **Interpreter Shortage in Hawai'i:**

- Belief in Interpreter Shortage: 83% of respondents believe there is a shortage of ASL interpreters in Hawai'i. Common reasons cited include the lack of interpreters at public events, schools, and government services.

### **Contributing Factors:**

- Limited Education: 70% of respondents note the lack of ASL programs in high schools and universities as a key factor.
- Geographic Isolation: 62% mention Hawai'i's remote location as a barrier to attracting trained interpreters.
- Cultural Awareness: 57% believe the limited recognition of the Deaf community and ASL in the local culture contributes to the shortage.

### **Proposed Solutions:**

#### **Expand ASL Education:**

- 80% of respondents suggest offering ASL in high schools and universities, with 72% specifically calling for degree programs in ASL and Interpreting.
- 64% emphasize the importance of integrating Deaf culture education alongside language training.

#### **Increase Accessibility:**

- 74% recommend more affordable and accessible ASL classes, including online options.
- 53% advocate for promoting ASL through apps or community events.

#### **Raise Awareness:**

- 65% believe more public awareness of interpreting careers can help alleviate the shortage, including social media campaigns and job fairs.
- 60% suggest creating internships or mentorship programs for aspiring interpreters.

#### **Key Challenges:**

- Limited Class Availability: 68% of students report difficulty accessing ASL courses due to high demand and limited availability.
- Lack of Exposure: 55% feel there is insufficient public awareness of the Deaf community and ASL in Hawai'i.
- Interpreter Shortage: 83% of students agree there is a shortage of ASL interpreters, driven by limited educational opportunities, cultural awareness, and geographic challenges.

**To see the full results of the survey: [ASL Students Final.pdf](#)**

## **D. Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened Community**

The survey gathered responses from twenty-six (26) members of the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened community in Hawai'i, providing valuable demographic insights. The majority of respondents (80.77%) live on O'ahu, reflecting the island's central role in the state, with its larger population and greater availability of resources. Fewer respondents are from Kaua'i (3.85%), Maui (3.85%), or Hawai'i (Big Island) (11.54%), which may indicate both a smaller Deaf population on these islands and challenges in reaching these communities to participate in the survey. The age distribution shows a higher proportion of older adults, with the largest groups in the 51-60 years (34.62%) and 61+ years (30.77%) ranges.

### **Interpreter Quality:**

- 46.15% of respondents rated interpreter quality as Excellent, and 42.31% rated it Good. This indicates a generally positive experience, though there is still room for improvement.
- Some concerns about quality stem from reliance on VRI, especially when mainland interpreters, unfamiliar with local signs, are used.

### **Confidence in Request Fulfillment:**

- Only 19.23% are very confident that their ASL interpreter request will be fulfilled, with a large portion (30.77%) not confident. The shortage of interpreters and logistical challenges (e.g., last-minute requests) are clear pain points.
- A vivid real-life example of the challenges in securing ASL interpreters can be seen in the aftermath of the Maui wildfires in August 2023. During the first few days after the disaster, the county of Maui and Maui's mayor struggled to secure an on-site ASL interpreter for emergency response efforts and critical press conferences. For the initial three days, there was no ASL interpreter available, which led to significant confusion and frustration among the Deaf community. The lack of communication during such a critical time left many Deaf individuals without access to vital information, leading to heightened anxiety and uncertainty. This example underscores the vital need for consistent and reliable interpreter availability, especially in emergency situations where timely communication can make a difference between life-or-death.
- Some responses indicate that early requests (e.g., 2 weeks in advance) increase the likelihood of getting the preferred interpreter.

### **Quality and Matching of Interpreters:**

- 42.31% are very confident that their interpreters will meet their quality expectations. However, respondents are still cautious, indicating that while there is confidence in some interpreters, there are concerns about consistency and the appropriateness of interpreters for specific needs (e.g., local signs, specialized appointments).

### **Relationship Between the Deaf Community and Interpreters:**

- 38.46% report the relationship as Excellent, and 42.31% as Good. There is a generally positive relationship, but some respondents note issues with professional ethics and a need for more trust-building and connection.
- Some concerns include interpreters sharing confidential information or becoming too friendly with Deaf clients, potentially leading to conflicts of interest.

### **Knowledge of Local Deaf Culture:**

- 42.31% of respondents rate interpreters as knowledgeable about local Deaf culture, while 34.62% describe them as very knowledgeable. It is generally understood that local interpreters have a better grasp of regional signs and Deaf culture compared to those from the mainland. However, a gap persists when new interpreters arrive.
- An example from a real-life interview with a Deaf individual who recently was released from prison illustrates this issue. The individual was attending a mandatory class while incarcerated, where two ASL interpreters were present: one local from Hawai'i and one who had recently moved from the mainland. The mainland interpreter struggled to interpret local Hawaiian Pidgin, causing significant confusion and frustration for the Deaf individual. As a result, the local interpreter had to step in to clarify or take over the interpretation.
- There is a strong consensus that training in Hawaiian signs and local cultural nuances is crucial for improving interpreter effectiveness.

### **Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI):**

- The majority (76.93%) disagree or strongly disagree that there are enough CDIs to meet demand. The state faces a shortage of CDIs, and respondents note that there are limited opportunities for training and certification.
- Many respondents express frustration that CDIs are not readily available, which can hinder access to quality services, especially for those with unique needs.

