

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

P.O. BOX 621
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

DAWN N.S. CHANG
CHAIRPERSON
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KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
DAWN N. S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
FINANCE

Friday, March 28, 2025
3:30 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 308 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of
SENATE BILL 223, SENATE DRAFT 2 HOUSE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO FIRE PREVENTION

Senate Bill 223, Senate Draft 2 House Draft 1 requires the Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) to establish an independent program for preventing, controlling, and extinguishing wildland fires within forest reserves. Authorizes the Administrator of the Division of Forestry and Wildlife (Division) to establish and maintain facilities for fire protection, fire prevention, pest control, and forest and range protection and enhancement activities. Requires the State Fire Council to amend the State Fire Code to require certain owners and occupants of properties in hazardous fire areas to maintain effective firebreaks within thirty feet of the property and to practice other fire prevention activities. Establishes the Community Fuels Reduction Project to be administered by the Department. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. **The Department supports this measure and provides comments.**

Part I of SB223 SD2 HD1 affirms the Division's role in preventing, controlling, and extinguishing wildland fires on Division-managed lands. Before FY25, the Division was funded around \$3.2M per year for its suppression work, but proportionally to the state's population, around \$2 per resident. FY25 increased DOFAW's fire program funding to \$18,850,000, or \$13.5 per resident. By contrast, a full-time wildland fire agency like CALFIRE spends approximately \$4.2B annually or \$105 per resident. Hawai'i's current fire program budget and staffing levels remain low relative to other fire-prone jurisdictions. Hawai'i's climate is predicted to become hotter and drier, and additional funds and staffing will be required for the Division to continue to meet its statutory mandate.

Regarding Part III, HD1 amended HRS Chapter 185 to grant the Department the authority to perform work on lands they do not own or control. For the Department to conduct this work, the Legislature would need to provide significant increases in funding and personnel to perform the job. With such a mandate would come liability that should also be addressed. An alternative solution to the hazardous fuels problem that the Department is currently working on funds the Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization to implement a grant program for communities to reduce fire fuels within their communities. The Division is allocating \$1.5M from its FY25 operational funds of \$7.45M to fund community fuel reduction projects up to \$300K per project. Expanding upon this program would help to protect both communities and forested watersheds. Department staff can work with legislators and legislative staff to provide more details on these issues.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this measure.



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

Date: 03/28/2025

Time: 03:30 PM

Location: 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Finance

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: SB 0223, SD2, HD1 RELATING TO FIRE PREVENTION.

Purpose of Bill: Requires the Department of Land and Natural Resources to establish an independent program relating to the prevention, control, and extinguishment of wildland fires within forest reserves. Authorizes the Administrator of Forestry and Wildlife to establish and maintain facilities for the performance of fire protection, fire prevention, pest control, and forest and range protection and enhancement activities. Allows the State Fire Council to amend the State Fire Code to require certain owners and occupants of properties and holders of easements located in hazardous fire areas to maintain effective firebreaks and to practice other fire prevention activities. Establishes the Community Fuels Reduction Project to be administered by the Department of Land and Natural Resources. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) is in support of SB 223, SD 2, HD 1.

The Department appreciates the previous House committees on Public Safety and Water and Land for their amendments in the HD 1 to reduce the burden on the Department.

The Department recognizes the importance of maintaining an effective firebreak by removing and clearing flammable vegetation and combustible growth from areas near buildings, structures, and other premises. However, pursuant to Section 302A-1316, Hawaii Revised Statutes, individual schools can no longer use any school funds to maintain any geographically disadvantageous land on or adjacent to its property. The Department appreciates the Department of Land and Natural Resources to establish a community fuels reduction project which would help to reduce hazardous wildfire fuels on state lands including around schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

**HONOLULU FIRE DEPARTMENT
KA 'OIHANA KINAI AHI O HONOLULU
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

636 SOUTH STREET • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
PHONE: (808) 723-7139 • FAX: (808) 723-7111 • WEBSITE: honolulu.gov

RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR
MEIA



SHELDON K. HAO
FIRE CHIEF
LUNA NUI KINAI AHI

JASON SAMALA
DEPUTY FIRE CHIEF
HOPE LUNA NUI KINAI AHI

March 28, 2025

The Honorable Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Committee on Finance
House of Representatives
State Capitol, Room 306
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Yamashita:

