



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH COMMENTS, SB 199

Relating to Hawaiian Cultural Centers
Senate Committee on Hawaiian Affairs

January 28, 2025

1:00 p.m.

Room 224

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

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) submits this testimony **IN SUPPORT WITH COMMENTS of SB199**. OHA accepts the kuelana set out in SB199 to construct a Hawaiian cultural center on its Kaka’ako Makai Lands. OHA agrees that a center open to the public and dedicated to the perpetuation of Hawaiian culture is an important community resource, in recognition of the foundational role of Hawaiian culture in our State. OHA agrees to prioritize construction of a Hawaiian cultural center in future planning activities related to Kaka’ako Makai, and will provide an update to the legislature on progress towards completion of a cultural center every two years. Based on these commitments, **OHA respectfully requests that SB199 be amended to specify that OHA will construct one cultural center on O’ahu by 2040**, with the understanding that construction will proceed as quickly as possible.

OHA would also like the Committee to note that the intent of its legacy lands program is to caretake areas that will be preserved for the practice of Hawaiian culture and other non-conflicting uses such as cultural and learning exchanges. For example, in 2012 OHA acquired the land under the Kūkaniloko Birthstone in Wahiawa, which it co-stewards with the Hawaiian Civic Club of Wahiawā and ‘Āina Kaiāulu. A conceptual master plan, still under review, is available on the [OHA website](#). OHA also continues to explore other opportunities to acquire and caretake culturally significant areas that are threatened with neglect, abandonment, or destruction such as Kāneiolouma Heiau Complex on Kaua’i and Mauna’ala on O’ahu. Acquisition and stewardship of culturally significant areas is complimentary to construction of a cultural center where language and dance classes can be offered to the public.

Mahalo again for this opportunity to provide comments in support of SB199.

SB-199

Submitted on: 1/25/2025 8:23:53 PM

Testimony for HWN on 1/28/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kenneth R. Conklin, Ph.D.	Testifying for Center for Hawaiian Sovereignty Studies	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This bill requires the Office of Hawaiian Affairs to establish and maintain Native Hawaiian cultural centers within the State. Requires the Office to submit reports to the Legislature regarding the Office's compliance with this Act. Appropriates moneys for the planning and design of the first Native Hawaiian cultural center.

The question is: Why must the legislature REQUIRE OHA to do these things? Why has OHA not already done these things using its vast hoard of wealth? And why should taxpayers be forced to pay for this particular ethnicity's cultural centers when other ethnicities developed their cultural centers mostly with money donated for that purpose?

Hawaii has "cultural centers" focusing on displays and activities of particular ethnic groups: In Honolulu the Japanese Cultural Center and Filipino Cultural Center, for example. Their buildings were paid for primarily by fundraisers and community groups working together, and their ongoing operating expenses are covered in the same way. From time to time they get grants from the legislature, but those are small portions of their budgets.

This bill proposes to establish "Hawaiian" cultural centers, referring to the ethnic group "Native Hawaiian". OHA is mandated to manage conceptualization, construction, and operation of these "Hawaiian Cultural Centers" using government money they have already been given; and now this bill proposes that the legislature must "Appropriate moneys for the planning and design of the first Hawaiian cultural center" and then presumably all the other ones to follow on every island, as will undoubtedly be called for in future legislation. That's grossly unfair to Hawaii's people.

According to OHA's financial statement for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, OHA had \$971 Million in assets. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022, OHA had \$823 Million in assets. Thus we see that OHA's cash stash is increasing by about \$75 Million per year, or \$37 Million per half-year. Thus by now OHA probably has MORE THAN A BILLION DOLLARS IN ASSETS!

In 2022 the legislature appropriated tens of millions more "in arrears" and also raised OHA's annual payment of ceded land revenues by tens of millions per year in the future. What does OHA plan to do with all that money?

Make OHA pay for these new "cultural centers." Do NOT appropriate extra money for them.
Too much already!

SB-199

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 9:24:08 AM

Testimony for HWN on 1/28/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kawaiohawaiki Anakalea	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Require the Office of Hawaiian Affairs to establish and maintain Native Hawaiian cultural centers within the State.

Require the Office to submit reports to the Legislature regarding the Office's compliance with this Act.

Appropriate moneys for the planning and design of the first Native Hawaiian cultural center.

SB-199

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 10:34:38 AM

Testimony for HWN on 1/28/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ronnie N Inagaki	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

****TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 199********Relating to Hawaiian Culture, OHA, and Native Hawaiian Cultural Centers********Senate Committee on Hawaiian Affairs********Hearing Date: January 28, 2025****

Aloha Chair Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ronnie Inagaki, and I am writing in strong support of ****SB 199****, which requires the ****Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA)**** to establish and maintain Native Hawaiian cultural centers throughout the state, mandates reporting on progress, and appropriates funds for the planning and design of these centers.