### **Satisfaction with Assigned Interpreters:**

- 56% are very satisfied, and 40% are satisfied with the ASL interpreters assigned to them. However, 4% are dissatisfied, which, while a small percentage, still reflects some dissatisfaction with the system.
- Several respondents mention the need for better retention of interpreters, as qualified professionals often leave the state.

### **Use of Video Remote Interpreting (VRI):**

- 42.31% report that VRI is used sometimes, but a substantial portion (19.23%) uses it rarely, and 15.38% never use it. The general preference is for on-site interpreters due to issues like internet connectivity, poor quality of mainland interpreters, and difficulty in communication (e.g., with Hawaiian-specific signs).
- VRI is especially prevalent in medical appointments (76%), but it is less favored for education or employment settings, where face-to-face interaction is preferred.

### **Preference for On-site vs. VRI Interpreting:**

- 88% of respondents prefer on-site ASL interpreters, citing clear communication, the ability to correct mistakes, and the value of in-person interaction.
- VRI is seen as a less reliable option due to technological issues like poor internet, lagging video, and challenges with local dialects.

### **Summary of Needs and Areas for Improvement:**

- Interpreter Shortages: There is a clear shortage of both general ASL interpreters and CDIs, which affects confidence in fulfilling requests.
- Training: There is a strong call for more training, especially in local Hawaiian signs and cultural nuances, to improve the quality of interpretation.
- VRI Challenges: Many prefer in-person interpreters due to technical issues with VRI, but it remains a backup when on-site interpreters are unavailable. VRI is most commonly used in medical settings.
- Retention: The community is concerned about losing qualified interpreters, particularly to mainland moves, and there is a need for better retention strategies.

### **Belief in Interpreter Shortage:**

Most respondents agree that there is a significant shortage of ASL interpreters in Hawai'i. In their opinion, the primary factors contributing to this shortage include:

- High Cost of Living: Many interpreters are unable to afford to stay in Hawai'i due to the high cost of housing and general living expenses.
- Low Pay: The compensation for interpreters is seen as insufficient given the high cost of living, leading many to leave or not stay long in the profession.
- Lack of Training Opportunities: There are few, if any, formal ITPs in Hawai'i, leading to a limited pipeline of new interpreters entering the field.
- Interpreter Turnover: Many interpreters move away from Hawai'i due to personal or financial reasons, including family matters and better job opportunities on the mainland.
- Lack of Mentoring: There is a noted absence of structured mentorship and professional development programs for interpreters in Hawai'i, making it difficult to grow in the profession.
- Limited Availability of Deaf Interpreters: A shortage of CDIs was also mentioned as a contributing factor.

### **Proposed Solutions:**

Several potential solutions were suggested to address the shortage of interpreters in Hawai'i:

- Establish ITPs: There is a strong push for creating formal ITPs at local universities (particularly the University of Hawai'i), with suggestions for 4-year degree programs in ASL/English interpreting.
- Support from Educational Institutions and Government: It was suggested that the DOE fund ASL programs in high schools and that universities offer courses that can serve as a pathway to becoming an interpreter. The state should also

provide more funding and resources to support interpreter training and certification programs.

- Recruitment from Mainland: Some respondents recommended recruiting interpreters from states like California, where there is a larger pool of qualified professionals.

To see the full results of the survey: [DDBHLD Final.pdf](#)

## E. ASL Interpreters

The survey received responses from twenty-one (21) ASL interpreters, with the majority based on O'ahu (63.16%), followed by a smaller number from Hawai'i (Big Island) (15.79%) and Maui (5.26%). Additionally, 15.79% of respondents have since relocated out of state.

In terms of age, the largest group of respondents falls within the 41-50 age range (42.11%), with the second largest group being those aged 61+ years old (26.32%).

The survey will also feature insights from an interview with a local ASL interpreter, who was born into a Deaf family in Hawai'i.

### Training & Certification:

- Training Locations: Many respondents have received ASL interpreter training at Community Colleges (63.16%), followed by a mix of University Degree Programs (31.58%) and Community-Taught (47.37%).
- Certifications: A wide range of certifications is represented, including HSSLIC, NIC, EIPA, and CI/CT certifications. Many hold multiple credentials, showing a high level of professional development.

### Education Level:

- Highest Education: Most respondents have at least an Associate's Degree (38.89%), with significant representation of Bachelor's (33.33%) and Master's or higher (22.22%).

### Work Settings:

- Primary Settings: The majority work in Higher Education (94.74%) and Health-care/Medical (89.47%). Other common settings include State/Federal/County Government (68.42%) and Vocational Rehabilitation (84.21%).
- Other Settings: Interpreting in Community and Cultural Events (78.95%) and Social Services (78.95%) is also common.

### Experience & Career Plans:

- Experience: The distribution of years of interpreting experience is spread out, with significant experience in the field—36.84% have 16-20 years, and 26.32% have over 26 years.
- Retirement Plans: The majority plan to retire in 16-20 years (35.29%), while 29.41% expect to continue for 21+ years.

- Career in Hawai'i: Most expect to provide interpreting services in Hawai'i for 6-10 years (26.32%), with 31.58% planning to continue for 16-20 years.