Subject: Senate Bill (SB) 223, Senate Draft (SD) 2, House Draft (HD) 1 Relating to Fire Prevention

I am Sheldon K. Hao, Fire Chief of the Honolulu Fire Department (HFD). The HFD in general supports and offers comments on SB 223, SD 2, HD1, which requires the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) to establish an independent program relating to the prevention, control, and extinguishment of wildland fires within forest reserves; authorizes the Administrator of the DLNR's Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) to establish and maintain facilities for the performance of fire protection, fire prevention, pest control, and forest and range protection and enhancement activities; allows the State Fire Council to amend the State Fire Code to require certain owners and occupants of properties and holders of easements located in hazardous fire areas to maintain effective firebreaks and to practice other fire prevention activities; and establishes the Community Fuels Reduction Project to be administered by the DLNR.

Part I of SB 223, SD 2, HD 1 affirms the DOFAW's role in preventing, controlling, and extinguishing wildland fires on DOFAW-managed lands. Prior to fiscal year (FY) 2025, the DOFAW was funded approximately \$3.2 million per year for its suppression work, but proportionally to the state's population, around \$2 per resident. FY2025 increased the DOFAW's fire program funding to \$18,850,000 or \$13.5 per resident. By contrast, a full-time wildland fire agency like the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spends approximately \$4.2 billion annually or \$105 per resident. Hawai'i's current fire program budget and staffing levels remain low relative to other fire-prone jurisdictions. Hawai'i's climate is predicted to become hotter and drier, and additional

The Honorable Kyle Yamashita, Chair
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March 28, 2025

funds and staffing will be required for the DOFAW to continue to meet its statutory mandate.

Regarding Part III, HD 1 amended Chapter 185, Hawaii Revised Statutes, to grant the DLNR the authority to perform work on lands they do not own or control. For the DLNR to conduct this work, the legislature must provide significant increases in funding and personnel to perform the job. With such a mandate, liability should also be addressed. An alternative solution to the hazardous fuels problem the DLNR is currently working on is to provide funding to the Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization to implement a grant program for communities to reduce fire fuels within their communities. The DOFAW is allocating \$1.5 million from its FY 2025 operational funds of \$7.45 million to fund community fuel reduction projects up to \$300,000 per project. Expanding upon this program would help to protect the communities and forested watersheds.

Should you have questions, please contact Administrative Specialist Gary Lum at 723-7169 or glum@honolulu.gov.

Sincerely,

SHELDON K. HAO
Fire Chief

SKH/GL:cn



P.O. Box 37158, Honolulu, Hawai`i 96837-0158
Phone: 927-0709 henry.lifeoftheland@gmail.com

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

DATE: Friday, March 28, 2025

TIME: 3:30 p.m.

PLACE: Conference Room 308

Agenda #2

SB 223, SD2, HD1 FIRE PREVENTION.

Comments

Aloha Chair **Yamashita**, Vice Chair **Takenouchi**, and Members of the Committee

Life of the Land is Hawai`i's own energy, environmental and community action group advocating for the people and `aina for 55 years. Our mission is to preserve and protect the life of the land through sound energy and land use policies and to promote open government through research, education, advocacy and, when necessary, litigation.

Proposed Amendment Re HRS 185-1.5(b): The department shall establish an independent program relating to the prevention, control, and extinguishment of wildland fires within forest reserves. The department may perform fuel reduction on lands not set aside to the department after receiving approval from the landowner or whoever controls the land and subject to existing laws."

The amendment may not be needed under normal conditions but should be included to guard against the possibility that the existing language might be interpreted to give DLNR broad rights to alter property they do not control.

Mahalo, Henry Curtis, Executive Director



Hawai'i Forest Industry Association

7192 Kalaniana'ole Hwy

Suite A-143A, #249

Honolulu, HI 96825

Phone: 808/933/9411

Email: hfia@hawaiiiforest.org

Date: 03/26/25

TO: FIN Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi and FIN Committee Members

FROM: Hawai'i Forest Industry Association (HFIA)

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of SB223 SD2 HD1 Relating to Fire Prevention

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi Committee Members,

On behalf of the Directors of the Hawai'i Forest Industry Association (HFIA), this testimony is in support of SB223 SD2 HD1 Relating to Fire Prevention. The Hawai'i Forest Industry Association (HFIA) supports the establishment of an independent program relating to the prevention, control, and extinguishment of wildland fires within forest reserves.

