

**Statewide Independent Living Council of Hawai'i (SILC)
July Monthly Meeting Minutes [Approved]**

Date: July 2, 2026

Time: 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Location (In Person): Entrepreneur Sandbox, 643 Ilalo St, Suite 1000, Honolulu, HI 96813

Location (Zoom): <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83211242897>

Call to Order – Patrick Gartside

The meeting was called to order by Chair Patrick Gartside *at 9:01 A.M.*

Roll Call & Establishment of Quorum – Donald Sakamoto

SILC Members Present:

- Patrick Gartside (Chair)
- Philip Ana (Vice Chair)
- Lehua Chang (new member)
- Roy Corpus (new member)
- Catia “Cat” Garell
- Judy Guajardo (Executive Committee Member, at-large)
- Donald Sakamoto (Secretary)
- Annette Tashiro (Treasurer)
- Nani Watanabe

SILC Members Absent:

- Brian Hauser
- Vickie Kennedy
- Leticia Zuno

Quorum established.

Staff:

- Amanda Lowe, Executive Director

Guests:

- Matthew Brown
- Karen
- Alexa Fuller
- Jason Julian
- Rose Leyson
- Cheryl Matthews, Hawai'i Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)

Review Independent Living Philosophy – Amanda Lowe

Amanda reviewed the Independent Living Philosophy.

Approval of Today's Agenda

Motion: Judy Guajardo moved to approve the agenda as presented.

Second: Annette Tashiro

Result: Approved.

Approval of Minutes – June 4, 2026

Motion: Judy Guajardo moved to approve the June 4, 2026 minutes.

Second: Annette Tashiro

Result: Approved.

Message from the SILC Chair

Patrick Gartside welcomed members and guests to the SILC meeting.

SILC Reports

SILC Activities Report – Amanda Lowe

Amanda reviewed the June 2026 SILC member activity report, organized around the four goals of the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). Activities included hands-on emergency preparedness training, sustained transportation and housing advocacy, and outreach with the blind and low-vision, kūpuna, and caregiver communities across the islands.

Survey Committee Report

The Survey Committee met and hope to have a Community Needs Assessment ready for a council vote in August.

State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) Committee Report – Amanda Lowe

Amanda stated that the SPIL Committee met, and that SILC and the two Centers for Independent Living (CILs) used the evaluation tool contained within the SPIL to evaluate their own progress on the SPIL goals. SILC and the CILs shared this information with each other.

Advocacy Committee Report – Philip Ana

Philip Ana encouraged members to take advantage of the opportunities for advocacy that he shares in his emails to council members.

Treasurer’s Report – Annette Tashiro

Annette updated the council on the SILC balance at American Savings Bank. ***Last Updated: July 1, 2026: Current Balance=\$205,047 (rounded), Available Balance=\$204,398 (rounded)***

New Business

Advocacy Updates and Opportunities

Update on the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Memo on the Supreme Court Olmstead Decision. On June 18, 2026, the DOJ Office of Legal Counsel released a memo reading Olmstead v. L.C. (1999) narrowly, arguing that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act do not require states to provide community-based services — a position the memo concedes is out of step with nearly thirty years of federal court interpretation of the integration mandate. The memo does not change the law, but it signals the federal government stepping back from enforcement that pushes states toward community living; coming alongside Medicaid cuts to home- and community-based services, advocates view it as a step back toward institutionalization, and state governors and attorneys general are the actors to watch.

Update on Changes in the U.S. Department of Education. On June 16, 2026, the Department of Education announced four interagency agreements moving the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) to the Department of Health and Human Services and the Office for Civil Rights to the DOJ; these are administrative agreements rather than legal transfers, as only Congress can move a statutorily created office. This matters for independent living because OSERS houses the Rehabilitation Services Administration, which runs vocational rehabilitation — a core partner of the Centers for Independent Living — and the change risks fragmenting the school-to-employment-to-independent-living continuum; a Senate HELP Committee vote is expected in July, and more than 700 organizations have urged Congress to halt the moves.

Cheryl Matthews provided an update that the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has been assured there will be no changes in funding, and that DVR is in constant contact with its liaison at the federal level.

Update on the Federal Budget (Fiscal Year 2027). Fiscal year 2027 begins October 1, 2026; the House has advanced its Labor-HHS-Education bill through committee while the Senate lags, and a continuing resolution or shutdown fight remains possible. The President's budget proposed raising Independent Living funding to roughly \$228 million while dissolving the Administration for Community Living (ACL), but the House rejected the reorganization, kept ACL intact, and set Independent Living at \$130,183,000 — essentially flat; nothing is settled, and these pressures arrive on top of prior-year Medicaid cuts.