### **Compensation:**

- Hourly Rate: The most common hourly rate is in the \$61-\$70 range (73.68%), with a few earning between \$31-\$60.

### **Job Availability:**

- Finding Work: Most respondents find it easy or very easy to secure ASL interpreting work on their island, particularly on O'ahu where demand for interpreters is high (38.89% say "Very Easy"). However, work shortages were noted in areas like Maui and outside K-12 education settings.
- Challenges: Factors like qualification levels and local competition affect job opportunities. Some respondents mentioned it being easier once involved in the Deaf community or once they gained experience.

### **Sufficiency of Income:**

- Challenges with Cost of Living: While 31.58% agree that their income is sufficient to cover living expenses, 42.11% disagree. The high cost of living in Hawai'i remains a significant concern, especially with no benefits package for freelance interpreters and the high cost of insurance and taxes.
- Some mentioned that they supplement their income with other work or rely on family support. Despite making a relatively decent hourly rate (\$61-70/hr mentioned), expenses in Hawai'i still create financial strain.

### **Contracting with Mainland Agencies:**

- 57.89% of respondents contract with mainland interpreting agencies to provide services in Hawai'i, with 91.67% contracting with 1-3 agencies. This suggests that mainland agencies play a significant role in providing work for local interpreters.

### **Non-Certified Interpreters & Job Availability:**

- Opinions vary on the ease of finding work for non-certified interpreters. While 35.29% say it is easy, others feel it is difficult (41.18%).
- Many respondents expressed concerns that non-certified interpreters may take jobs from certified interpreters, often at lower rates, or work in settings where certification is necessary, undermining the profession's standards.
- Lack of certification is seen as a barrier for work outside of K-12, especially for those pursuing jobs in medical or higher education settings.

### **Video Remote Interpreting (VRI):**

- VRI Work in Hawai'i: Most respondents do 0-4 hours per week of VRI work in Hawai'i (63.16%), with 78.95% reporting that 0-25% of their work is done via VRI.
- VRI Outside Hawai'i: A majority (72.22%) provide 0-4 hours of VRI work to clients outside Hawai'i, and 83.33% report that 0-25% of their VRI work is for out-of-state clients.



- Hourly Rate: For VRI work outside Hawai'i, respondents generally earn between \$61-\$70/hr (35.71%), with some earning in the \$51-\$60 and \$71-\$80 range.

### **Community Involvement:**

- 55.56% of respondents are somewhat involved in Deaf and interpreting-related community groups, with a smaller portion being very involved (27.78%).
- Some are involved in groups like Hawai'i Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (HRID) and Aloha State Association of the Deaf (ASAD), but others, particularly from Maui, report that community events are infrequent, and some have become less involved due to life circumstances or distance.

### **Deaf Community & Interpreter Relations:**

- 64.71% describe the relationship with the Deaf community as Good, but there's a sense that relationships could be improved by building trust and better rapport.
- There seems to be a lack of collaboration between Deaf and interpreter communities for shared events or advocacy efforts.
- Discomfort with New Interpreters: In areas like Maui, some interpreters note a resistance to new interpreters, which may affect their integration into the community.

### **Interpreters & Agencies:**

- The relationship between interpreters and interpreting agencies is generally Good (47.37%), but many feel that communication and transparency could be improved. Some interpreters report that one agency is better at communication than others.
- Dissatisfaction exists in agencies with perceived lack of accountability or poor business practices, but many feel overall supported by the agencies they work with.
- Out-of-State Agency Satisfaction: 61.54% are satisfied with their relationship with mainland interpreting agencies, and 30.77% are very satisfied.

### **Support for Licensure of ASL Interpreter Agencies:**

- 31.58% of respondents support requiring licensure for ASL interpreter agencies, recognizing that it could ensure ongoing professional development through Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and improve the skill set of interpreters, ultimately benefiting Deaf consumers.
- 57.89% of respondents were unsure about the impact of licensure, highlighting the complexity of the issue and the need for further exploration of potential benefits and drawbacks.
- 10.53% opposed licensure, though their concerns focused on practical considerations, such as the potential for a drop in the number of interpreters following licensure requirements and the need for mitigation strategies.
- There was consensus around the idea that licensure could help set up processes for accountability and filing grievances against unethical agencies or interpreters.
- Many suggested that licensure should be approached in a way that supports interpreters' development and skill growth, with assessments or provisional

licenses being viewed as positive tools to help both experienced and novice interpreters.

### **Potential Impact on Attracting ASL Interpreters to Hawai'i:**

- 0% of respondents felt that licensure would attract more ASL interpreters to Hawai'i.
- 73.68% were unsure, acknowledging that while licensure may not necessarily attract more interpreters, other factors—such as the cost of living and the local community's needs—would likely play a more significant role.
- 26.32% of respondents felt that licensure might not attract new interpreters, with some suggesting that external interpreters might be deterred by the administrative burden of licensure, while others pointed out that the focus should be on incentivizing local involvement rather than attracting interpreters from outside.

