

## Suit seeks Hawaii driver's test in other languages

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Hawaii discriminates against immigrants by only allowing driver's license exams to be taken in English, a federal class-action lawsuit filed today claims.

The class-action lawsuit by Faith Action for Community Equity, or FACE, and two unnamed Hawaii residents wants to force the state Department of Transportation to offer the test in other languages. According to FACE, Hawaii, Kansas, Maine, New Hampshire and South

Dakota are the only states that don't offer a driving test in any language other than English.

That wasn't always the case in Hawaii, a state with a diverse population. In 2001, the state began offering the exam in languages including Tagalog, Japanese, Mandarin, Korean, Vietnamese, Samoan and Tongan. But those tests were no longer offered when new questions were added. It's not clear when those tests stopped, but the group began getting complaints last year.

The transportation department doesn't comment on pending litigation, spokeswoman Caroline Sluyter said. But she said the department has already been working to reinstate the previously offered tests and also add Ilocano, Chuukese, Marshallese, Spanish and Hawaiian. The translations are expected to be completed by the end of the year, she said.

The group has been trying to get the translations in place since the beginning of the year, said Gavin Thornton, deputy director of the Hawaii Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice, but transportation officials have refused to confirm the translations will be provided. Kim Harmon, of FACE, said the lawsuit was filed as a last resort after unsuccessful meetings with the DOT.

According U.S. Census data, nearly 300,000 people in Hawaii out of about 1.2 million spoke a language other than English at home from 2006-08.

"Kentucky offers 22 different translations," Thornton said. "We have close to six times the immigrant population of Kentucky."

The ability to drive is especially important on outer islands where there's limited or no public transportation, Thornton said.

"Some members of the class have felt compelled to drive without a license because they have no other viable means of getting to work and supporting their families," the lawsuit states. The lawsuit describes a plaintiff only identified as John Doe 1 who is a Chuukese citizen of the Federated States of Micronesia living on Maui. "In spite of his efforts to learn English by taking

classes, he has had difficulty with the vocabulary and idioms on the exam, which includes words like 'inadvertently' and 'abreast' and phrases like 'ride up.'" He took and failed the test three times.

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