

Aloha Independent Living Hawai'i

Systems Advocacy Report

Reporting Period: May 1, 2026 – July 31, 2026

I. Overview of Policy Engagement

During the reporting period of May 1, 2026 through July 31, 2026, Aloha Independent Living Hawai'i (AILH) carried its systems advocacy from the 2026 legislative session into the implementation, rulemaking, and administrative phases where enacted policy is given real effect. With the session concluded, AILH's work shifted toward federal regulatory comment, state agency rulemaking engagement, county ordinance implementation, representation on regional planning and emergency-response bodies, and coalition building — while continuing to monitor federal legislation affecting Hawai'i's disability community.

Across the period, AILH submitted formal public comment, testimony, and agency correspondence at the county, state, and federal levels; secured a place in a state civil-rights rulemaking process; formalized a partnership role on emergency-communications accessibility; advanced toward a seat on O'ahu's regional transportation-planning advisory body; gathered and elevated consumer voices in support of neighbor-island transit access; and shared AILH's disability-inclusive emergency-management expertise with a visiting Pacific-regional cohort.

As in prior reports, AILH's engagement focused on identifying systemic themes affecting individuals with disabilities in Hawai'i rather than addressing measures on a bill-by-bill basis. This approach keeps our advocacy aligned with the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) and with the Independent Living philosophy and the Olmstead integration mandate that anchor all of our work: people with disabilities have the right to live in their communities, not in institutions, and systems must be built so that right is real.

Highlights of the Reporting Period

- **Digital accessibility rulemaking (Act 257).** AILH's stakeholder-engagement letter to the Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission secured a formal agenda item at the Commission's meeting, opening the door to disability-community participation before formal rulemaking begins.
- **Federal funding rule (OMB).** AILH filed a federal regulatory comment defending statutorily required Independent Living systems advocacy, disability accessibility, and rural outreach against a government-wide rule that, as written, risked treating those congressionally mandated activities as prohibited.
- **County disaster-recovery ordinance (Hawai'i Island).** A county Disaster Recovery Program AILH testified on was enacted as Ordinance No. 2026-054 (signed July 27, 2026), with an implementation letter positioning AILH as an ongoing expertise resource.
- **Emergency communications (State 911 Board).** AILH was formalized as a community partner and holds a cross-disability review role on the RapidSOS Emergency Health Profile.
- **Regional transportation planning (OahuMPO).** AILH placed disability access into O'ahu's transportation-planning record through two federal-level public comments and is advancing toward a Citizen Advisory Committee seat.

- **Medicaid coverage protection (CMS).** AILH filed a federal comment opposing a Medicaid community-engagement (work-requirement) rule that threatens coverage and home- and community-based services for people with disabilities.
- **Pacific-regional expertise exchange.** AILH hosted the American Samoa Community College Inclusive Emergency Management cohort for a knowledge exchange on disability-inclusive emergency management.

II. Issue Area Analysis & SPIL Alignment

Transportation Access & Regional Planning

Transportation determines whether every other right — to work, health care, and community life — is usable. During the period, AILH submitted two formal public comments in June 2026 in the federal review of O‘ahu’s metropolitan transportation planning process: one on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) amendment, and one to the Federal Highway and Federal Transit Administrations in their certification review of OahuMPO’s planning process. Both asked that disability access be built into project design and prioritization from the start — accessible bus-stop amenities and transfer points, resilient evacuation planning for residents who cannot self-evacuate, and disability-inclusive outreach — and both raised a structural gap: OahuMPO’s equity analysis examines minority and low-income populations but does not analyze people with disabilities as a population group, though disability can be mapped and weighed as those categories already are.

AILH is also pursuing a seat on OahuMPO’s Citizen Advisory Committee, earning attendance credits toward eligibility and analyzing the agency’s Title VI implementation plan to document where disability access is missing from the planning framework.

On Hawai‘i Island, AILH’s Independent Living Specialists gathered consumer accounts of Hele-On fixed-route and paratransit barriers — seven riders responded within four days, spanning mobility, vision, hearing, chronic-illness, and aging experiences — and AILH produced a consumer-voice document, shared with consumer consent and with identifying details removed, in support of DCAB’s work on the Hele-On service-expansion resolutions (HR146 and HCR154). These first-hand accounts illustrate the difference between community participation and isolation that transportation access decides, and gave DCAB real-world evidence tied to a live resolution.

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

Emergency Preparedness & Disaster Resilience

AILH continued to advance the accessibility of Hawai‘i’s emergency systems. Following the enactment of Act 133 (2026), which establishes a Disability Integration Specialist position at the Hawai‘i Emergency Management Agency, AILH engaged DCAB on the position’s design, confirming that the recommended position description — developed with DCAB and the State Council on Developmental Disabilities — is cross-disability and inclusive of access and functional needs, and that its establishment will take time to move through the State’s process. AILH also formalized its role as a community partner with the State of Hawai‘i 9-1-1 Board and holds a cross-disability review role on the RapidSOS Emergency Health Profile, raising the needs of residents who do not use smartphones or lack reliable connectivity so that access to emergency communications does not depend on a single technology.