### **Professional Development and Satisfaction:**

- **Proactive Participation:** A significant number of interpreters actively pursue professional development (CEUs), often exceeding the minimum requirements. However, many respondents face challenges in accessing local professional development opportunities.
- **Dissatisfaction with Local PD Opportunities:** A large portion of respondents are dissatisfied with the frequency and availability of professional development opportunities in Hawai'i. There is a strong desire for more local in-person PD, especially given the limited opportunities that currently exist.
- **Remote Learning is a Supplement, Not a Substitute:** While many interpreters appreciate remote PD options, most prefer in-person learning for its interactive, community-building benefits.

### **Training and Education Resources:**

- **Need for Local ITPs:** A clear majority of respondents advocate for the development of local ITP to help build a sustainable pipeline of interpreters from within Hawai'i. Many see this as critical for both increasing the number of interpreters and improving the quality of those entering the field.
- **Mentorship is Crucial:** There is widespread support for mentorship programs to help novice interpreters gain experience and develop skills. Mentorship is seen as a vital resource, especially in a small community like Hawai'i where opportunities for hands-on training are limited.
- **Support for a 4-Year ITP:** Many respondents feel that having a 4-year ITP locally (e.g., at the University of Hawai'i) would provide a foundation for attracting and training interpreters who are familiar with the unique cultural and linguistic needs of the local Deaf community.
- An interview with a local ASL interpreter revealed that local interpreters had to leave Hawai'i to participate in ITPs on the mainland. This journey came with the added financial challenge of out-of-state tuition and travel expenses.

### **Interpreter Shortage:**

- **Unquestioned Shortage:** There is unanimous agreement that Hawai'i is experiencing an ASL interpreter shortage, which is compounded by the high cost of living, limited local training programs, and many interpreters moving out of state due to financial and personal reasons.
- **Quality and Quantity Issues:** While there may be enough interpreters in some areas, the shortage is particularly acute in terms of qualified, skilled interpreters who can handle the diverse needs of the community. The absence of an interpreting training pipeline in Hawai'i is a critical factor in this shortage.
- **Work Availability:** Some respondents noted that interpreter availability is also an issue of scheduling, where there are often multiple requests for the same time slots, leading to job shortages even if the total number of interpreters might seem adequate.
- **Deaf Interpreters (DIs):** An interview with a local ASL interpreter highlighted the urgent need for Deaf Interpreters (DIs) in Hawai'i, pointing to the lack of resources and training programs for local Deaf interpreters. This shortage is particularly concerning as some Deaf individuals with limited English proficiency struggle to understand hearing ASL interpreters translating from English to ASL. Deaf Interpreters (DIs) could offer better access and reduce the need for Deaf individuals to adjust to the varying language proficiency of hearing interpreters. As a result, many Deaf individuals continue to face communication barriers in settings requiring interpretation.

### **Potential Solutions to Address the Shortage:**

- **Develop Local Training Programs:** Most respondents suggest that the solution to the interpreter shortage lies in creating a local ITP to cultivate a pipeline of interpreters who are already familiar with Hawai'i's unique linguistic and cultural context.
- **Mentorship and Community Support:** There's strong support for creating mentorship programs that could provide the necessary guidance for novice interpreters to gain experience and improve their skills.
- **Improved Financial Support and Resources:** Several respondents suggested that offering more financial support for interpreters (e.g., lower health-care costs, parking perks, and better pay structures) could make the profession more sustainable in Hawai'i.
- **Increase Local ASL Awareness:** Some respondents suggest that introducing ASL courses in high schools could help generate local interest in the interpreting profession and create a more sustainable local workforce.
- **ASL Courses in Hawai'i public high schools:** An interview with a local ASL interpreter highlighted the limited availability of ASL courses in Hawai'i's public high schools. The interviewee suggested that the establishment of such courses could be supported through significant investments from the State government, the Deaf community, Gallaudet University, the University of Hawai'i, and local Deaf associations. The interviewee also noted that substantial investments are made in Filipino language programs in high schools, funded by grants from the

Filipino consulate, Filipino associations, and the University of Hawai'i. They questioned why similar support could not be directed toward ASL courses.

To see the full results of the survey: [ASL Interpreters Final.pdf](#)

# ASL Interpreter Shortage in Hawai'i

## A. Factors Contributing to the Shortage

### 1. Limited Number of Training Programs and Resources

- **Educational Opportunities:** Hawai'i faces a significant shortage of specialized training programs for ASL interpreters. While some community colleges and universities offer ASL courses, no program is comprehensive enough on its own to adequately prepare students for the demands of the field. Although seven public high schools in Hawai'i offer ASL courses, these programs alone are not enough to inspire and recruit enough students into the field. Additionally, the lack of broader community awareness, limited Deaf cultural events, and few opportunities to engage beyond the classroom hinder students' language acquisition and cultural understanding, which are essential for successful careers as interpreters.
- **Lack of Resources:** The limited availability of resources for professional development, such as workshops and continuing education, further hampers the growth of a skilled interpreter workforce. It is important to highlight that the scarcity of resources is not solely the responsibility of non-profits or referral agencies. The government plays a critical role in supporting the professional development of ASL interpreters, as these efforts benefit all Deaf kama'aina and visitors. Without sufficient governmental investment in these resources, the growth of the interpreter workforce remains constrained.
- **Lack of Local ITPs:** Survey responses from ASL interpreters highlight a significant gap in Hawai'i's interpreter training infrastructure. The absence of a dedicated ITP makes it challenging to develop local talent. Consequently, the state is heavily dependent on mainland-based interpreters, many of whom relocate after only a few years, exacerbating the shortage of qualified, locally trained professionals.

