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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATE AGENCIES REMIND HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS ABOUT RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS FOR PATIENTS WHO ARE DEAF

HONOLULU — The Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) and the Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) today announced a joint public education effort to inform patients who are deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind and use sign language as well as health care providers of their legal rights and responsibilities. Under state and federal law, health care providers have an obligation to provide auxiliary aids and services for patients who have disabilities, including qualified sign language interpreters when needed to provide effective communication.

One to two percent of people in Hawai'i are deaf, hard of hearing or deaf blind. A majority of them use American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate. Using ASL interpreters, they have full access to information and services, including the health care services. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Hawai'i state civil rights law, they have the right to effective communication in medical and health care services.

"We receive a high volume of requests for information and assistance regarding the provision of sign language interpreters and the highest number relate to health care settings," said DCAB Executive Director Francine Wai. "All health care providers in Hawai'i, from hospitals to community clinics and small practitioner doctor offices, are legally obligated to provide auxiliary aids and services, including sign language interpreters, at no cost for patients who are deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind."

HCRC Executive Director Bill Hoshijo added: "Deaf patients have come forward to report that doctors' offices have denied requests for sign language interpreters, citing cost or asking the patient to secure coverage and payment for those services, which does not comply with state or federal law. Unfortunately, many health care providers and patients are not aware of their obligations and rights in this area.

"Deaf, hard of hearing and deaf blind patients are being denied sign language interpreters needed to effectively communicate. As a direct consequence, they cannot communicate their health problems to the health care provider, cannot obtain critical information like diagnoses

and prognoses, and cannot give informed consent. Too often, this results in a denial of services based on disability.”

The agencies have developed educational materials for health care providers and patients to help address the need for public education as well as the consequences of unlawful denial of requests for sign language interpreters.

For more information, visit: <http://health.hawaii.gov/dcab/communication-access/>

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