Planning for Development of the SILC Strategic Plan – Amanda Lowe

Patrick Gartside introduced the item, noting that while SILC's work is guided by the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), the council also needs a plan for itself as an organization. Amanda Lowe reported that the question of whether SILC should have a strategic plan had come up at an Executive Committee meeting. She and Philip Ana held a call with Nancy, a consultant referred by the Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities (DD Council), who assisted with that council's strategic plan.

Amanda described a strategic plan as a roadmap and organizing document — one that would help the council evaluate whether it is doing the work it set out to do. She outlined the steps in the framework Nancy provided:

- Define the organization's core identity — review the mission and vision statements and determine whether they remain accurate or should be updated.
- Analyze the landscape — conduct a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats).
- Set strategic priorities — generally three to five critical areas with the most significant impact on the organization's work.

- Create measurable goals using the SMART framework (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely).
- Assign accountability so members know who is doing what, and how.

On timing: the council shared the SPIL with Nancy and explained that the current SPIL runs through Fiscal Year 2027 (September 30, 2027). Nancy advised that it makes more sense to complete the SPIL first and then undertake the strategic plan, since strategic plans typically span three to five years. The Executive Committee will continue the conversation and keep the council posted; SILC would expect to engage help in order to do the work well.

Discussion: Nani Watanabe supported the direction, noting that geographic areas differ in their needs and barriers, and that identifying those barriers and reaching underserved communities is important; she observed that SILC is moving forward and involving the community. The council also discussed the possibility of engaging a strategic planner or neutral facilitator to assist with development of Hawai'i's next State Plan for Independent Living.

Unfinished Business

Update on SILC Efforts to Reconstitute the Honolulu Mayor's Committee on People with Disabilities on O'ahu

Donald Sakamoto reported that he, Annette Tashiro, Amanda Lowe, and Patrick Gartside met in June with the Managing Director of the City and County of Honolulu regarding reconstitution of the Mayor's Committee on People with Disabilities.

History (Annette Tashiro and Donald Sakamoto):

- Annette recalled that the Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities was started under Mayor Frank Fasi in the mid-1980s, while she worked for the Department of Parks and Recreation. Kirby Shaw (Disability and Communication Access Board) served as a chair, and Mark Obatake, then Executive Director of the Hawaii Centers for Independent Living, was among the leadership. Administration of the committee sat with the City and County deputy director's office before moving to another department.
- Donald reported that the committee was reestablished under Mayor Peter Carlisle, with Roxanne Bolden and others serving. It was not reestablished during Mayor Kirk Caldwell's two four-year terms. In November 2020, Donald asked the incoming mayor on a radio program whether he would bring the committee back; the mayor initially responded favorably but subsequently indicated that the Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) and the Hawaii Disability Rights Center (HDRC) already

perform advocacy for people with disabilities. Donald noted that advocacy by those agencies is not the same as the purpose of a Mayor's Committee.

- Donald and Annette subsequently met with the Department of Community Services and city staff, including the ADA Coordinator, and were asked to contact three individuals to establish the committee. One contact was supportive; another declined to move forward, and the effort stalled for several years until Donald rejoined SILC.
- Two of Hawai'i's counties — Maui and Hawai'i Island — already have active commissions that review county policies and practices for impact on people with disabilities, recommend how accessibility set-aside funds should be used, recommend changes to policies and practices that do not meet federal, state, and county law, review county programs and facilities for accessibility, and promote housing, employment, and transportation.

Follow-up letter (Amanda Lowe):

The Managing Director asked three questions, and Amanda drafted a reply addressing each:

- Why create another committee when Honolulu already has committees addressing disability? SILC clarified that only two exist — the Honolulu County Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee and the Committee for Accessible Transportation — and that a Mayor's Committee would be cross-issue rather than single-issue.
- What about existing statewide agencies? SILC clarified the roles of DCAB, HDRC, and the Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities, and explained how a Mayor's Committee would be separate from those state agencies and specific to the City and County of Honolulu.
- What would the scope of the committee be? SILC drew on the missions and responsibilities of the Hawai'i County Committee on People with Disabilities and the Maui County Commission on Persons with Disabilities as a possible framework.

The Deputy Managing Director indicated that a decision appeared to have already been made and that he would honor it, while remaining open to continued conversation. SILC will continue to engage, in the hope that the reply, Councilmember Radiant Cordero's resolution, DCAB's letter, and examples of mayor's committees and city councils on the mainland (which were included with the letter) will be persuasive.

Discussion: Donald asked whether, absent a Mayor's Committee, disability representation could be strengthened on the county aging council rather than relying on a single disability representative. Patrick agreed that in the interim SILC should track and show up at Honolulu County Office on Aging meetings so that a diverse range of disabled voices is at the table. Nani Watanabe, who serves on the Maui County Office on Aging Council representing the disability community, described Maui's commissions and councils and noted that county-level bodies cannot always address state-level concerns, and that responses from the mayor's office are not always timely. She emphasized that when people with disabilities are not present,

decisions are made by non-disabled community members. Patrick added that the Managing Director had also raised the broader difficulty of filling boards and commissions — including a gender gap and the challenge of engaging youth — and expressed interest in a youth leadership forum through the Independent Living network.