### 2. Geographic Challenges and Cost of Living

- **Geographic Isolation:** Hawai'i's geographic isolation poses significant challenges for both aspiring interpreters and those already in the profession. Traveling to and from the mainland for training or professional development is costly and time-consuming.
- **High Cost of Living:** A consistent theme in the survey responses is that the high cost of living in Hawai'i is a major factor driving interpreters off the island. Many interpreters are moving back to the mainland after a few years because they cannot afford to stay in Hawai'i, particularly given that the pay rates for interpreters often do not match the high cost of housing and other living expenses.

### 3. High Demand for Interpreters

- **Increasing Awareness:** As awareness of Deaf rights and accessibility needs increases, so does the demand for ASL interpreters across various sectors,

including health-care, education, and government services. This demand often outpaces the supply of qualified interpreters.

- **Diverse Needs:** The diverse needs of the Deaf community, including requests for interpreters with specialized knowledge in areas such as medical settings, legal courts, and concerts, can further strain the existing interpreter workforce. This demand highlights the importance of expanding training programs and resources to ensure that interpreters are equipped to meet these varied requirements effectively.
- **Shortage of Qualified Interpreters:** While some respondents noted that there may be enough interpreters in numbers, there is a shortage of highly skilled interpreters who can meet the diverse needs of the community. As the field of interpreting requires continual skill development, newer or less experienced interpreters are not yet be able to cover more complex or specialized assignments.

## B. Consequences of the Shortage

### 1. Impact on Service Availability and Quality

- **Inconsistent Access:** The interpreter shortage results in inconsistent access to interpreting services, particularly in rural areas and on the neighbor islands. While some areas may have reliable access, others—especially during peak demand periods—may struggle to provide interpreters. This creates significant barriers to participation in essential activities such as medical appointments, legal proceedings, or community events. For Deaf individuals, this inconsistency can lead to delayed medical treatments, potentially exacerbating illnesses, and diseases for both Deaf adults and children, as well as for those who depend on Deaf adults as caregivers, including kūpuna and children. In educational settings, inconsistent access to interpreters further hinders academic progress, affecting Deaf students' ability to fully engage and succeed in their education.
- **Quality Concerns:** With fewer qualified interpreters available, there is often a reliance on less experienced or underqualified interpreters. In critical settings such as health-care or legal matters, this can lead to miscommunication and serious consequences. In health-care, inaccurate interpretation can result in incorrect prescriptions or misdiagnoses, leading to improper treatments. In legal settings, it may cause mistrials, clogging the legal system with duplicative efforts that could have been resolved with proper interpretation. These quality issues can have severe health and legal consequences for Deaf individuals, undermining trust in service providers and damaging relationships with institutions they rely on.

### 2. Increased Wait Times for Services and Missed Opportunities

- **Long Wait Times:** Deaf individuals face long wait times when trying to access interpreting services, particularly in urgent situations. This is especially problematic for those living on the neighbor islands when interpreters are not readily available, it is necessary to fly interpreters in from other locations. These

logistical challenges result in significant delays, hindering effective communication and often worsening the situation at hand. For instance, long waits for interpreters in medical emergencies could delay treatment, contribute to misdiagnoses, or exacerbate health problems. In legal matters, it could impact the timeliness of defense or access to justice, placing Deaf individuals at a distinct disadvantage.

- **Missed Opportunities:** The shortage of interpreters also leads to missed opportunities in education and employment. Without reliable access to interpreters, Deaf individuals may struggle to participate fully in classroom discussions, job interviews, or training programs. This lack of access not only affects their immediate academic or professional success but also limits their long-term career prospects, undermining their overall well-being and social mobility. Furthermore, the inability to access vital services can lead to feelings of isolation and exclusion from broader social, educational, and professional networks.
- **Unfilled Positions and Lack of Work for Some Areas:** In addition to the challenges of accessing interpreters, there are instances where positions remain unfilled due to scheduling conflicts or the limited availability of interpreters at specific times. This is particularly evident in rural regions or on neighbor islands, where interpreter shortages are more acute. These unfilled positions can further reduce access to essential services and create gaps in communication that impact the Deaf community's ability to function fully in society.

### 3. Interpreters Moving Out of State

- **Loss of Interpreters:** Many interpreters who come to Hawai'i from the mainland eventually move back due to the high cost of living, lack of local support, and limited career advancement opportunities. This high turnover rate significantly contributes to the ongoing interpreter shortage. The loss of interpreters not only creates instability within the profession but also disrupts the continuity of services provided to the Deaf community. As interpreters leave, they take with them valuable experience and knowledge, making it harder to develop a stable, locally trained workforce. This constant turnover further exacerbates the shortage, leaving the community without consistent access to qualified interpreters.

