

JAN 17 2025

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO SEARCH AND RESCUE.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. This Act shall be known and cited as the
2 "Hawaii State Search and Rescue Coordinator Act".

3 SECTION 2. The legislature finds that Hawaii's unique
4 geographic conditions, including seven hundred fifty miles of
5 coastline and 3,800,000 acres of undeveloped property, pose
6 significant challenges for search and rescue operations.
7 Current search and rescue operations in Hawaii are fragmented,
8 involving multiple agencies having varying standards and
9 protocols, leading to inefficiencies and safety risks.

10 The legislature further finds that Hawaii is among the
11 states having the highest rates of missing persons,
12 necessitating improved oversight and accountability for search
13 and rescue activities. Recent data highlights a lack of
14 funding, tools, training, and technology for statewide search
15 and rescue operations, contributing to delayed responses and
16 compromised outcomes.



1 The legislature recognizes that the establishment of an
2 office of the state search and rescue coordinator would ensure a
3 centralized authority for search and rescue operations; unified
4 communication and collaboration among all participating federal,
5 state, and county agencies and volunteer organizations; adequate
6 training and resources to improve search and rescue outcomes and
7 reduce costs; oversight of resource allocation and deployment;
8 and enhanced public safety through streamlined processes.

9 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to enhance public
10 safety and improve the coordination, efficiency, and
11 effectiveness of search and rescue operations throughout the
12 State by establishing within the office of the state fire
13 marshal the office of the state search and rescue coordinator.

14 SECTION 3. The Hawaii Revised Statutes is amended by
15 adding a new chapter to be appropriately designated and to read
16 as follows:

17 **"CHAPTER**

18 **SEARCH AND RESCUE**

19 **§ -1 Definitions.** As used in this chapter:

20 "Coordinator" means the state search and rescue
21 coordinator.



1 "Emergency support function 9" means the search and rescue
2 function according to the department of defense and Hawaii
3 emergency management agency.

4 "Office" means the office of the state search and rescue
5 coordinator.

6 "Participating agencies" means federal, state, county, and
7 volunteer organizations focusing on search and rescue
8 operations, as identified by the state search and rescue
9 coordinator.

10 "Search and rescue operations" means any coordinated effort
11 to locate, assist, or recover individuals in distress or danger,
12 including:

13 (1) Missing person searches;

14 (2) Wilderness rescue operations;

15 (3) Urban search and rescue; and

16 (4) Maritime and aeronautical rescue operations.

17 "State search and rescue coordinator" means the individual
18 appointed to oversee statewide search and rescue operations.

19 "Unified command structure" means a framework wherein
20 multiple agencies and organizations involved in search and



1 rescue operations collaborate, sharing authority and
2 decision-making responsibilities.

3 **§ -2 Office of the state search and rescue coordinator;**

4 **established.** (a) There is established within the office of the
5 state fire marshal, pursuant to section 132-16.5, the office of
6 the state search and rescue coordinator. The office shall be
7 headed by a state search and rescue coordinator, who shall be
8 appointed by the state fire marshal, with the approval of the
9 governor, to serve for a term of five years. The appointment of
10 the state search and rescue coordinator shall be made without
11 regard to chapters 76 and 89 and shall not be subject to the
12 advice and consent of the senate. The coordinator may hire
13 staff as necessary.

14 (b) The office shall oversee all statewide search and
15 rescue operations, including coordination among participating
16 agencies.

17 **§ -3 State search and rescue coordinator; powers and**
18 **duties.** The state search and rescue coordinator shall:

- 19 (1) Develop and maintain a statewide search and rescue
20 plan, ensuring compliance with emergency support
21 function 9;



- 1 (2) Serve as the primary point of contact for all
2 statewide search and rescue operations;
- 3 (3) Coordinate search and rescue operations involving
4 participating agencies;
- 5 (4) Oversee the training, certification, and readiness of
6 search and rescue personnel statewide;
- 7 (5) Manage the allocation and deployment of resources for
8 search and rescue operations, including mutual aid
9 requests;
- 10 (6) Establish and implement interagency communication
11 protocols to improve coordination and efficiency
12 during search and rescue operations;
- 13 (7) Administer the search and rescue special fund,
14 pursuant to this chapter, to support operations,
15 training, and public education initiatives;
- 16 (8) Collect and maintain data on search and rescue
17 incidents, outcomes, and expenditures within the State
18 and make the data available to the public as permitted
19 by law;



