



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI
A HO'OMĀKA'IKA'I

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Statement of
JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
Director

Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism
before the

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM
and
SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY

Thursday, February 6, 2025
1:10 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 229

In consideration of
SB 1571
RELATING TO TOURISM.

Chairs DeCoite and Aquino, Vice Chairs Wakai and Lee, and members of the Committees.

The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports SB 1571, which exempts all positions within the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) from the state civil service law and amends the eligibility requirements to serve on the Hawai'i Tourism Authority board of directors, in addition to other clarifications and amendments.

With regards to removing the language referring to the two-year waiting period for individuals who have served on the Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau board of directors, DBEDT is in agreement with removing the reference to a specific entity. However, the committees may want to consider changing this to any entity that receives over a certain threshold in funding from the Hawai'i Tourism Authority or percentage of its overall budget. In addition, we may also want to consider a one-year waiting period to be consistent with other ethics rules for state of Hawai'i employees.

DBEDT looks forward to collaborating with the committees and participating in any discussions as it relates to the proposed changes to the governance of the HTA.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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TESTIMONY OF
DANIEL NĀHO'OPI'I
Interim President & CEO
Hawai'i Tourism Authority
before the
**SENATE COMMITTEES ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM
AND
LABOR & TECHNOLOGY**

Thursday, February 6, 2025
1:10 p.m.
State Capitol, Room 229

In consideration of
SB 1571
RELATING TO TOURISM

Aloha Chairs DeCoite and Aquino, Vice Chairs Wakai and Lee, and Members of the Committees,

The Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) respectfully offers comments on SB 1571, which exempts all positions within the Hawai'i Tourism Authority from the state civil service law. It also provides that the powers described in section 201B-3, HRS, shall be granted to the Hawai'i Tourism Authority except as otherwise provided by law. Furthermore, it amends the definition of "convention center facility" for purposes of chapter 201B, HRS, and the eligibility requirements to serve on the Hawaii Tourism Authority board of directors.

Please consider the implications of the proposed changes to the HTA's governance and Hawai'i State Planning Act. We look forward to a more complete discussion with the legislators and interested parties to discuss the issues raised.

1. Adding language exempting all positions within the HTA from state civil service law allows for the hiring of the best-qualified professionals.
2. We should maintain a strong "Hawaiian sense of place" at the Hawai'i Convention Center in alignment with our Strategic Plan's Hawaiian Culture pillar goal of growing the uniqueness and integrity of the Native Hawaiian culture and community through genuine experiences for both visitors and residents.

3. HTA's role as a "policy-making and advisory board" needs clarification. We are already experiencing confusion and difficulties with the recent changes that have blurred some lines between the Authority and the Department. Adding the word "advisory" would create additional confusion and uncertainty. The high importance of industry and community input to HTA's work is vital to the purpose, mission, and impact of the Authority's work. Moving that to an advisory duty should first include greater discussion with all stakeholders. We look forward to having a more complete discussion around the powers/authority between the Authority/Board and the Department before amendments like this are made.
4. Removing the two-year waiting period for individuals who served on the Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau board of directors to join HTA's board diminishes the safeguards against the appearance of impropriety. The committee may consider strengthening the safeguards by broadening the provision to any entity contracted for a significant portion of HTA's budget.
5. The amendment changing the phrasing from "limited by this chapter" to "provided by law" undermines the authority of Chapter 201B, subjecting HTA to HRS 26-35, the administration of boards and commissions, and impacting its operational autonomy.
6. Regarding HRS 226-8, the amendment to remove 'form' and replace it with 'allow the formation of' weakens the objective of the current policy to establish community partnerships to ensure Native Hawaiian cultural integrity.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide our comments.



HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION
AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

RANDY PERREIRA, Executive Director • Tel: 808.543.0011 • Fax: 808.528.0922

The Thirty-Third Legislature, State of Hawaii
The Senate
Committee on Economic Development and Tourism
Committee on Labor and Technology

Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 6, 2025

S.B. 1571 – RELATING TO TOURISM

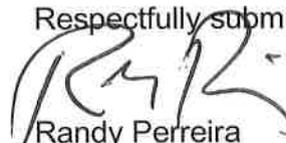
The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO opposes the purpose and intent of S.B. 1571, Section One, which exempts all positions within the Hawai'i Tourism Authority from the state civil service law. **Furthermore, we respectfully request an amendment to delete Section One of this measure.**

Our records indicate that all current members, including clerical employees, within this agency are already exempted from civil service, therefore we question the need for Section One of this bill. Although all current members are already exempted from civil service, the passage of this measure would prohibit the creation and hiring of future civil servants within this agency. The use of exempt employees, which are considered "at will" by the state, is completely contrary to the principles of civil service. Exempt employees do not have the same rights and benefits of civil service employee specifically – they are not afforded the right to grieve/appeal any disciplinary action taken against them. We have consistently opposed the creation of more exempt positions in state government and have advocated for sensible civil service reform.