# Solutions and Recommendations

## A. Increasing Training Opportunities

### 1. Develop a Local Interpreter Training Program (ITP)

#### Method:

- **Collaborative Program Development:** Partner with local community colleges and universities to create a comprehensive ASL Interpreter Training Program. This collaboration could lead to specialized certificate programs focused on essential interpreting fields, such as medical, legal, and educational interpreting. Additionally, work towards establishing degree pathways (Associate's or Bachelor's) in ASL interpretation, ensuring that programs meet national accreditation standards and align with industry needs.
- **Curriculum Design:** In line with established practices in the field of interpreter training, we propose a curriculum that balances theoretical knowledge with practical application. This is not a novel idea; there are numerous models and a professional network of experts that can guide the development of such a program. Key course topics should include ASL linguistics, interpreting techniques, ethics, and cultural competency. The program should also provide hands-on experience through internships, fieldwork, and supervised practice, ensuring students are well-prepared for real-world scenarios. What we're advocating for already exists in hundreds of colleges and universities across the country and can be adapted to meet local needs.

#### Implementation:

- **Action:** Advocate for the establishment of a Bachelor's degree-level ITP or Deaf Studies program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. While community colleges play a supportive role, the primary focus should be on creating an affordable, high-quality four-year program at the university level. This program could attract local students, particularly Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs), who have a strong cultural connection to the community and are more likely to remain in Hawai'i for long-term careers in interpreting. To further enhance accessibility, consider implementing loan forgiveness programs for graduates who commit to working in Hawai'i for a set number of years. We can address community college pathways later, but for now, the focus should be on building a robust and sustainable ITP at UHM.

### 2. Mentorship Programs for New Interpreters

#### Method:

- **Mentorship Programs:** To support individuals entering the interpreting field, establishing mentorship programs that pair experienced interpreters with newer or non-certified interpreters can help bridge the skills gap. This approach allows for hands-on learning and skill development, especially



considering that many newcomers lack practical experience in real-world settings.

**Implementation:**

- **Action:** Create a formal mentorship initiative, potentially state-sponsored, to match experienced interpreters with newer practitioners. This approach is already in use across the country, and we would not be reinventing the wheel. With a nationwide network of mentors and resources available, we can tap into existing models to implement an efficient and streamlined program. This could include opportunities for non-certified interpreters to work alongside certified mentors, fostering skill development, career guidance, and professional growth. Such a program would help cultivate local talent, strengthen the interpreter workforce, and provide the fiscal and legislative resources needed for successful implementation.

### 3. Networking Opportunities

**Method:**

- **Networking Opportunities:** Establish platforms for interpreters to connect with industry professionals and peers through networking events, conferences, and social gatherings. These events can encourage collaboration, mentorship, and the sharing of best practices, helping to build a stronger, more cohesive interpreting community.

**Implementation:**

- **Annual or Biannual Conferences:** Organize annual or biannual conferences featuring panels, keynote speakers, and roundtable discussions on key issues in the interpreting field. These events should also offer interpreters the chance to showcase their skills through live demonstrations, case studies, or interactive workshops, providing both learning opportunities and professional exposure. To ensure equitable access, travel subsidies should be provided for neighbor island practitioners, assuming the event is hosted in-person on O’ahu, enabling broader participation and fostering a more inclusive professional community.
- **Community Engagement:** Actively promote these events within the Deaf community and among interpreting professionals to encourage wide participation. Solicit feedback from attendees to identify areas of interest, ensuring that future events are tailored to the evolving needs and concerns of the community.

### 4. Funding for Training

**Method:**

- **Grant and Scholarship Opportunities:** Actively pursue funding from state government and legislators to support the ongoing education and professional development of interpreters. This could involve identifying and applying for

grants and scholarships from government agencies, foundations, and organizations dedicated to improving services for the Deaf community. Engaging state leadership in securing these funds would be key to ensuring sustainable growth in the interpreter workforce.

#### **Implementation:**

- **Proposal Development:** Develop well-researched proposals that highlight the value of funding professional development for interpreters. These proposals should emphasize how such funding will directly improve service quality, enhance community engagement, and contribute to long-term sustainability within the interpreting profession.
- **Community Partnerships:** Build partnerships with local businesses, community organizations, and philanthropic entities to create sponsorship opportunities for interpreter training. These partnerships can showcase the mutual benefits, such as enhanced service delivery and stronger community ties, reinforcing the value of investing in interpreter education.

By prioritizing the expansion of ITPs, along with ongoing education, professional development, and networking opportunities, Hawai'i can ensure that ASL interpreters are skilled, knowledgeable, and well-connected in their field. This, in turn, will significantly benefit the Deaf community they serve.

## **B. Incentives for Interpreters**

### **1. Improve Compensation**

#### **Method:**

- **Increase Pay and Transparency in the Profession:** A key concern for interpreters is the disconnect between current pay rates and the high cost of living in Hawai'i. To address this, it's crucial to establish a more transparent pay structure that accurately reflects the financial realities of interpreting, including factors such as taxes, fees, and living expenses.
- **Reduce Financial Barriers for Freelance Interpreters:** Freelance interpreters often face financial challenges, including the high cost of medical insurance. Providing solutions such as group insurance plans can help alleviate some of these burdens and make freelancing more financially sustainable.

#### **Implementation:**

- **Action:** Work with insurance providers to negotiate group health insurance plans specifically tailored for freelance interpreters.
- Seek legislative support for tax incentives or subsidies to ease the financial burdens on freelance interpreters, particularly those with significant health-care costs.

