



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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DRAFT MINUTES

Standing Committee on Communication Access Meeting

LOCATION: Virtual via Zoom and In-Person Location
Kamamalu Building
1010 Richards Street, Rm. 111A and 111B
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

DATE: October 30, 2025
TIME: 11:00 a.m.

PRESENT: Gerald Isobe, Chairperson; LisaAnn Tom, Board Member; Bryan Mick, Justin
"Pono" Tokioka, Staff

PUBLIC PARTICIPANTS: Donald Sakamoto, Nani Watanabe

SIGN LANGUAGE

INTERPRETERS: Keri Lee and Sabina Wilford

REAL TIME

CAPTIONERS: April Chandler and Kelly DeCamp

- I. Chairperson Gerald Isobe called the meeting to order at 11:08 a.m.
- II. Board members, staff, captioners, and sign language interpreters introduced themselves.
- III. Statement from Public and Written Testimonies Submitted.

No written testimonies were submitted.

- IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes of September 11, 2025.

The minutes of the September 11, 2025, meeting were approved as circulated (M/S/P Tom/Isobe).

- V. Old Business

- A. Review of Establishment of American Sign Language Classes in Elementary Schools.

This is a continuing discussion from our last meeting on September 11, 2025 regarding the establishment of American Sign Language (ASL) classes in public elementary schools. Board member LisaAnn Tom expressed strong support for offering ASL at the elementary level and noted that some ASL teachers are already brainstorming potential curriculum ideas. She

suggested the Department of Education (DOE) review how ASL could fit into current school schedules.

Chairperson Gerald Isobe emphasized the benefits of early exposure, noting that young children pick up languages easily through interactive and visual methods. He and Board member LisaAnn Tom discussed potential collaboration between special education teachers and Deaf instructors, possibly starting in schools near existing ASL programs, such as Pearl City High School. He also suggested that special education teachers could help facilitate instruction, while Board member LisaAnn Tom proposed offering ASL as an elective or enrichment class.

Board member LisaAnn Tom will continue consulting with ASL teachers and parent coordinators to gather curriculum ideas and share updates.

TESTIMONY: Nani Watanabe highlighted that other languages like Japanese, French, and Spanish are offered, so ASL should be included as well.

The Committee agreed and stated that research would be conducted on how other states implement ASL in elementary schools. Staff confirmed the research would begin after this meeting, with a report to follow at the next meeting.

VI. New Business

A. Report on Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Board (DHHAB) Meeting held on September 20, 2025.

Staff reported that the meeting went well and two (2) new staff members were recently hired to support the Deaf section of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). The Board proposed forming a subcommittee to focus on collecting data about Kids of Deaf Adults (KODAs), including surveying their experiences and potential interest in becoming interpreters. Staff will participate in the subcommittee to help with survey development and interpreter recruitment efforts.

Board member LisaAnn Tom supported the survey idea and staff confirmed it would be distributed online via email to parents of KODA children and through networks such as DVR. Clarification was provided that KODA refers to children under age 18 with Deaf parents, while CODA refers to adult children of Deaf adults. Staff noted that outreach to Deaf individuals on Maui, Kauai, and the Big Island is challenging due to limited DVR involvement and staffing shortages.

TESTIMONY: Nani Watanabe reported on the Maui Deaf community, noting limited gathering opportunities and a need for proactive engagement.

The next DHHAB meeting is scheduled for November 8, 2025, when further updates are expected.

B. Update on the Deaf Awareness Day event held on September 27, 2025.

Deaf Awareness Day on September 27, 2025 drew one hundred twenty five (125) attendees, marking a successful turnout. The day opened with remarks from Board Chair Charlotte Townsend and a speech by Dr. Angel Ramos, principal of the Hawai'i School for the Deaf and the Blind. A panel of five (5) Deaf community members shared personal stories about communication access in families, schools, and workplaces, while a Deaf museum exhibit offered historical perspectives of local Deaf individuals through stories and photographs, enriching the cultural context. The event was livestreamed for remote audiences.

Although the event was well-received, several areas for improvement were noted. Some feedback suggested that the panel discussion ran too long, which prevented the planned entertainment from occurring. The Committee recommended implementing time limits for panelists to maintain the schedule and allow for audience participation. There was also discussion about attracting more hearing participants, since raising awareness about Deaf culture and accessibility among hearing individuals is a primary goal. Ideas for future events included separating activities for Deaf and hearing audiences, planning further in advance, and ensuring accessibility for Deaf-Blind attendees. Despite minor setbacks, the event was considered a success, and the Committee expressed confidence that the next Deaf Awareness Day would benefit from improved planning and engagement strategies.