Proactive measures such as pest control, vegetation management and maintaining firebreaks helps to protect our forested land and forest resources, and in turn neighboring agricultural and ranch lands, protects the economies and livelihoods tied to our forested lands and natural areas. Protecting these lands and resources against future wildfires and being better prepared to respond when fires do occur, is a responsibility we have to current and future generations who will rely on these lands and resources. The HFIA supports establishing a program related to fire prevention (and all it entails), and allowing the State Fire Council to amend the State Fire Code.

We hope that you will support SB223 SD2 HD1.

Mahalo,

Guy Cellier, President
Hawai'i Forest Industry Association

HFIA's mission is to promote healthy and productive forests and a sustainable forest industry through management, education, planning, information exchange, and advocacy. HFIA has over 130 members including woodworkers, landowners, sawyers, foundations, foresters, growers, educators, environmentalists, architects, millers, ranchers, and others interested in HFIA's mission and goals.

HFIA Board of Directors

Officers: President Guy Cellier, Vice President Irene Sprecher, Secretary Taylor Coons, Treasurer Wade Lee
Directors: Jeremy Campbell, Doug Gordon, Nicholas Koch, Michael Sowards, Aileen Yeh



March 28, 2025

Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance (FIN)

Comments and Concerns Regarding SB 223, SD2, HD1 RELATING TO FIRE PREVENTION (Requires the Department of Land and Natural Resources to establish an independent program relating to the prevention, control, and extinguishment of wildland fires within forest reserves. Authorizes the Administrator of Forestry and Wildlife to establish and maintain facilities for the performance of fire protection, fire prevention, pest control, and forest and range protection and enhancement activities. Allows the State Fire Council to amend the State Fire Code to require certain owners and occupants of properties and holders of easements located in hazardous fire areas to maintain effective firebreaks and to practice other fire prevention activities. Establishes the Community Fuels Reduction Project to be administered by the Department of Land and Natural Resources. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. [HD1])

**Friday, March 28, 2025, at 3:30 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 308 & VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

The Land Use Research Foundation of Hawaii (LURF) is a private, non-profit research and trade association whose members include major Hawaii landowners, developers, utility companies and land use professionals. LURF's mission is to research and advocate for reasonable, rational, and equitable land use planning, legislation and regulations that encourage well-planned economic growth, housing, agriculture, and renewable energy, while safeguarding Hawaii's significant natural, historic, and cultural resources, and public health and safety.

LURF appreciates the opportunity to express its **comments and concerns regarding SB 223, SD2, HD1.**

SB 223, SD2, HD1. This measure does not include any purpose clause, however, it requires the DLNR to establish an independent program relating to the prevention, control, and extinguishment of wildland fires within forest reserves; authorizes the Administrator of Forestry and Wildlife to establish and maintain facilities for the

performance of fire protection, fire prevention, pest control, and forest and range protection and enhancement activities; allows the State Fire Council to amend the State Fire Code to require certain owners and occupants of properties and holders of easements located in hazardous fire areas to maintain effective firebreaks and to practice other fire prevention activities; establishes the Community Fuels Reduction Project to be administered by the DLNR; requires reports to the Legislature; and appropriates funds.

LURF's Position. LURF appreciates that the House Committees on Public Safety and Water and Land addressed LURF's recommendations that easement holders should also be parties who could be responsible for maintaining effective firebreaks. LURF remains in **general support** of this measure but has major concerns.

We offer the following **comments and amendments** for your consideration:

1. **More clarification is needed relating to the proposed authorization of DLNR to perform fuel reduction on areas outside of DLNR's current legal jurisdiction (kuleana).** The current version of the bill authorizes the DLNR to perform fuel reduction on lands not set aside to DLNR, however, there is no purpose clause or criteria that would clarify the extent of such authorization, the legal, liability, or cost ramifications of DLNR having authority over lands that are not within its jurisdiction.
2. **DLNR should work in coordination and collaboration with other government agencies and the Public Utilities Commission (Commission) and investigate and determine appropriate wildfire mitigation actions, in pending Commission dockets, cases and future administrative rules.** The current version of the bill appears to allow DLNR to act independently of any other State, county, or federal agency and to ignore any other governmental requirements or permit conditions relating to fire prevention or fuel reduction. If government requirements are inconsistent, such inconsistencies will cause confusion and could add unnecessary costs for property owners.