## C. Community Engagement

### 1. Raise Awareness About ASL and Deaf Needs

#### Method:

- **Educational Campaigns:** Launch comprehensive public awareness campaigns aimed at educating the broader community about the importance of ASL and the unique needs of the Deaf community. These campaigns can utilize various formats, including workshops, informational sessions, social media initiatives, and public service announcements, to reach diverse audiences and increase understanding.
- **ASL classes in High Schools:** Advocate for the introduction of ASL classes in high schools to increase awareness of both ASL and the interpreting profession. By introducing students to the potential career opportunities in interpreting early on, we can encourage future generations to pursue this field and better understand its societal value.

#### Implementation:

- **Workshops and Informational Sessions:** Organize workshops in schools, community centers, and workplaces to teach basic ASL and raise awareness about the importance of accessibility for Deaf individuals. Collaborate with local Deaf educators and interpreters to lead these sessions, offering firsthand perspectives on Deaf culture and communication.
- **Outreach Efforts:** Develop targeted outreach programs for specific groups, such as educators, health-care providers, and employers, to improve interactions with Deaf individuals. Distribute informative materials—like brochures, posters, and digital content—designed to enhance understanding and support inclusion.
- **Action:** Advocate for the inclusion of ASL courses in high school curricula and support career exploration programs that introduce students to interpreting as a profession. These initiatives can lay the foundation for future interest in the field, help address workforce shortages, and foster long-term community engagement.

### 2. Collaboration with Organizations

#### Method:

- **Partnerships with Advocacy Groups:** Collaborate with local and national organizations that advocate for Deaf rights and accessibility. These partnerships can facilitate initiatives that emphasize the importance of interpreting services and enhance understanding of Deaf culture.

#### Implementation:

- **Joint Initiatives:** Create joint campaigns or events that celebrate Deaf culture, such as Deaf Awareness Month, and include activities like sign language performances, panel discussions, and informational booths.

Engaging the community in these events can foster a sense of inclusion and understanding.

- **Resource Sharing:** Develop and share resources, such as videos, articles, and toolkits, that can be disseminated through partner organizations' networks. This can amplify the reach of awareness efforts and educate diverse audiences about the significance of ASL and interpreting services.

To address the needs of the Deaf community in Hawai'i, raising awareness about ASL and Deaf culture is crucial. Public awareness campaigns, including workshops and outreach in schools and community centers, can educate the community. Partnering with organizations that advocate for Deaf rights can also highlight the importance of interpreting services and promote inclusion in education and health-care, benefiting Deaf individuals statewide.

## Conclusion

To ensure the Deaf community in Hawai'i has access to high-quality, accessible services, a multifaceted approach is necessary to strengthen the ASL interpreter workforce. This approach includes expanding local ITPs to create a sustainable pipeline of qualified professionals, as well as providing ongoing professional development opportunities to help interpreters stay current with evolving language use and best practices. Additionally, fostering strong community engagement is essential, encouraging collaboration between interpreters, the Deaf community, educational institutions, and other stakeholders to create a supportive and well-connected network. By implementing these strategies, Hawai'i can build a more skilled, well-supported, and connected pool of interpreters, ensuring the Deaf community receives the high-quality services they deserve.

### Education

Educational opportunities to become an ASL interpreter in Hawai'i are limited due to the lack of ASL courses offered statewide. While HRS Section 1-13.7 recognizes ASL as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own distinct grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage, there is a disconnect in its practical integration into education systems.

This lack of exposure is detrimental to students who may otherwise discover ASL as a career pathway. It represents a missed opportunity to spark interest in the interpreting field and to help students develop foundational skills before pursuing a college degree or obtaining state or national certification as an interpreter. Building awareness and providing access to ASL education within Hawai'i's public schools is essential to addressing the state's shortage of qualified interpreters.

### Interpreter Training in Hawai'i

Hawai'i is one of the few states that does not offer an ASL Interpreter Training Program (ITP). This absence of local training opportunities creates challenges for individuals aspiring to become certified interpreters and for meeting the growing demand for qualified ASL interpreters across the state. Nationwide, there are approximately 200 ASL Interpreter Training Programs, including certificate, associate's, bachelor's, and graduate-level programs. (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf)

Unlike Hawai'i, many states have established ITPs, which help maintain a robust supply of ASL interpreters. For example, the Alamo Colleges District at San Antonio College in Texas offers an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in ASL: Sign Language Interpreter. Programs like this support the demand for interpreters by providing structured education and clear pathways to certification, addressing interpreter shortages in those states. The Hawai'i DOE's World Languages program envisions that all students will communicate and demonstrate cultural competence in at least two languages. (Hawai'i State Department of Education) This includes offering ASL

instruction in elementary and secondary schools. However, to our knowledge, no ASL courses are currently available in these schools.

