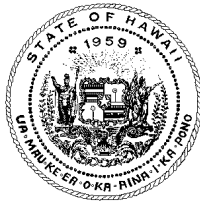


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII
**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
AND REHABILITATION**
*Ka 'Oihana Ho'omalua Kalaima
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No. _____

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 1869, HOUSE DRAFT 1, SENATE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO UNMANNED AIRCRAFT.

By
Tommy Johnson, Director
Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

Senate Committee on Judiciary
Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair

Tuesday, April 2, 2024; 10:05 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 016 & via Videoconference

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Committee:

The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) **supports** House Bill (HB) 1869, House Draft (HD) 1, Senate Draft (SD) 1, which proposes to establish the felony offenses of misuse of unmanned aircraft in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd degrees and offers amendments.

DCR appreciates that we have all become dependent on technology and the benefits it affords us in our daily lives. For example, most of us have cell phones that allow us to maintain uninterrupted contact both in our personal and professional lives; however, in our correctional facilities, these same cell phones are contraband as they create dangerous situations that allow incarcerated individuals to conduct illegal activities, including, but not limited to the drug trade, gang activities, smuggling other forms of contraband, and have been used to facilitate assaults on both, inmates and staff.

Drones increase dangerousness exponentially for correctional facilities as they can provide for the immediate delivery of contraband including weapons in or near proximity to our jails and prisons with little warning or detection. DCR facilities have had multiple instances recently of “drug drops” where individuals late at night leave what appears to be crumpled trash at our fence lines for inmates to retrieve. DCR has been fortunate to intercept these drops and is working with law enforcement to identify the individual, although this can be difficult as they are often unrecognizable on video surveillance due to the darkness. Drones create an added advantage for these individuals, as the person responsible for controlling the drone can do so from a position and distance that makes it difficult to trace. These are some examples of the pitfalls of technology that create an increased risk to the safety, security, and good governance of our institutions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in **support** on HB 1869, HD 1, SD 1.

STEVEN S. ALM
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY
LOIO HO'OPI'I

**DEPARTMENT OF THE PROSECUTING
ATTORNEY**
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CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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THE HONORABLE KARL RHOADS, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Thirty-Second State Legislature
Regular Session of 2024
State of Hawai'i

April 2, 2024

RE: H.B. 1869, H.D. 1, S.D. 1; RELATING TO UNMANNED AIRCRAFT.

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary, the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney of the City and County of Honolulu (“Department”) submits the following testimony in **strong support** of H.B. 1869, H.D. 1, S.D. 1. This bill is part of the Department's 2024 legislative package, and we thank you for hearing it.

The purpose of this bill is to establish specific offenses in state law, to address increasing public safety concerns presented by uncrewed aircraft, also known as “drones.”

As civilian use of drones becomes increasingly popular among the general public, the risk of drones being used to harm people or property—or for other improper purposes¹—is becoming a near-inevitable reality. While the Federal Aviation Administration (“FAA”) ultimately has the power and authority to enforce all Federal Aviation Regulations, including those pertaining to drones, the FAA has stated that “State and local Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) are often in

¹ See “Texas Man Charged with Using Drone to Deliver Contraband to Prison,” United States Attorney’s Office, Northern District of Texas, August 12, 2022. Available online at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndtx/pr/texas-man-charged-using-drone-deliver-contraband-prison#:~:text=Texas%20Man%20Charged%20with%20Using%20Drone%20to%20Deliver%20Contraband%20to%20Prison,-Friday%2C%20August%2012&text=A%20Smithville%20man%20who%20allegedly,Meacham>; last accessed February 1, 2024.

the best position to deter, detect, immediately investigate, and, as appropriate, pursue enforcement actions to stop unauthorized or unsafe UAS [unmanned aircraft systems, i.e. drones] operations.”²

Moreover, while the Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) generally takes the lead in matters of counter terrorism and/or national security—the level at which some people associate “drone attacks”—recent reports have indicated that DHS wants “every community [to have] the ability to detect and mitigate drone activity responsibly in line with the same safeguards that we’re already employing at the federal level...[because DHS] can’t be everywhere. It’s just not possible.”³ Other reports indicate that “DHS gets thousands of requests a year from event organizers who want drone protection, [yet] it grants ‘only a few dozen.’ [And]...the FBI has only three agents dedicated to drone defense.”⁴

