
SENATE RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO SHARE INFORMATION
ON THE SAFETY AND PERFORMANCE OF COMMERCIAL TOUR OPERATORS
TO HELP RESIDENTS AND VISITORS MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS.

1 WHEREAS, general aviation and commercial helicopter flights
2 are sometimes used by local residents and businesses for
3 commercial purposes, and are popular activities tourists
4 throughout Hawaii; and
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6 WHEREAS, numerous general aviation and tour operators
7 provide commercial air tour flights throughout the islands,
8 including numerous companies often operating on a single island;
9 and
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11 WHEREAS, not all tour operators employ the same levels of
12 safety precautions and best practices when flying customers, or
13 maintain their helicopters and vehicles with the same degree of
14 care, which have been contributing factors in fatal crashes; and
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16 WHEREAS, pilots at some companies have reported being
17 pressured to continue flying at times and in conditions when
18 they felt it was potentially unsafe or inappropriate to fly; and
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20 WHEREAS, since 2000, there have been over forty helicopter
21 tour crashes and incidents in Hawaii, resulting in approximately
22 fifty fatalities and nearly as many other serious injuries; and
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24 WHEREAS, commercial air tour operators on Kauai recorded
25 the highest number of fatalities with nearly thirty deaths as a
26 result of helicopter crashes; and
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28 WHEREAS, general aviation and commercial helicopter flights
29 over residential areas can create safety hazards, such as the
30 2019 crash of a tour helicopter on a street in Kailua, Oahu that
31 resulted in three deaths, and could have killed dozens more had
32 it struck a busy area; and
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1 WHEREAS, the risk of crashes, fatalities, and injuries to
2 helicopter and tour pilots and customers is significantly
3 increased in the absence of currently available safety
4 mechanisms, devices, and best practices; and
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6 WHEREAS, following the 2019 crash in Kailua, the Chair of
7 the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) stated that
8 "each crash underscores the urgency of improving the safety of
9 charter flights by implementing existing [board] safety
10 recommendations," and called for small aircraft flight safety
11 improvements; and
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13 WHEREAS, NTSB has made repeated recommendations for safety
14 enhancements in the helicopter tour and charter industry,
15 including the use of crash-resistant fuel systems, flotation
16 devices for flights over water, and terrain awareness and
17 warning systems to reduce the risk of controlled flight into
18 terrain; and
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20 WHEREAS, the implementation of safety measures such as
21 crash-resistant fuel tanks can significantly reduce the risk of
22 post-crash fires, a factor that has contributed to fatalities in
23 multiple aviation crashes; and
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25 WHEREAS, helicopters operating in the State frequently fly
26 over the ocean and remote terrain where emergency landings may
27 be required, and the presence of emergency flotation devices are
28 a critical factor in survivability in the event of an unplanned
29 water landing; and
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31 WHEREAS, radar and terrain awareness technology have proven
32 effective in enhancing pilot situational awareness and reducing
33 the likelihood of accidents caused by poor visibility, weather
34 conditions, or pilot disorientation; and
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36 WHEREAS, many companies currently hold minimal insurance
37 policies that may not be sufficient to cover injuries or worse
38 in the event of a crash; and
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40 WHEREAS, ensuring public access to safety-related
41 information regarding the presence or absence of flotation
42 devices, radar technology, and crash-resistant fuel tanks in



1 helicopters used for commercial and general aviation flights, as
2 well as applicable levels of insurance coverage would empower
3 consumers and the public to make better informed decisions
4 regarding their safety and help save lives; and
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6 WHEREAS, increased transparency in the aviation industry
7 would encourage helicopter tour operators and charter companies
8 to adopt best practices in aviation safety, thereby reducing
9 risks to passengers, crew, and the public at large; and
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11 WHEREAS, providing detailed safety information aligns with
12 broader efforts to enhance consumer protections and uphold the
13 State's commitment to safeguarding its residents and visitors
14 from avoidable risks; and
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16 WHEREAS, providing residents and visitors with safety and
17 performance related information will enable them to make
18 informed decisions; now, therefore,
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20 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-third
21 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2025,
22 that the Department of Transportation is requested to share
23 information on the safety and performance of commercial tour
24 operators to help residents and visitors make informed
25 decisions; and
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27 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of
28 Transportation is requested to solicit information no less than
29 annually from commercial air tour operators on whether their
30 helicopters are equipped with, and what percentage of their
31 helicopters are equipped with:
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- 33 (1) Crash resistant fuel systems;
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35 (2) Flotation devices in the event of a water landing;
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37 (3) Terrain awareness and warning systems; and
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39 (4) Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast technology;
40 and
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1 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of
2 Transportation is requested to solicit information from
3 commercial air tour operators on whether their companies are
4 operating with best practices including information regarding:

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6 (1) Minimum pilot hours required to fly commercial
7 passengers; and

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9 (2) The amount of insurance coverage provided to cover
10 personal injury and loss for each customer in the
11 event of harm; and
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13 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of
14 Transportation is requested to identify and share with the
15 public the numbers of legitimate complaints about safety, noise,
16 or operations received by the Department of Transportation or
17 any other appropriate departments or agencies about each
18 commercial air tour operator operating in the State, and any
19 other relevant safety or operational information as may be
20 appropriate; and
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22 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of
23 Transportation is requested to identify and share with the
24 public the numbers of legitimate safety-related incidents
25 experienced by each commercial air tour operator over the
26 preceding twenty-four months; and
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28 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of
29 Transportation is requested to collaborate with the NTSB to
30 identify and develop any other safety criteria that may be
31 appropriate to be shared with the public; and
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33 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of
34 Transportation is requested to establish a system of scoring and
35 transparency for these collected criteria to provide the public
36 with information in a format easy to visualize and understand,
37 that enables a resident or visitor to know whether or not a
38 commercial air tour company has incorporated the particular
39 criteria, and what threshold or amount of criteria that company
40 has incorporated, where appropriate; and
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1 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED in establishing the system of
2 scoring and transparency, that the Department of Transportation
3 is requested to also assign an easy to understand overall score
4 or letter grade for each commercial air tour operator that
5 clearly distinguishes those commercial air tour operators that
6 employ more or higher levels of safety and other relevant
7 criteria than those that do no; and

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9 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of
10 Transportation is requested to identify the very highest scoring
11 commercial air tour operator each year and recognize and
12 categorize that commercial air tour operator as the "Safest
13 Commercial Air Tour Operator" and categorize commercial air tour
14 operators who did not provide a response with safety information
15 as "Safety Unknown"; and

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17 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of
18 Transportation is requested to provide this information to the
19 public in an online place and format that is easy and simple to
20 find and understand, and keep it updated; and

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22 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of
23 Transportation is requested to share this information with the
24 Hawaii Tourism Authority, who is requested to also provide this
25 information to visitors in an online format that is easy and
26 simple to find and understand, and keep it updated; and

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28 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of
29 Transportation is requested to submit an annual report to the
30 Legislature summarizing specific safety-related information for
31 each general aviation and commercial tour operator in the State
32 and post an electronic copy of each report on the Department of
33 Transportation's website; and

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35 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this
36 Resolution be transmitted to the Chairperson of the National
37 Transportation Safety Board, Director of Transportation, and
38 Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Hawaii Tourism
39 Authority.