This measure goes to the larger conversation within our state government's workforce. In recent legislative sessions, we have seen an uptick in measures aiming to exempt employees across various agencies and departments from civil service. According to the Executive Branch Workforce Profile report submitted to this body each year, in 2020 there was 1715 exempt employees within the State Executive Branch under the personnel system administered by DHRD, today there is 2390 exempt employees, which reflects a significant increase in the use of exempt positions. To note, the total number of civil service employees have decreased within that highlighted timeframe. We fear that this trajectory will continue upwards unless our civil service system becomes more flexible and competitive. More and more employees will become "at-will", which will ultimately hurt our state's effort to recruit and retain employees because fair and reasonable job security is one of the core components that make's state employment attractive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition of S.B.1571.

Respectfully submitted,



Randy Perreira
Executive Director

Bill #: SB1571

Organization: Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement

Name: Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu

Job Title: Ambassador

Position: Oppose





**Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement
91-1270 Kinoaiki St., Bldg. 1
Kapolei, HI 96707**

Hawai'i State Senate Committees on
Economic Development and Tourism & Labor and Technology
SB1571 – Relating to Tourism

RE: Strong opposition of SB1571

February 6, 2025

The Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA) writes in **strong opposition of SB1571**. The visitor industry requires. Since its creation, the mission of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) has been to manage tourism in a sustainable manner that balances economic goals, cultural values, preservation of natural resources, community desires, and visitor industry needs. The changes proposed by SB1571 throws HTA out of balance with the necessary checks and balances of governance. This bill proposes concerning changes with the operation, structure, and driving ideology of an authentic and respectful tourism industry.

Section 1 of SB1571 exempts HTA employees from civil service process, an exemption also granted to positions filled by the legislature, employees in the Governor's office, and UH faculty members. No reason is given as to why all positions within HTA is exempt from a process that otherwise applies to all other agencies. Additionally, Section 3 of SB1571 eliminates the two-year prohibition from serving on the HTA board after serving on the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau. This change is also made without a specified reason. These two sections create significant worry for conflicts of interest and abolishing necessary safeguards for critical government processes.

Section 2 of SB1571 changes the convention center definition to reflect a "Hawaii sense of place" rather than a "Hawaiian sense of place." While this section simply replaces one word in the definition, it is the most concerning change suggested by SB1571. It is difficult to succinctly understand how to include all of Hawai'i's diverse communities without decentering Native Hawaiians when in their homeland; this is a complex, nuanced conversation. The suggested change is too simplified and reductive of the issue and requires significantly more discussion to find a way to properly define the intention put forth.

The tourism industry is an enormous component of Hawai'i's economic realities and it is critical for the agency guiding visitor experience can do so properly. For these reasons, we humbly ask that you **OPPOSE SB1571**.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

Madelyn McKeague
Director of Advocacy, CNHA

SB-1571

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 1:06:03 PM

Testimony for EDT on 2/6/2025 1:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael EKM Olderr	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I do not see the need to absolve the HTA of any civil liability. It feels like it invites corruption and advertises that people in the HTA could get away with wrongdoing. Even if it's currently being run by good people, that won't stop those from ill will finding their way in.

Defer this bill!

LATE

SB-1571

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 11:54:44 PM

Testimony for EDT on 2/6/2025 1:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melinda Healani Sonoda-Pale	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Senator Lynn DeCoite, Chair

Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY

Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Chair

Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

Thursday, February 6, 2025, at 1:10 PM

Conference Room 229 & Videoconference, State Capitol

Aloha Senators,

My name is **Healani Sonoda-Pale**, and I am writing in **strong opposition to SB1571**. It is unfortunate, but not surprising, that the State of Hawai‘i continues to prioritize **tourism profits over Native Hawaiians** while actively shutting us out of decision-making.

Whether one supports tourism or not, the reality is that it **profits off Hawaiian lands and waters while exploiting Kānaka Maoli labor, culture, and identity**. Hawai‘i’s tourism industry has been built on the displacement of Native Hawaiians, the desecration of sacred sites, and the extraction of resources that should be preserved for future generations.