According to the State Consumer Advocate and the Commission, wildfire mitigation actions have been proposed as part of:

- **the Climate Adaptation Transmission and Distribution Resilience Program by Hawaiian Electric Company's (Hawaiian Electric) in Commission Docket No. 2022-0135;**
- **the Wildfire Mitigation Plans submitted by Hawaiian Electric and Kauai Island Utility Cooperative (KIUC) filed as part of a non-docketed proceeding under Commission Case No. 2023-04661;**
- **the Wildfire Plan submitted by Hawaiian Electric in Commission Docket No. 2025-0156; and**
- **KIUC's Wildfire Mitigation Plan, which will be docketed in the near future by the Commission.**

Also, based on its prior testimony, the Commission also intends to establish **minimum vegetation clearance requirements for electric utilities** in its administrative rules with input from the State Fire Marshal, pursuant to the “Phase 3” Forward-Looking Report by the Fire Safety Research Institute.

LURF believes that the Commission’s administrative process will allow sufficient time to present, review and discuss expert testimony and information, and will provide ample opportunities for input by the DLNR, Commission, DCCA, State Fire Marshall, county fire departments, the public utilities, landowners, elected officials, the public, and other stakeholders.

Coordination and collaboration between DLNR, other government agencies, and the Commission will assure consistent requirements, guidelines and enforcement of fire prevention and mitigation in Hawaii.

LURF and its members are willing to continue to collaborate with all stakeholders regarding these matters.

Based on the above comments and concerns, LURF supports the general intent of SB **223**, **SD2**, **HD1**, but respectfully recommends that your committee consider amending this measure as described above.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of and amendment to this bill.

SB-223-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/25/2025 3:51:03 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/28/2025 3:30:00 PM

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

Comments:

I stand in SUPPORT of this bill, and hope that it includes allowing DLNR to acquire or contract out aircraft or use in fire fighting and fire prevention. In previous years I saw a worthwhile bill be killed for technical reasons because it was titled ‘relating to firefighting helicopters’ when it was amended to include all aircraft. While that bill related to the State Fire Marshal rather than DLNR I think it would be better suited in DLNR’s hands considering what some of these aircraft can do.

One in particular is known as the ‘Fire Boss’, it is basically a single engine, single crew amphibious plane adapted from a crop duster. It is advertised to be able to land on and skim the water’s surface to refill it’s dump tanks (800 gallons compared to HFD’s 80 gallon ‘Bambi Buckets’), these dump tanks can also drop seeds and liquid fertilizers to help burn areas regrow after a fire. These planes could even potentially be used to water inaccessible drought affected areas, as well as disperse chemical treatments over a wide area. This could help with combating invasive insects or dispersing treatments for diseases like Rapid Ohia Death. The only thing I would say about these is that I do not know if they could handle landing in our waters during rough conditions.

SB-223-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/26/2025 2:36:48 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/28/2025 3:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Master Jedi Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire	Ohana Unity Party & Kingdom Of The Hawaiian Islands	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

To: Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Legislature
Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Support for S.B. No. 223 – Strengthening Fire Prevention for Lahaina, Waianae, and the Big Island

Aloha Esteemed Lawmakers,

I write to express my strong support for Senate Bill No. 223, a forward-thinking measure to bolster wildfire prevention across Hawaii through the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), the State Fire Council, and the innovative Community Fuels Reduction Project. As a concerned citizen deeply aware of the devastating toll of wildfires—most notably the 2023 Lahaina fire that claimed 102 lives and \$5.5 billion in damages (Maui County, 2024)—I commend your proactive stance. This bill holds immense promise for communities like Lahaina (Maui), Waianae (Oahu), and the Big Island (Hawaii County), but its success hinges on adequate funding, clear enforcement, and swift implementation. I urge you to pass S.B. No. 223 with targeted enhancements, effective July 1, 2025, to safeguard our ohana and lands.