At the county level, AILH testified in support of Hawai‘i County’s Disaster Recovery Program ordinance, which passed final reading and was signed into law as Ordinance No. 2026-054 on July 27, 2026, effective

immediately. AILH prepared an implementation letter to the Mayor positioning the organization as an ongoing expertise resource on the accessibility of recovery programs, drawing on AILH's disaster-response record.

AILH further proposed to DCAB a joint, cross-disability, island-specific emergency-preparedness web hub, grounded in the CMIST framework (communication, maintaining health, independence, services and supports, and transportation) and modeled on a mainland Center for Independent Living's tool, so that residents can find the resources relevant to their own island and their own access needs in one place rather than depending on a single technology or agency. DCAB expressed interest in partnering on the concept.

This work reinforces the Independent Living philosophy by ensuring that emergencies — from statewide disasters to individual service disruptions such as a power loss for a resident dependent on powered medical equipment — are planned for with people with disabilities at the table from the beginning, rather than as an afterthought.

Digital Access & Civil Rights

The enactment of Act 257 (2026), signed July 14, 2026, established that requiring the use of inaccessible information and communication technology by a place of public accommodation is an unlawful discriminatory practice, and directed the Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) to adopt implementing rules. AILH wrote to the Commission on July 24, 2026 requesting that it convene the disability community — Hawai'i's Centers for Independent Living, the Statewide Independent Living Council, and the Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB), together with the cross-disability community they serve — before the rulemaking moves into formal proceedings, so that the people with the most direct knowledge of digital barriers shape the rules at the front end. The letter grounded this request in AILH's own session testimony and in the Olmstead integration mandate, framing accessible digital services as Olmstead compliance infrastructure for a time when commerce, health care, and government increasingly move online. The Commission responded and placed AILH's request as an agenda item at its Commission meeting.

During the period, AILH also established a working relationship with DCAB, the State's communication-access authority. In a July meeting, the two organizations committed to ongoing collaboration and identified several shared priorities: AILH will be connected into the Hawai'i Disability & Healthcare Coalition, and agreed to help distribute DCAB's forthcoming health-access survey to the Deaf, deaf-blind, and hard-of-hearing community. AILH and DCAB also agreed to coordinate — rather than duplicate effort — on reestablishing the Honolulu Mayor's Committee on Persons with Disabilities, which AILH has pursued through the City Council and which remains inactive while every neighbor-island county maintains such a body, and on the accessibility of the airport-to-Skyline transit connection. This partnership positions AILH to provide a consumer-perspective, cross-disability review on accessibility matters statewide.

This work advances SPIL goals related to equal access, civil rights protections, cross-disability inclusion, and consumer participation in the systems that serve them.

Housing Access

AILH continued housing systems advocacy across levels of government. At the federal level, AILH monitored the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act, whose disaster-recovery and rural-housing provisions carry direct significance for Hawai'i, and maintained contact with Hawai'i's congressional delegation. At the county level, AILH sent a letter to a Hawai'i County Council member pressing for disability-access metrics in the live rewrite of the County's affordable-housing ordinance, a higher-leverage vehicle than periodic report monitoring. On O'ahu, AILH submitted a letter urging genuine disability-stakeholder engagement in the New Aloha Stadium Entertainment District planning. AILH also filed testimony with the Maui Housing Advisory

Board on affordable-housing access; the Board's meeting was subsequently rescheduled, and AILH is monitoring for the new agenda.

This work supports SPIL goals tied to accessible, affordable, integrated housing and the prevention of institutionalization.

Workforce & Employment Access

AILH deepened its engagement with the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council (WDC) on the intersection of workforce systems and disability. Following AILH's public comment on the Modified State Plan, the Council confirmed amendments in writing, and AILH participated in WDC engagement on the Kaua'i American Job Center, whose provisional certification was extended during the period. WDC invited AILH's Kaua'i Independent Living Specialist to join restarted partner meetings and offered an informal advisory role, establishing AILH as the cross-disability, Independent Living voice at the Kaua'i workforce partner table. AILH prepared its Kaua'i Independent Living Specialist as the organization's primary voice for the forthcoming partner convening.

This work advances SPIL goals related to employment, self-determination, and access to workforce systems for people with disabilities.

