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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS

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TO: Honorable Norman Sakamoto, Chair
Honorable Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Education and Housing

FROM: Serafin “Jun” Colmenares, Executive Director, Office of Language Access

RE: **Testimony in Support of the Intent of SB1072**
Hearing: Monday, February 9, 2009, 1:15 p.m., Room 225

I. OVERVIEW OF CURRENT PROPOSED LEGISLATION

SB1072 proposes that the Ombudsman evaluate customer service at the Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA) by establishing a pilot program using informed customers to investigate customer service. The purpose of the program is to use the information gathered by the informed customers to improve the HPHA’s delivery of services and identify areas with staffing shortages.

II. SB1072

The Office of Language Access supports the intent of SB1072. This measure is not part of the Governor’s Administrative Bill Package.

The Language Access Law was enacted by the Legislature in 2006 and subsequently signed into law by Governor Linda Lingle. The law applies to 25 state agencies, including the legislature, the judiciary and the departments of the executive branch. They are required to assess the language service needs and take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to state-funded services, programs and activities by persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). Access is provided by oral language services or by offering written translations of vital documents, if it is reasonable.

As a result of the proposed program, vital information can be gathered to address potential or perceived barriers to access for services. For LEP tenants, language is the barrier to service. The OLA supports the intent of this measure to the extent that it can determine whether HPHA’s LEP tenants are receiving sufficient notice of the HPHA’s services in a language that they can understand.