

# **Aloha Independent Living Hawai'i Legislative & Policy Engagement Report**

*Reporting Period: March 1, 2026 – May 21, 2026*

## **I. Overview of Policy Engagement**

During the reporting period of March 1, 2026 through May 21, 2026, Aloha Independent Living Hawai'i (AILH) continued ongoing policy monitoring and legislative analysis across state and county policy processes. This period encompassed the most active phase of the 2026 Hawai'i Legislative Session — including crossover, conference committee, and final reading — through adjournment sine die.

AILH continued tracking measures from the more than 131 identified during the session and submitted formal written testimony as those measures advanced through successive committee stages. The majority of AILH's 175 total pieces of session testimony were submitted during this reporting period, reflecting the concentration of decision-making in the session's final months.

AILH's engagement during this reporting period continued to focus on identifying systemic themes affecting individuals with disabilities in Hawai'i rather than addressing legislation solely on a bill-by-bill basis. This approach allows advocacy efforts to remain aligned with the broader goals of the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) and supports long-term systems change.

## **II. Issue Area Analysis & SPIL Alignment**

### **Accountability, Due Process & Data Transparency**

AILH continued to review measures addressing investigation timelines, agency oversight, and reporting requirements. Testimony emphasized the importance of transparency in administrative processes, documented explanations when delays occur, and clear communication with individuals affected by agency proceedings.

These recommendations support SPIL goals related to strengthening accessible systems and ensuring equitable access to administrative remedies and civil rights protections.

### **Emergency Management, Disaster Resilience & Disability Integration**

A central focus of AILH's advocacy during this period was the integration of disability considerations into Hawai'i's emergency management and disaster recovery systems. AILH tracked and supported legislation establishing a Disability Integration Specialist position within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, which passed both chambers and was enrolled for transmittal to the Governor. The measure integrates the needs of individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs into all phases of emergency planning, preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation, and represents the most significant disability policy advancement of the 2026 session.

AILH also monitored related measures addressing emergency medical services coordination, the Maui wildfire health registry, and community resilience for care settings, emphasizing

disability-specific data tracking, accessible emergency communication, and disability-inclusive planning throughout.

In response to the March–April 2026 Kona Low storm events, which produced flooding and displacement across multiple islands, ALLH developed a consumer needs survey and a companion field observation form for use by Independent Living Specialists to capture the lived experiences of disabled survivors and inform accessible recovery efforts. Deployment is pending finalization of the supporting funding pathway.

ALLH also advanced engagement with the State 911 Board, pursuing representation on its Advisory Committee as a cross-disability Center for Independent Living and developing analysis on the accessibility of emerging 911 technologies — including AI-assisted systems and the statewide Emergency Health Profile — for individuals with communication, cognitive, and sensory disabilities. This work is in progress.

This work supports SPIL goals related to emergency preparedness, accessible disaster recovery, and the integration of Independent Living philosophy into statewide systems.

### **Education & Youth Disability Supports**

ALLH continued to engage on measures affecting students with disabilities, including legislation addressing literacy access, assistive technology, dyslexia screening, school safety, and student transportation, monitoring these measures to ensure disability-specific provisions were preserved through conference committee.

During this period, ALLH also initiated systems advocacy in response to a Department of Education decision to reduce contract reimbursement rates for agencies providing behavior technicians to autistic students and students with related disabilities, effective with the new contract beginning July 1, 2026. Provider agencies serving the neighbor islands reported that the reduced rate is likely to deepen existing workforce shortages. ALLH framed this as a cross-disability and integration concern rather than a narrow funding question, developing internal analysis and a plain-language Independent Living Specialist briefing, and identifying Board of Education monitoring as an ongoing function.

This work reinforces the Independent Living philosophy by treating school-based supports as upstream infrastructure for adult community living, self-determination, and integration.

### **Community Living, Health & Anti-Institutionalization**

Consistent with the integration mandate established by *Olmstead v. L.C.* (1999), ALLH tracked and supported measures expanding community-based services as the alternative to institutionalization, including Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services funding for community care settings, non-discrimination protections for individuals seeking community-based residential options, and the establishment of a long-term care financing advisory body. Testimony emphasized HCBS-first framing, cross-disability eligibility, and meaningful disability community representation on advisory bodies.

ALLH also monitored measures affecting individuals with psychiatric disabilities, including legislation addressing assisted community treatment, raising concerns regarding consumer autonomy, due process, and informed consent. This work was conducted in coordination with the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) Advisory Council and the Hawai'i Disability Rights Center as part of ongoing cross-disability coalition advocacy.

These efforts support SPIL goals related to community living, consumer control, and the prevention of unnecessary institutionalization.

### **Civil Rights & Accessibility**

AILH engaged on measures addressing physical and digital accessibility, anti-discrimination protections, and civil rights enforcement. Measures advancing during the period included a resolution urging expedited county action on building permits for disability-related home modifications, a resolution directing study of anti-discrimination protections in automated decision systems, and legislation establishing a disability travel placard program. AILH continued to advocate on information and communications technology accessibility, universal changing accommodations, and accessible pedestrian infrastructure.

