

A Bill for an Act Related to Disaster Services.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that one out of nine people living in Hawaii is limited English proficient. These individuals often encounter disproportionate risks before, during, and after disasters. These risks include an inability to understand evacuation orders and procedures and information from emergency relief providers and impediments that slow access to emergency medical care, sheltering assistance, and other forms of emergency relief. Moreover, in the aftermath of a disaster, many limited English proficient persons encounter barriers to obtaining relief when applying for state or county programs, including financial, medical, housing, and food assistance programs.

The legislature also finds that in the immediate aftermath of the August 8, 2023, Maui wildfires, language interpreters and sign language interpreters were not present at the shelters, nor was any provision made to assist individuals through remote interpretation. In the absence of a planned coordinated response from the Hawaii emergency management agency and the Maui emergency management agency, Hawaii's professional and community interpreters stepped in to fill the void. Non-profit organizations adjusted their budgets and strategic and contractual obligations to meet the needs of the Maui community and continue to provide services as needed.

The legislature further finds that in addition to state and federal language access laws and regulations, section 308 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act (Stafford Act, P.L. 93-288, as amended) specifically requires entities receiving funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to identify limited English proficient populations to ensure that they are incorporated into the disaster management planning process, ensure that such populations can access disaster relief information, and develop and maintain a database identifying qualified language assistance programs that could be activated in an emergency.

The purpose of this Act is to appropriate funds to the Hawaii emergency management agency for the establishment of a limited English proficiency language access coordinator and programming support for limited English proficiency community projects.

SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$200,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2024-2025 as follows:

- (1) \$100,000 for the establishment of one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) limited English proficiency language access coordinator position, which shall be exempt from chapter 76, Hawaii Revised Statutes, within the Hawaii emergency management agency; and
- (2) \$100,000 for programming support for limited English proficiency community projects, such as public service announcements, translation services, and other program projects and support.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the Hawaii emergency management agency for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2024.

(Approved July 5, 2024.)