Consistent with these types of concerns, H.B. 1869, H.D.1, S.D. 1 would establish a wide variety of drones-involved offenses, some of which would be unique to the proposed chapter, such as arming a drone with a firearm, and some of which are simply heightened levels of existing offenses. For example, causing “substantial bodily injury” (e.g. broken bone, serious concussion, and certain types of internal injuries) to another is typically a class C felony,⁵ but it would be considered a class B felony if done (intentionally or knowingly) using a drone. Because many consumer drones can be controlled from great distances away from the operator—and it is often not possible for law enforcement to locate or identify the person operating a drone—it would make sense for these types of activities to be strongly deterred. Also, drones can inflict a great deal of injury, or transport contraband materials, beyond what most people would be capable of doing themselves.

One new offense was added to the bill after conferring with the Honolulu Fire Department (“HFD”) and Honolulu Police Department (“HPD”); this would make it a class C felony to (intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly) “obstruct[], impair[] or hinder[] the performance of a police officer, deputy sheriff, or fire department personnel acting under color of their official authority.” In recent years, civilian drones have increasingly been seen flying into or near HFD operations, which is a major concern.⁶ Not only does this threaten the safety of

² “Law Enforcement Guidance for Suspected Unauthorized UAS Operations,” U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, 2016. Available online at https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/uas/resources/policy_library/FAA_UAS-PO_LEA_Guidance.pdf; last accessed February 1, 2024.

³ “DHS ‘concerned’ drones being used for ‘malicious purposes,’” ABC News, November 21, 2023. Available online at <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/dhs-concerned-drones-malicious-purposes/story?id=105064562>; last accessed on February 1, 2023. (Website notes: “The authorization expires in February,” meaning unknown.)

⁴ “U.S. tech companies prepare for potential drone attacks as international strikes spark concern,” NBC News, January 14, 2024. Available online at <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/security/flip-side-drone-boom-airports-stadiums-power-plants-need-defending-rcna128248>; last accessed February 1, 2024.

⁵ See HRS §707-711(1)(a), Assault in the second degree; and “substantial bodily injury” defined in HRS §707-700.

⁶ See “Drone interferes with helicopter rescue at Koko Head trail,” Honolulu Star Advertiser, January 14, 2023. Available online at <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2023/01/14/breaking-news/drone-interferes-with-helicopter-rescue-at-koko-head-trail/>; last accessed February 1, 2024. See also “HFD: Civilian drones are delaying care, putting people at risk during rescue operations,” Hawaii News Now, October 4, 2022. Available online at <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2022/10/05/hfd-civilian-drones-are-delaying-care-putting-people-risk-during-rescue-operations/>; last accessed February 1, 2024.

rescue victims and/or lengthen the time it takes for a fire to be extinguished, it also endangers the pilots of HFD's helicopters and anyone on the ground who happens to be traversing below them.

It is also our understanding that HFD's own drone program—which has been used to safely approach hazardous materials, assess brush fires with thermal imaging cameras, and even deliver life jackets to boating accident victims at sea, among other uses—has been hindered more frequently by civilian drones appearing during HFD operations.⁷ Because Hawaii has a lot of remote or mountainous areas, which are extremely hazardous and/or time-consuming for fire department and law enforcement personnel to travel by land, the use of drones by these county agencies has become a crucial tool for a wide range of public safety purposes.⁸

In order to adjust to the increasing availability and use of drones by the public; discourage any intentional or knowing (or reckless) misuse of drones that is detrimental to others; and ensure our state and county prosecutors are equipped to properly charge these types of offenses, if and when they occur, the Department urges this Committee to pass H.B. 1869, H.D. 1, S.D. 1.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.

⁷ See “HFD is expanding its drone program to save more lives. The problem? Crowded skies,” Hawaii NewsNow, August 25, 2022. Available online at <https://www.khon2.com/hawaii-crime/drones-and-canine-units-are-key-tools-in-the-search-for-remains-of-isabella-kalua/?ipid=promo-link-block1>; last accessed February 1, 2024. *See also* “Your drone is interfering with Hawaii emergencies,” KHON2, July 21, 2022. Available online at <https://www.khon2.com/local-news/hawaii-civilian-drones-are-in-the-way-of-emergencies/>; last accessed February 1, 2024.

