



COMMENTS ON SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 92 (SCR92)
REQUESTING THE OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS TO ESTABLISH AND PROVIDE
LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENT FORUMS TO EDUCATE AND EMPOWER THE NATIVE
HAWAIIAN COMMUNITY REGARDING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Senate Committee on Hawaiian Affairs
Hawai'i State Capitol

April 1, 2025

1:10 PM

Room 224

Aloha e Chair Richards, Vice Chair San Buenaventura and Members of the Senate Committee on Hawaiian Affairs:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) supports the intent of **SCR92** requesting OHA to establish and provide legislative engagement forums to educate and empower the Native Hawaiian Community regarding the legislative process. We submit the following **COMMENTS**.

OHA is the constitutionally established body responsible for protecting and promoting the rights of Native Hawaiians. Haw. Const. Art. XII § 5. Among its statutory duties, OHA is required to: (1) serve as principal public agency in the state responsible for the performance, development and coordination of programs and activities relating to native Hawaiians and Hawaiians (collectively "Native Hawaiians"); (2) assess the policies and practices of other agencies impacting Native Hawaiians; and (3) conduct advocacy efforts for the betterment of the conditions of Native Hawaiians. See Hawai'i Revised Statutes § 10-3.

OHA continues to effectuate its mandate by engaging Native Hawaiians in various capacities including conducting educational events, meetings, and empowerment events specifically designed to cover the full range of our political interests at the county, state, federal and international levels. For example, OHA has conducted island wide meetings for the purpose of building consensus around various issues impacting Native Hawaiians such as traditional and customary rights, ocean policy, and the cultivation and restoration of abundance across Hawai'i nei. OHA will also engage in non-partisan voter education events, such as the Hawai'i Island mayoral forum that OHA sponsored this past July in collaboration with the Hawai'i Island Native Hawaiian Chamber of Commerce and other partners.

In this way, the forums and educational initiatives requested by SCR92 are not new concepts for OHA; they are long-standing practices that have evolved organically in response to our community. While OHA is happy to provide the requested annual report to the legislature, OHA notes that its work in this area is not limited to a single annual event or report. Rather, it is an integrated, ongoing part of how we respond to beneficiary needs and promote self-determination. During the legislative session and throughout the year, our staff engages in outreach that includes

sharing testimony templates, policy alerts, and educational materials through digital platforms and in-person channels alike. These resources are intentionally designed to lower barriers to civic engagement and make the legislative process more accessible to Native Hawaiians across the pae ‘āina. OHA is also considering how to bring back its highly successfully Aha ‘Opio program.

In summary, OHA’s enabling statutes already provide the authority—and obligation—to advocate for Native Hawaiians in the policymaking process. OHA continuously fulfills this mandate by adapting its outreach to meet community demand, legislative opportunities, and resource capacity. We remain committed to working collaboratively with the Legislature and our communities to ensure that Native Hawaiians are equipped with the tools and knowledge necessary to participate fully and effectively in Hawai‘i’s democratic process. Thus, while OHA appreciates the intent behind SCR92, we believe the goals of the resolution are already being met. **We respectfully request that this measure be amended to simply require that OHA provide an annual report to the legislature concerning its activities.**

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to present this testimony.