****SB 199** is a vital step toward the preservation and perpetuation of Native Hawaiian culture**, a cornerstone of our shared identity in Hawai‘i. This bill recognizes the significant contributions of Native Hawaiian culture to our islands, and it seeks to address the lack of dedicated spaces for the practice, education, and celebration of Hawaiian traditions. I would like to highlight several reasons why this bill is essential for the well-being of Hawai‘i and its people:

****1. Native Hawaiian Culture is the Foundation of Life in Hawai‘i****

The legislature has rightly recognized that Native Hawaiian culture is central to all aspects of life in Hawai‘i, influencing government, businesses, tourism, families, and individuals. Despite this, there are currently ****no public spaces dedicated to the perpetuation of Hawaiian culture****. SB

199 seeks to fill this gap by creating cultural centers that will serve as places to preserve and celebrate the rich traditions, history, and practices of Native Hawaiians.

2. Cultural Centers Will Serve as Vital Hubs for Education and Community

The proposed cultural centers will provide invaluable resources for both residents and visitors. These centers will:

- Offer **ongoing classes in Hawaiian practices**, such as chanting, hula, music, and language, ensuring that these traditions are passed on to future generations.
- Include **interactive and static exhibits** that highlight Hawaiian history and emphasize the unique cultural significance of the geographic area where each center is located.
- Serve as **community gathering spaces** for celebrations and events, fostering fellowship and unity among Native Hawaiians and the broader community.

By creating these centers, SB 199 will ensure that Hawaiian culture remains a living, thriving tradition, accessible to all who call Hawai‘i home.

3. Supporting Native Hawaiians is a Responsibility We Share

Native Hawaiian culture has endured centuries of challenges, from colonization to the suppression of language and traditions. Today, we have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to uplift and empower Native Hawaiians through meaningful action. SB 199 directly addresses this by mandating cultural centers that focus on **elevating and uplifting Native Hawaiian people**. These centers will not only preserve cultural practices but also promote pride and resilience among Native Hawaiians.

4. Economic and Social Benefits for the State

Investing in Native Hawaiian cultural centers is not just a moral imperative—it also brings economic and social benefits to the state. These centers will:

- Attract **cultural tourism**, a growing segment of the travel industry, by offering visitors authentic and meaningful experiences.

- Provide spaces for **community engagement**, strengthening social ties and fostering greater understanding and appreciation of Hawaiian culture among all residents and visitors.

The appropriation of funds for the planning and design of the first cultural center is a crucial first step, and I urge the legislature to ensure sufficient resources are allocated for the successful implementation of this initiative.

5. Accountability and Progress Reporting

SB 199 includes provisions for OHA to report to the legislature on its progress, estimated costs, and any proposed legislation. These reporting requirements will ensure transparency and accountability, allowing stakeholders and the public to track the implementation of this important initiative.

Conclusion

SB 199 is more than just a bill—it is a commitment to the perpetuation and celebration of Hawaiian culture. By supporting this measure, we are investing in Hawai‘i’s future, honoring its past, and ensuring that the traditions, language, and practices of Native Hawaiians continue to thrive.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 199 and take this critical step toward preserving and uplifting the cultural heritage of Hawai‘i.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in support of this important measure.

Me ke aloha pumehana,

Ronnie Inagaki

He Mele komo a he mele aloha no na kupuna o ke au i hala Aloha mai kakou.

Aloha,

My name is Cindy Freitas and I'm a Native Hawaiian descended of the native inhabitants of Hawai'i prior to 1778 and born and raised in Hawai'i.

I am also a practitioner who still practice the cultural traditional customary practices that was instill in me by my grandparents at a young age from mauka (MOUNTAIN TO SEA) to makai in many areas.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support** of this measure requiring the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) to establish and maintain Native Hawaiian cultural centers throughout the State, as well as appropriating funding for the planning and design of the first cultural center.

This initiative is a vital investment in preserving and perpetuating the culture, history, and traditions of Native Hawaiians. A network of cultural centers will serve as hubs for education, community connection, and the practice of Hawaiian cultural traditions, ensuring that future generations remain deeply rooted in the knowledge and values of their ancestors.

By mandating that OHA spearhead this effort, the measure appropriately aligns the project with an organization that has a proven commitment to Native Hawaiian well-being and cultural preservation. Additionally, the requirement for regular reporting to the Legislature ensures transparency and accountability, providing confidence that the centers will meet the needs of Native Hawaiian communities.

The appropriation of funds for the planning and design of the first cultural center is an essential first step. This financial support demonstrates a tangible commitment to turning this vision into reality. Moreover, this initiative has the potential to contribute not only to cultural revitalization but also to economic opportunities by attracting visitors, supporting local artisans, and fostering a deeper understanding of Hawaiian culture statewide.