SB1571 **removes worker protections** for Hawai‘i Tourism Authority employees, making them more vulnerable to political influence and corporate interests. At the same time, it **gives more unchecked power to the tourism industry**—the same industry that drives up the cost of living, overcrowds our lands, and takes without giving back.

This bill follows a long history of state-backed exploitation, where **Hawaiians are used as a marketing tool but denied real authority** over the industry that profits from our homeland. It does not ensure Native Hawaiian representation in tourism decisions, nor does it protect our communities from the ongoing harm caused by over-tourism.

Hawai‘i’s people deserve better. **I urge you to reject SB1571 and stop enabling an economy that continues to exploit Kānaka Maoli while silencing our voices.**

**Me ka 'oia'i'o,
Healani Sonoda-Pale**

SB-1571

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 4:54:11 PM

Testimony for EDT on 2/6/2025 1:10:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lynda Camarao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a life long resident of the State of Hawaii I feel that all state buildings should be for ALL the people of Hawaii. Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony.

Individual: Chadlyn Hirata

BILL No:SB1571

In Support and Testimony Letter Regarding SB1571

LATE

February 5, 2025

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Senator Lynn DeCoite, Chair
Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY

Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Chair
Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

Dear Senator Chair DeCoite and Senator Chair Aquino:

My name is Chadlyn Hirata and I support this bill SB1571 and the commitment to the communities providing tourism in the State of Hawaii.

This letter is to provide **support and testimony** for bill SB1571 to support the exemption of all positions within the Hawaii Tourism Authority from the state civil service law.

The Hawaii Tourism Authority has provided much needed support on many levels to empower and increase the culture of the Hawaiian Islands even as isolated as we are on the island of Molokai. We need to work with the HTA to continue to evolve and expand this program throughout the State of Hawaii as we continue to pursue and fortify the support for bill SB1571.

Please pass this bill SB1571 to allow this study and assist our community.

Mahalo nui,
Chadlyn Hirata

In Support and Testimony Letter Regarding SB1571

LATE

February 5, 2025

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Senator Lynn DeCoite, Chair
Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY

Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Chair
Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

Aloha Senator Chair DeCoite and Senator Chair Aquino:

I am a homesteader residing on Molokai, I **support** bill SB1571, to support the exemption of all positions within the Hawaii Tourism Authority from the state civil service law.

To support a few things such as:

- Strengthen Tourism Governance and Oversight
- Prioritize **cultural preservation**, to accurately portray the visitor industry and workforce in Hawaiian cultural practices
- Increase Transparency and Fiscal Responsibility
- An important issue is addressing local concerns about Tourism impact on Molokai

In Conclusion

I support this bill as it will strengthen our local interests, and cultural identity.

Me ke aloha pumehana,

Faith Tupulotu

Individual: Faith Tuipulotu

BILL No:SB1571

In Support and Testimony Letter Regarding SB1571

LATE

February 5, 2025

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Senator Lynn DeCoite, Chair
Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY

Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Chair
Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

Aloha Senator Chair DeCoite and Senator Chair Aquino:

I live on Hawaiian Homestead on Molokai, and volunteer with the beneficiary community, I am in support of bill SB1571, as it promotes many areas of practical functions of responsibility, and adapts many of the concerns we have on Molokai.

The Tourism Governance as the revised structure of HTA of board representation to support a strong emphasis on Hawaiian Cultural practices is very important for one, the economic diversity and workforce development of job creation as it relates to Molokai and its underserved jobs on island.

Local concerns need to be addressed in visitor education, and partnerships with proposed policies in place or need to be created to prevent the divide in the community.

This bill supports many of the concerns we have on Molokai, and to provide events supporting tourism provides for Hawaii's people, not just for visitors. We can strengthen tourism governance by promoting cultural practices, recreating tourism, and workforce development.

I appreciate your time and support.

Mahalo nui, Rosie

SB-1571

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 7:40:17 PM

Testimony for EDT on 2/6/2025 1:10:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joey Chun	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a Kamehameha graduate of 2010, I feel that Hawaii embraces many cultures not just a single one.

SB-1571

Submitted on: 2/6/2025 12:15:27 PM

Testimony for EDT on 2/6/2025 1:10:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Teri Nishimura Orton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support and comment only on the portion of this bill relating too a "hawaii sense of place" change in this bill. I support inclusivity of all cultures in Hawaii, however the values, marketing, messaging and promoting of our islands should to come from the host of the destination which is the native Hawaiian culture.