Health Care Access & Community Living

AILH filed a detailed federal comment opposing, as written, a Medicaid interim final rule imposing community-engagement (work) requirements. AILH's analysis showed that the rule's exemptions — for individuals who are medically frail, veterans with total disability ratings, and caregivers — place the burden of proof on the individual within a short deadline, falling hardest on people with cognitive, psychiatric, episodic, and non-apparent disabilities, and that nearly seven in ten Medicaid adults with a disability receive neither SSI nor SSDI and so may not be reached by data-only verification. AILH recommended identifying exemptions from data before any notice issues, correcting the medical-frailty definition, maintaining coverage while determinations are pending, requiring accessible notices and multiple response channels, and protecting home- and community-based services from any interruption. The comment is grounded in Olmstead: the loss of these services forces people from their homes into institutions, the opposite of independence.

This work is central to SPIL goals on community living, home- and community-based services access, and the prevention of unnecessary institutionalization.

Federal Disability Policy & Program Integrity

AILH filed a federal regulatory comment on July 2, 2026 on the proposed Regulation for Federal Financial Assistance (OMB), requesting narrow clarifications to ensure that a government-wide funding rule would not be read to prohibit activities Congress requires of Centers for Independent Living: that disability accessibility and statutorily directed outreach to unserved and underserved rural populations are not unlawful "DEIA"; that statutorily required Independent Living systems advocacy is not prohibited issue advocacy; and that lawful participation in disability coalitions and the federal Independent Living network is not a negative risk factor. AILH also continued federal monitoring and delegation engagement on community-living legislation, and its weekly Congressional Record review flagged committee action affecting proposals to move special education and Vocational Rehabilitation out of the U.S. Department of Education — now on active monitoring for their implications for disabled students and rehabilitation services.

This work protects the statutory foundation of the Independent Living program and supports SPIL goals on federal policy alignment.

Behavioral Health & Anti-Coercion Coalition

AILH continued its coalition work with the Hawai'i Disability Rights Center's Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) program, participating in the PAIMI Advisory Council and sustaining shared advocacy against the expansion of coercive treatment without corresponding due-process protections. This partnership pairs AILH's Independent Living, consumer-control, and cross-disability framing with the Center's protection-and-advocacy authority.

This work advances SPIL goals related to self-determination, voluntary community-based services, and cross-disability rights.

Consumer Voice, Community Education & Organizational Capacity

AILH invested in community education and organizational capacity during the period. AILH hosted the American Samoa Community College Inclusive Emergency Management cohort — students, public-health staff, first responders, and resilience-office personnel — for a knowledge-exchange session on disability-inclusive emergency management, sharing the CMIST framework, disaster-response lessons, the Independent Living approach to consumer-directed services, and Hawai'i's emerging emergency-accessibility infrastructure. The exchange reflects AILH's role as a Pacific-regional resource on disability inclusion.

AILH continued hosting a Creighton University Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) doctoral capstone student. The capstone (May–August 2026) is producing three accessible educational videos for the disability community — on exercising at home, emergency preparedness, and transportation — for broadcast on 'Ōlelo Community Media and AILH's YouTube channel under AILH's Information and Referral service. As the capstone concludes in August, these videos extend AILH's reach as accessible, consumer-facing educational resources grounded in Independent Living philosophy.

Throughout, AILH's Independent Living Specialists continued to gather consumer experiences under the organization's standing practice of documented consumer consent and default de-identification, ensuring that systems advocacy is grounded in real consumer voices rather than assumption.

This work advances SPIL goals related to community education, consumer control, and organizational capacity to serve people with disabilities statewide.

Strategic Impact

- Secured disability-community access to a state civil-rights rulemaking process by obtaining a formal HCRC agenda item on digital-accessibility stakeholder engagement (Act 257)
- Filed a federal regulatory comment protecting statutorily required Independent Living systems advocacy, disability accessibility, and rural outreach under a government-wide funding rule (OMB)
- Testified on and saw enacted a Hawai'i County Disaster Recovery Program ordinance (Ordinance No. 2026-054), and prepared an implementation letter establishing AILH as an ongoing expertise resource
- Placed disability access into O'ahu's regional transportation-planning record through two federal-level public comments and advanced toward a Citizen Advisory Committee seat
- Formalized a community-partner role with the State 9-1-1 Board on emergency-communications accessibility, including cross-disability review of the RapidSOS Emergency Health Profile
- Filed a federal comment protecting Medicaid coverage and home- and community-based services for people with disabilities against a work-requirement rule

- Established a working relationship with DCAB — connecting AILH into the Hawai'i Disability & Healthcare Coalition, agreeing to distribute DCAB's health-access survey to the Deaf, deaf-blind, and hard-of-hearing community, and opening a joint emergency-preparedness web-hub concept — and delivered consumer-voice evidence supporting Hawai'i Island transit access
- Deepened workforce-system engagement, securing an ongoing seat at the Kaua'i workforce partner table for AILH's cross-disability voice
- Shared AILH's disability-inclusive emergency-management expertise with the American Samoa Community College Inclusive Emergency Management cohort