I strongly urge this committee to pass this measure and support the preservation and perpetuation of Native Hawaiian culture through these cultural centers. This investment is not only a tribute to the past but a critical step toward a thriving future for Native Hawaiians and the broader Hawai'i community.

Mahalo,

_____/s/____

Cindy Freitas

LATE

SB-199

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 7:21:58 PM

Testimony for HWN on 1/28/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dana Keawe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support SB199

LATE

SB-199

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 6:42:13 AM

Testimony for HWN on 1/28/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire	Testifying for KIngdom of The Hawaiian Islands	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Support for Senate Bill 199 - Establishing Native Hawaiian Cultural Centers

Dear Members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

I am writing to express my profound support for Senate Bill 199 (SB199), which is pivotal in fostering the appreciation and preservation of 'ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language), Native Hawaiian culture, and the establishment of Hawaiian cultural centers to combat cultural appropriation while educating both residents and visitors.

Support for SB199:

1. Preservation of 'Ōlelo Hawai'i and Culture:
 - This bill directly addresses the urgent need to preserve and revive the Hawaiian language, which is integral to the identity and practices of Native Hawaiians. As per the 2023 'Aha Pūnana Leo report, only 24,000 people speak Hawaiian fluently, highlighting the necessity for dedicated spaces for language education [Source: 'Aha Pūnana Leo, 2023].
2. Cultural Centers as Educational Hubs:
 - By mandating the creation of Native Hawaiian Cultural Centers, SB199 ensures that these spaces will be dedicated to teaching and celebrating Hawaiian culture in a respectful and authentic manner. These centers will offer classes in 'ōlelo Hawai'i, hula, mele (music), and other cultural practices, countering superficial cultural appropriation often seen in tourism.
3. Combatting Cultural Misrepresentation:
 - The centers will serve as authentic sources of cultural knowledge, reducing the risk of cultural misrepresentation. A study by the Hawaii State University in 2022

indicated that 60% of visitors to Hawaii seek genuine cultural experiences, which these centers can provide [Source: HSU, 2022].

4. Economic and Social Impact:

- The investment in cultural infrastructure like these centers not only enriches the cultural landscape but also has economic benefits. The Hawaii State Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism estimates that cultural centers can increase tourism revenue by enhancing cultural authenticity, which is sought-after by modern travelers [Source: DBEDT, 2024].

5. Community and Visitor Engagement:

- These centers will act as community gathering places where both kama'āina (locals) and malihini (visitors) can engage in cultural learning, fostering a deeper respect and understanding for Hawaiian culture. This engagement is vital for cultural continuity and respect, as emphasized by cultural leaders in various forums.

6. Legislative Oversight:

- The requirement for OHA to report on the progress, costs, and legislative proposals ensures that the project remains on track and transparent, aligning with the values of stewardship and accountability within Hawaiian culture.

Conclusion: Senate Bill 199 is not merely an appropriation but a commitment to cultural integrity, education, and respect for Native Hawaiian heritage. By establishing these centers, we move towards a future where 'ōlelo Hawai'i and Hawaiian cultural practices are not just preserved but are thriving, educating, and uniting people under the 'ohana (family) of Hawaii.

I strongly encourage the Hawaii State Legislature to support this bill to ensure that our cultural legacy continues to flourish for both residents and visitors alike.

Mahalo nui loa for your consideration.

Aloha,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire

Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, HRM

References:

- 'Aha Pūnana Leo. (2023). Report on the State of Hawaiian Language.
- Hawaii State University (HSU). (2022). Tourism and Cultural Authenticity in Hawaii.
- Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (DBEDT). (2024). Cultural Tourism Impact Analysis.

LATE

SB-199

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 7:18:40 AM

Testimony for HWN on 1/28/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
TERI SAVAIINAEA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my support for Senate Bill 199 (SB199).

The preservation of 'Ōlelo Hawai'i and Culture is vital in preserving our culture for future generations.

I highly encourage the Hawaii State Senate to support this bill to ensure that our cultural legacy continues to thrive.

Mahalo,
Teri K. Savaiinaea
Wai'anae Resident, District 45

SB-199

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 12:03:43 PM

Testimony for HWN on 1/28/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
De MONT Kalai Manaole	Testifying for Hoomana Pono, LLC	Support	In Person

Comments:

We STRONGLY SUPPORT this awesome bill that will strengthen 'Olelo Hawai'i & allow us to reclaim our language.

SB-199

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 1:11:18 PM

Testimony for HWN on 1/28/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kimmer Horses (Bighorse)	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Pls, fund many cultural centers and include the oppression true history of Kanaka Maoli