C. Summary of the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA) meeting on September 30, 2025.

The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA) meeting on September 30, 2025, involved DCAB staff to discuss improving communication access for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. The discussion focused on lessons learned from past tsunami warnings, emphasizing the need for on-screen interpreters, captioning for TV broadcasts, social media posts, and press announcements.

TESTIMONY: Donald Sakamoto highlighted additional considerations for tourists who may face language barriers, suggesting the use of visual cues for emergencies and exploring multilingual captioning options.

Staff acknowledged these challenges and noted that HIEMA is exploring ways to integrate solutions, including referrals to the Office of Language Access for non-English communication. The meeting was described as productive, and HIEMA expressed a desire to continue collaborating with DCAB, with the new staff responsible for press and public information still learning about DCAB's services and available referral resources.

D. Review of quarterly Communication Access statistics.

Staff presented the quarterly Communication Access statistics, summarizing key activities and outcomes. One Hawaii Quality Assurance System (HQAS)

applicant was tested during the quarter, and twenty three (23) interpreters remain active in the Continuing Education Program. Staff provided five (5) instances of technical assistance related to the revised Hawai'i Administrative Rules, Title 11, Chapter 218 and continued to post monthly updates of credentialed communication access providers on the DCAB website.

Eight (8) interviews were conducted with interpreter training program representatives across the country to explore effective models for Hawai'i. Following this, staff met with Senator San Buenaventura to discuss support for establishing an Interpreter Training Program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

Thirty (30) technical assistance responses were provided to individuals and agencies on effective communication, including collaboration with HIEMA to improve emergency accessibility following the recent tsunami warning.

Other ongoing activities included monitoring the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) updates on communication access and meeting with the Office of Enterprise Technology Services to advance the draft Hawai'i Electronic Information Technology Disability Access Standards. Several projects, such as first responder training and continuing education workshops, had no activity this quarter.

E. Real-time captioning of phone calls at no cost funded by the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) fund which is administered by the Federal Communications Commission.

The discussion focused on real-time captioning of phone calls offered at no cost through funding from the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) fund, which is administered by the FCC. Staff clarified that DCAB does not endorse or promote any specific company but shared information about a new FCC-approved service called "Rogervoice."

This service provides an app that enables real-time captioning for phone calls, allowing Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to communicate directly with hearing persons without the need for a video relay interpreter. The app generates live transcripts of spoken conversations and allows users to type their responses. Staff noted that the program is free of charge and may serve as a helpful communication tool for the community, though it has not yet been tested by DCAB staff.

F. Recap of the Deaf Safari Day event held on October 25, 2025.

Staff provided a recap of the Deaf Safari Day event held on October 25, 2025, hosted by Relay Hawaii. Approximately seventy five (75) people attended, including members of the Deaf community, ASL students, and several families with children, some of whom traveled from the neighbor islands to participate. Staff noted that it was encouraging to see new faces and appreciated the strong turnout of vendors who set up booths to share resources and information.

DCAB staff attended the event and distributed outreach materials to raise awareness about available services and programs. The event was described as a positive community gathering that provided valuable exposure and connection opportunities for Deaf individuals and their families from across the state.

VII. Open Forum

During the open forum, a public comment from Donald Sakamoto shared his thoughts on how technology could improve communication between individuals who are blind and those who are Deaf. He expressed interest in exploring the potential of artificial intelligence and emerging tools such as Meta smart glasses or Ray-Bans that could one day translate sign language into speech or text and vice versa. He noted that while interpreters are helpful, having accessible technology for direct communication would be a significant advancement.

Staff responded that AI-based sign language interpretation tools are still in early development and not yet capable of recognizing the natural grammar and structure of ASL. One example mentioned was a company called Handspeak, which uses a camera to translate signed input into text, though it requires slow, deliberate signing to function accurately. Staff explained that while current tools have limitations, there is growing investment in this area, and future improvements could make such technology more practical. The discussion concluded on an optimistic note, acknowledging that continued innovation in AI could one day bridge communication between Deaf and blind individuals more seamlessly.

VIII. Announcement of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 8, 2026, at 11:00 a.m.

IX. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:21 p.m.

NOTE: All votes were unanimous unless otherwise noted.

Respectfully submitted,

JUSTIN TOKIOKA