⁸ *See* “Drones and canine units are key tools in the search for remains of Isabella Kalua,” KHON2, November 11, 2021. Available online at <https://www.khon2.com/hawaii-crime/drones-and-canine-units-are-key-tools-in-the-search-for-remains-of-isabella-kalua/?ipid=promo-link-block1>; last accessed February 1, 2024.



**Hawaiian
Electric**

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
JUDICIARY**

**HB 1869, HD1, SD1
RELATING TO UNMANNED AIRCRAFT**

Tuesday, April 2, 2024
10:05 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 016

Cullen Chong
UAS Program Manager
Hawaiian Electric

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Cullen Chong, and I am submitting written testimony on behalf of Hawaiian Electric offering comments and suggesting amendments to HB 1869, HD1, SD1, Relating to Unmanned Aircraft.

First, we propose adding Public Utility, as defined in Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), section 269-1, to the list of those persons and entities exempt in HRS 711-B(3), 711-C(3), and 711-D(3) of the bill. This exemption would mitigate the risk of Hawaiian Electric's employees and contractors being prosecuted as felons for performing normal unmanned aircraft system (UAS) operations in the ordinary course of business.

Second, we have concerns regarding language on page 6, line 3. Specifically, we believe the terms "intentionally" and "knowingly" are overly broad and its application might lead to unintended consequences and be left to prosecutorial discretion. In theory, any commercial unmanned aerial vehicle ("UAV") operator whose UAV becomes inoperable in flight - - for reasons other than operator's negligence or reckless activity - - might result in damaged property. For example, an otherwise prudent UAV pilot could

have his or her UAV be struck by another piloted UAV, or a bird, or face rapid battery loss, or its flight guidance commands might be temporarily blocked by interference. In these instances, the UAV pilot's initial command and control of the UAV was both "intentional" and "knowing," but the events that followed which led to property damage were certainly not intended, and certainly not reckless. To address this issue, we are requesting the damage dollar amount be increased from \$750 to a higher level, which would align more with a third-degree felony. For example, many accidents with bicycles, mopeds, scooters, opening car doors in a parking lot result in more than \$750 damage.

Additionally, we request the below amendment on page 6, lines 14-16: (d) Operates an unmanned aircraft and thereby damages the property of another by an unmanned aircraft, without the other's consent, in an amount exceeding \$____. This amendment would make it a felony if the operator intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly damages the property of another in an amount exceeding a certain dollar amount. Given prosecutorial discretion, the state would have to show the UAV operator had the requisite intent to cause property damage, and not just the intent to initiate unmanned aerial activities that unexpectedly led to property damage.

Lastly, we recommend amending language on page 7, lines 1-2 to read the following: (c) Operates an unmanned aircraft and thereby causes bodily injury to another person by an unmanned aircraft; This amendment would clarify that a felony would only be committed if the UAV operator intentionally, knowingly or recklessly injures another person with an unmanned aircraft.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on and provide amendments to HB 1869, HD1, SD1.

HB-1869-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/27/2024 6:42:23 PM

Testimony for JDC on 4/2/2024 10:05:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael I Rice	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As currently worded I stand in opposition to the bill. I am mostly against making illegal the arming of drones with firearms and/or electric guns (tasers).

I'm mostly concerned regarding arming drones with both firearms and electric guns as it would put a hamper on invention and development. If I wanted to help develop a drone armed with a taser for police use I'm now prevented from doing so because of this, admittedly well intentioned, law. Even drones armed with firearms have their legal uses, again using the police as an example, less-than-lethal beanbag guns are legally firearms and making a drone equipped as such for police use would be made illegal under this law, and I could see their legal use outside of law enforcement as well, such as HECO using a shotgun armed drone to sever power cables in an emergency or to knock branches away from a power line in a remote area.

This would apply to drones armed with stun, smoke, or gas grenades, as these same drones can be armed with fragmentation grenades. And there is precedent for Police Departments using ROVs in such a way. In 2016 Dallas Police used an explosive device that they attached to one of their bomb disposal robots to kill a heavily armed suspect firing from a barricaded position of cover that likely would have resulted in several officers being killed or wounded if they used normal tactics.

This would also prevent such drones from being showcased or demonstrated to local police departments here in Hawaii under current wording of the bill as well as prevent non-police officers from training the various law enforcement agencies in their use. This would require officers to travel to the mainland to receive training in their use and take custody of the drones.