A Vital Response to a Growing Threat

Hawaii's wildfire crisis is escalating—1,500+ fires burned 17,000 acres in 2023 (Hawaii Wildfire Management Org, 2024), fueled by dry grasses and climate shifts. The DLNR (2023) oversees 1.1 million acres of forest reserves, yet resources lag: the 2023 Lahaina blaze exposed gaps in prevention and response (NIST, 2024). S.B. No. 223 addresses this head-on: Part I empowers DLNR with an independent fire program and facilities (Sections 1, 2); Part II mandates firebreaks in hazardous areas (Section 4); and Part III launches a fuels reduction project near communities (Section 5). These steps could cut fire spread by 20-30% (USFS, 2023), saving lives and billions.

Implications for Key Communities

1. Lahaina (Maui)
 - Context: With 12,702 residents (Census, 2023) and a 90% wildfire risk (Hawaii Wildfire, 2024), Lahaina’s scars from 2023—2,170 acres burned, 2,200 structures lost—demand action. It borders 50,000 acres of state land (DLNR, 2023).
 - Benefit: Section 5’s 30-ft firebreaks near homes could halve future burns (NIST est.), saving 1,000+ structures and 50-75 lives (2023 scale). A DLNR fire station (Section 2(b)(7)) cuts response from 4 hours to 1-2 (est.), while grazing on 10,000 acres (est.) slashes grass fuel by 70% (UH CTAHR, 2023).
 - Need: \$10 million and 15 FTEs for Maui alone (scaled from CAL FIRE), plus mandatory firebreak rules—30% of 5,000 parcels are rentals or absentee-owned (Maui DPP, 2023).
2. Waianae (Oahu)
 - Context: Home to 13,614 (Census, 2023), Waianae’s dry corridor saw 15 fires burn 500 acres in 2023 (Honolulu Fire Dept). It’s near 1,000+ state acres (DLNR, 2023).
 - Benefit: Section 4’s 30-100 ft firebreaks around 4,000 homes (est.) stop 60% of fire spread (USFS, 2022), protecting 5,000+ residents. Grazing on 5,000 acres (est.) curbs 80% of its grass risk (HFD, 2023).
 - Need: \$5 million and 5 FTEs (est.), with enforcement and subsidies—40% of lots are vacant or low-income (median \$55K, Census, 2023), risking 1,600 homes (est.).
3. Big Island (Hawaii County)
 - Context: With 206,315 residents across 4,028 square miles (Census, 2023), 2023 fires hit 10,000 acres (HCFD, 2024) near 800,000+ forest acres (DLNR, 2023).
 - Benefit: Section 5’s fuels reduction on 50,000 acres (est.) shields 20,000 people and \$500M in assets (DBEDT, 2023). Fire stations (Section 2(b)(7)) drop response from 45 to 20 minutes (est.).
 - Need: \$15-\$20 million and 20 FTEs (est.)—800,000 acres dwarf current capacity, leaving 50,000 rural residents exposed without scale.

Strengthening the Bill

S.B. No. 223’s framework is robust, but gaps threaten its impact:

- Funding: Blank appropriations (Sections 3, 6) must be filled—\$30 million total (\$10M Maui, \$5M Oahu, \$15M Big Island) for 2025-2027, with 30 FTEs, mirrors CAL FIRE’s efficacy (\$2B for 33M acres).
- Enforcement: Part II’s “may” (Section 4) should be “shall,” with penalties (e.g., \$500 fines) and subsidies for low-income owners (40% in Waianae).
- Timeline: Parts I and III start July 1, 2025, but the full Act’s July 1, 3000, date (Section 10) needs correction to 2025—delays past June’s fire season risk 5,000+ acres (2023 avg.).

A Call to Action

For Lahaina, this could mean 50-75 fewer deaths and \$2 billion spared (2023 scale); for Waianae, 5,000 safer lives; for the Big Island, 20,000 protected. But without \$30 million, 30 FTEs, and mandatory rules, 20-40% of each area remains kindling (est.). I urge you to:

1. Fund It: Allocate \$30 million (2025-2027), split by region, for staffing and infrastructure.
2. Enforce It: Mandate firebreaks with compliance support, per Section 4.
3. Act Now: Set the full effective date to July 1, 2025, avoiding a 2026 fire season gap.

S.B. No. 223 is Hawaii's chance to turn tragedy into resilience—pass it fortified, and let Lahaina, Waianae, and the Big Island breathe easier. Mahalo for your dedication to our state's safety.

With Profound Aloha and Resolute Support,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire, HRM

Ohana Unity Party, Chairman

www.Ohanaunityparty.com

Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I.