According to the Alamo Colleges District, there are currently 602 job openings for entry-level ASL interpreters, with a local demand growth rate of +1%. Graduates entering the field can expect an annual wage range between \$30,130 and \$127,121. This data highlights the growing need for skilled ASL interpreters and underscores the potential for a rewarding and stable career. (Alamo Colleges District)

Establishing a 4-year program similar to Western Oregon University's (WOU) Division of Deaf Studies and Professional Studies program would benefit Hawaii. Hawaii DVR offers short-term staff training (4-6 weeks) to address VR services for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing (HH), and Deaf-Blind (D/B). Hawaii DVR and students would receive local Deaf Studies and Professional Studies training at UH instead of mainland institutions such as WOU. Expanding local training opportunities and culturally relevant education supports a more inclusive and effective system for the Deaf and HH communities. (Western Oregon University)

In contrast, the absence of an ITP in Hawai'i poses a significant barrier to developing a local pool of qualified ASL interpreters, impacting the availability of services for the Deaf, hard of hearing, and Deaf-Blind communities.

The U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration provides discretionary grants to address the nationwide shortage of qualified ASL interpreters. Institutions such as the University of Hawai'i (UH) system are eligible for these grants as they meet the requirements for institutions of higher education.

Currently, the UH system offers a Bachelor of Arts in Languages and Literatures of Europe and the Americas (LLEA), but this program does not include ASL. Establishing a Bachelor of Arts in ASL Studies or a Bachelor of Arts in Interpretation (ASL/English) would likely enhance opportunities for local graduates. Such programs would prepare students to earn higher state or national-level certifications and credentials, enabling them to enter the workforce as ASL interpreters with competitive earning potential.

### Advocacy

The University of Hawai'i (UH) system's operating budget relies heavily on state general funds (48%) and revenue from tuition and fees (34%). (University of Hawai'i, 2023) This budget structure underscores the importance of community and legislative support for expanding educational offerings, such as additional ASL courses and degree programs. Advocacy for a Bachelor of Arts in ASL Studies or a Bachelor of Arts in Interpretation (ASL/English) could address the increasing demand for ASL interpreters in Hawai'i and nationwide. Nationwide, there are 19 accredited programs offering associate and bachelor's degrees in interpreter training, demonstrating a growing recognition of the field's importance. (Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education, 2023)

Currently, ASL courses in the UH system are taught by two lecturers at Kapiolani Community College, one lecturer at Honolulu Community College, and two permanent instructors at UH Mānoa. Research suggests that most colleges and universities with robust ASL programs employ an average of two permanent instructors to manage associate or bachelor's degree programs effectively. The ASL program at UH Mānoa began in Fall 2018, and demand has steadily grown, with a waitlist for enrollment in courses. Currently, there are 365 students enrolled in ASL Level 101 through ASL 202 at UH Mānoa for the Fall 2024 and Spring 2025 semesters combined. Expanding permanent faculty and course availability would help meet this demand while preparing students to enter a high-demand field.

To address the shortage of ASL interpreters on the neighbor islands, UH community college students could enroll in online courses and work toward earning an associate or bachelor's degree. This flexible approach would allow more students to pursue careers in ASL interpretation without needing to relocate. As interest in the ASL interpreting field grows, community advocacy to add dedicated ASL instructor positions on each respective island would ensure adequate support for the demand for on-site and remote ASL interpreters. Expanding faculty resources would directly contribute to addressing Hawai'i's interpreter shortage while fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

In addition to these initiatives, the Hawai'i DVR offers short-term staff training (4-6 weeks) to address DVR services for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind. Establishing a 4-year program similar to Western Oregon University's (WOU) Division of Deaf Studies and Professional Studies program would benefit Hawai'i. Hawai'i DVR offers short-term staff training (4-6 weeks) to address DVR services for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing (HH), and Deaf-Blind (D/B). Hawai'i DVR and students would receive local Deaf Studies and Professional Studies training at UH instead of mainland institutions such as WOU. Note that UH is not accredited for Hawai'i DVR staff to receive a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor certification (CRC) training and enroll in various programs such as WOU. Expanding local training opportunities and culturally relevant education supports a more inclusive and effective system for the Deaf and HH communities.

### Community Outreach

Implementing incentives such as improved compensation, better job conditions, and mental health resources will not only attract and retain interpreters but also contribute to their long-term job satisfaction and success. Additionally, raising awareness about ASL and Deaf culture through public campaigns and collaborations with advocacy organizations will promote greater understanding and inclusion across the state.

Ultimately, a combination of education, advocacy, and community outreach will help meet the growing demand for qualified interpreters while ensuring that the needs of the Deaf community are met with respect, expertise, and compassion. By prioritizing these solutions, Hawai'i can enhance the accessibility of essential services, strengthen the

interpreter profession, and build a more inclusive society where communication barriers are minimized and opportunities for all are maximized.



# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ASL</b>	American Sign Language
<b>BEI</b>	Board for Evaluation of Interpreters
<b>CDI</b>	Certified Deaf Interpreter
<b>CEU</b>	Continuing Education Unit
<b>DCAB</b>	Disability and Communication Access Board
<b>DOE</b>	Department of Education
<b>DVR</b>	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
<b>HAR</b>	Hawai'i Administrative Rules
<b>HRS</b>	Hawai'i Revised Statutes
<b>HSSLIC</b>	Hawai'i State Sign Language Interpreter Credential
<b>HQAS</b>	Hawai'i Quality Assurance System
<b>ITP</b>	Interpreter Training Program
<b>NAD</b>	National Association of the Deaf
<b>NIC</b>	National Interpreter Certification
<b>RID</b>	Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf
<b>VRI</b>	Video Remote Interpreting
<b>VRS</b>	Video Relay Services

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