Testimony Presented Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

March 30, 2006

by
Ann Ito, Director
KŌKUA Program
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HCR 187 – REQUESTING THAT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I STUDY THE COST AND FEASIBILITY OF USING AVATAR TECHNOLOGY TO DEVELOP LAPTOP COMPUTERS FOR INSTANTANEOUS TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION SYSTEMS FOR THE DEAF AND HEARING-IMPAIRED.

Chair Arakaki, Vice Chair Green, and Members of the Committee:

While the University has staunchly supported Deaf and hard of hearing persons in their pursuit of best options for effective communication, the University does not support HCR187/HR 141 and SCR 232/SR69 requesting that the University of Hawai`i study the cost and feasibility of using Avatar technology to develop laptop computers for instantaneous translation and interpretation. The University would defer to the resources and expertise of the cutting edge National Technical Institute for the Deaf within the Rochester Institute of Technology which has established a Center on Access Technology that has been charged with reviewing all technologies including Avatar technology to determine their efficacy for applications such are described in this resolution. According to Dr. John Albertini, Chair of Research and Teacher Education at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Avatar technology is well suited for simple communication such as "please," "thank you," etc. but lacks the sophistication to ensure effective communication given the profound complexities of both English and American Sign Language. Dr. Albertini has invited the University to participate in field study of emerging technologies, applications, etc. and we are eager to so do.