Vibrant Hawaii Conference Attendee Report Out to SILC

Amanda Lowe attended a two-day Vibrant Hawaii conference in Hilo on behalf of SILC, in support of the council's emergency preparedness goal. Attendees selected tracks; Amanda joined the shelter track, which addressed what is needed to stand up an emergency shelter. She raised disability considerations within her group, noting these were not at the forefront of participants' thinking. Speakers included a presenter who operates a shelter for unhoused individuals, who spoke to residents' needs, mental health considerations, and how to create a safe, inclusive, and welcoming shelter. Amanda also connected with a staff member from Aloha Independent Living Hawaii who attended.

Annette Tashiro attended on behalf of the Kaneohe–Kahalu'u Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). She described how her involvement began through the Feeling Safe, Being Safe self-advocacy emergency preparedness group, and explained that the Ko'olau Resilience Hub was brought to O'ahu from the Vibrant Hawaii model, which took roughly six years to develop its island-wide network of hubs. Hubs prepare during "blue skies" periods so that communities can support one another when disaster strikes. Annette participated in the food security track and encouraged members to get involved with their community emergency response groups, noting that the community is typically the first to respond and cannot rely on government assistance arriving immediately.

Roy Corpus offered comments, but in-room audio difficulties meant they could not be fully heard; he will send his remarks in writing. Philip Ana noted that Roy was one of the advocates for the universal changing table legislation supported by HDRC, has raised transportation concerns in Kona — including that consumers can secure a ride to a destination without a guaranteed ride home — and leads the self-advocacy network in Kona.

Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items

- Nani Watanabe announced that the DD Council is sponsoring the 2026 Maui Legislative Forum on August 11, 2026, from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the Pilina Events Center at the University of Hawai'i Maui College. Topics will include accessibility, housing, employment, transportation, and health. Nani will send the flyer to Amanda for distribution.
- Judy Guajardo raised accessibility concerns at a new housing project in Kihei, Maui. Bathrooms are built so that grab bars cannot readily be installed (and approval is required where they can be),

and building access relies on a resident-held fob with no keypad — requiring one tenant, who receives four in-home services, to travel from the fourth floor to admit providers. Each apartment comes with 28 pages of rules. Judy noted appreciation for the new housing while questioning how such units are permitted for senior housing given the design flaws.

- Catia “Cat” Garell, an occupational therapist specializing in home modifications, offered that occupational therapists can advocate directly with property managers and complete reasonable accommodation requests, which may be covered through Medicare home health or private-pay occupational therapy. She shared a recent O’ahu public housing case in which a wheelchair user in a non-accessible unit was moved to an accessible unit after a reasonable accommodation form was filed. She noted that funding remains the largest barrier and that contractors often design to the cheapest option and describe it as ADA-compliant when it is not.
- Nani Watanabe added that fire departments distribute free smoke detectors but not models with flashing lights, which Deaf residents must purchase themselves, and advocated for universal design in doorbells and alarms. She also noted the practice of requiring tenants to remove grab bars upon move-out, and a case in which a blind tenant was placed in a unit modified for a wheelchair user, underscoring the need for education among housing providers.
- Rose Leyson, speaking as a Vocational Rehabilitation consumer, described a lengthy and difficult experience seeking reassignment to a different counselor, which required a hearing. She reported that the digital hearing packet did not mirror the printed copy, lacked page numbers, and was ordered differently, and stated that she felt there was a lack of accountability and no accessible way for consumers to raise concerns. She noted that most consumers are unaware of the Client Assistance Program, HDRC, SILC, or the State Rehabilitation Council. Her two suggestions were (1) a consumer rights booklet so that consumers know their resources up front, and (2) greater engagement and partnership between agencies and the people they serve. Patrick Gartside thanked her, apologized for her experience, and asked to connect offline; Rose consented to Donald sharing her contact information.
- Donald Sakamoto reported attending a legislative town hall meeting and raising the case of a 67-year-old woman with a disability whose Section 8 housing voucher was reduced substantially, resulting in roughly a year of homelessness. She has compiled documentation and is seeking an opportunity to present her concerns to the Legislature. Donald spoke with Representative Lisa Marten, Chair of the Committee on Human Services, urging that Section 8 and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) resources reach people with disabilities, disabled veterans, and people experiencing homelessness.

Adjournment

Motion: Nani Watanabe moved and ***Donald Sakamoto seconded to adjourn*** the meeting.

Result: Motion ***passed*** unanimously.

Meeting adjourned