At the county level, AILH submitted a letter to Kauaʻi County leadership regarding elevator accessibility and ADA Title II program access obligations, which received a constructive initial response, with a substantive county response anticipated within the standard review window. AILH also engaged on county accessibility matters across multiple jurisdictions, including pedestrian and facility access, universal design in long-range county planning, and accessible emergency sheltering and evacuation.

This work supports SPIL goals related to civil rights enforcement, accessible community infrastructure, and full participation of individuals with disabilities in public life.

### **Civic Participation & Access to Democracy**

AILH continued to advance the Access to Democracy initiative in partnership with the League of Women Voters of Hawaiʻi, a three-year effort to strengthen disability-inclusive civic engagement statewide. Following the initiative's public panel on structural barriers to voting, candidacy, and democratic participation, AILH and the League continued planning a series of community listening sessions to gather direct input from individuals with disabilities regarding lived barriers to civic engagement.

AILH also strengthened its voting accessibility advocacy during this period, advancing a dual-modality position that supports both accessible vote-by-mail and strengthened in-person voter service centers, recognizing that individuals with different disabilities rely on different access pathways. AILH began pursuing representation on elections accessibility advisory bodies at the state and county levels to ensure the disability community's direct participation in elections accessibility decisions.

At the county level, AILH supported the reinstatement of Honolulu's Mayor's Advisory Committee on Disabilities, submitting a letter of support for the reinstatement resolution and requesting that Council leadership advance the measure through the legislative process. Reestablishing this body would restore a dedicated channel for disability community input into county government.

This initiative and related work align with SPIL goals related to promoting full participation of individuals with disabilities in civic life and strengthening cross-sector collaboration to advance systems change.

### **Workforce Systems & Economic Participation**

AILH continued to monitor measures related to workforce systems and economic participation, including family caregiver support. AILH also continued to track the Medicaid full earned income

disregard as a critical unresolved barrier for working-age people with disabilities; this measure did not advance in 2026 and has been identified as a priority for future engagement, including potential administrative pathways.

These efforts support SPIL goals related to economic participation, community living, and systems-level coordination that enables individuals with disabilities to maintain independence.

### **Federal Policy Monitoring**

AILH monitored federal legislation with direct relevance to Hawai'i's disability service systems. In particular, AILH communicated with Hawai'i's congressional delegation regarding the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act, which passed the U.S. Senate in March 2026 and includes provisions affecting disaster recovery funding and rural rental assistance preservation of direct consequence to disabled Hawai'i residents. This included recent outreach to Senator Brian Schatz. AILH continues to monitor the bill's progression through the U.S. House of Representatives.

This work supports SPIL goals related to community living, accessible housing, and the prevention of unnecessary institutionalization.

## **III. Strategic Impact & Ongoing Monitoring**

During this reporting period, AILH:

- Continued tracking measures from the more than 131 identified during the 2026 session and submitted the majority of its 175 total pieces of session testimony
- Supported the establishment of a Disability Integration Specialist position within the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, the most significant disability policy advancement of the session
- Advanced engagement with the State 911 Board on the accessibility of emergency communications technologies, including AI-assisted systems
- Initiated systems advocacy in response to Department of Education behavior technician rate reductions
- Developed disaster response tools following the March–April 2026 Kona Low storm events
- Strengthened voting accessibility advocacy and began pursuing representation on elections accessibility advisory bodies
- Submitted a county ADA Title II program access letter and supported reinstatement of a county disability advisory committee
- Continued cross-disability coalition advocacy with PAIMI and the Hawai'i Disability Rights Center on mental health legislation
- Advanced the Access to Democracy initiative in partnership with the League of Women Voters of Hawai'i
- Communicated with Hawai'i's congressional delegation regarding federal housing legislation affecting disability systems

Through this work, AILH contributed disability-informed analysis to policy discussions across multiple issue areas. AILH will continue monitoring legislative developments, amendments, and implementation efforts to ensure that Independent Living principles remain embedded in statewide systems.

## **IV. Next Steps**

Looking ahead, AILH will continue to:

- Monitor Governor signature decisions on measures passed during the 2026 session, including the Disability Integration Specialist position
- Engage emergency management leadership on implementation of disability integration provisions
- Pursue AILH representation on the State 911 Board Advisory Committee and finalize related accessibility analysis
- Monitor Board of Education developments related to behavior technician contracting and IEP-specified service delivery
- Deploy the Kona Low consumer needs survey upon finalization of the supporting funding pathway
- Continue pursuing representation on elections accessibility advisory bodies at the state and county levels
- Monitor the Kaua'i County response on elevator and ADA Title II program access within the response window
- Continue supporting reinstatement of Honolulu's Mayor's Advisory Committee on Disabilities
- Advance the Access to Democracy initiative, including community listening sessions and civic education
- Monitor the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act through the U.S. House of Representatives
- Identify priorities for the 2027 legislative session, including measures that did not advance in 2026
- Maintain partnerships that support long-term systems change aligned with SPIL priorities

Through these efforts, AILH remains committed to advancing consumer-centered, data-informed advocacy that strengthens inclusive and accessible systems for individuals with disabilities throughout Hawai'i.