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- 1 (9) Promote public awareness and education initiatives to
2 reduce the need for search and rescue operations and
3 improve public safety;
- 4 (10) Adopt rules pursuant to chapter 91 and propose updates
5 to statewide search and rescue policies and
6 procedures, subject to approval by the state fire
7 marshal;
- 8 (11) Ensure that all search and rescue operations conducted
9 within the State are executed in accordance with
10 applicable federal, state, and county laws,
11 regulations, rules, and ordinances;
- 12 (12) Submit an annual report to the legislature and
13 governor no later than sixty days prior to the
14 convening of each regular session, including:
- 15 (A) A summary of all search and rescue operations
16 conducted during the reporting year, including:
- 17 (i) The number and types of incidents;
18 (ii) The agencies and organizations involved;
19 (iii) The outcomes of the operations; and
20 (iv) Any challenges encountered;



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(B) An overview of training programs and certification activities, including participation rates and notable achievements;

(C) A detailed accounting of expenditures from the search and rescue special fund, including:

(i) Expenditures allocated to operations, training, equipment, and public education, respectively, and any other expenditures and their purpose;

(ii) Revenue sources and amounts received;

(iii) The remaining balance in the special fund; and

(iv) Any recommendations for changes to the special fund's structure or usage;

(D) Recommendations for legislative or policy changes to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of search and rescue operations; and

(E) Any additional information deemed relevant by the coordinator;

(13) Partner with applicable national organizations and federal agencies to establish and oversee uniform



1 mandatory training and certification programs for all
2 search and rescue personnel in the State, including:

3 (A) Wilderness and urban search and rescue
4 techniques;

5 (B) Water-based rescue and recovery operations;

6 (C) Use of technology in search and rescue
7 operations, including:

8 (i) Cell phone forensics;

9 (ii) Drone operations; and

10 (iii) Geographic information systems;

11 (D) Mass casualty and disaster response protocols;

12 (E) Search and rescue coordination under the incident
13 command system; and

14 (F) Federal compliance standards for search and
15 rescue operations;

16 (14) Conduct regular statewide training exercises to ensure
17 operational readiness and interagency coordination;
18 and

19 (15) Periodically review and update training programs to
20 reflect advancements in search and rescue technology
21 and methodologies.



1 § -3 **Participation in training programs.** (a) Pursuant
2 to this chapter, all participating agencies shall ensure their
3 designated personnel complete mandatory training and maintain
4 active certifications.

5 (b) Volunteer teams involved in search and rescue
6 operations may participate in training programs offered by the
7 office.

8 § -4 **Participating agencies.** (a) Under the direction
9 of the coordinator, the following agencies shall participate in
10 search and rescue operations pursuant to this chapter:

- 11 (1) The department of defense, including the Hawaii
12 emergency management agency;
- 13 (2) The department of land and natural resources;
- 14 (3) The department of the attorney general, including the
15 missing child center;
- 16 (4) The department of law enforcement;
- 17 (5) The fire department of each county;
- 18 (6) The police department of each county; and
- 19 (7) The emergency services department of each county;
- 20 in coordination with:
- 21 (A) The United States Coast Guard;



(B) Civil Air Patrol;

(C) The Federal Emergency Management Agency; and

(D) Volunteer search and rescue teams.

(b) Participating agencies shall:

(1) Designate a liaison officer to serve as the primary point of contact with the coordinator;

(2) Provide regular updates on search and rescue operations, related activities, resources, and capabilities;

(3) Participate in statewide search and rescue training and planning initiatives; and

(4) Comply with policies and protocols established by the coordinator.

(c) Volunteer teams shall be encouraged to participate in training and planning initiatives and operate under the coordinator's direction.

§ -5 Search and rescue special fund. (a) There is established a search and rescue special fund within the treasury of the State into which shall be deposited:

(1) All appropriations made by the legislature to the fund;



(2) Federal grants designated for search and rescue operations and related activities;

(3) Private donations and charitable contributions; and

(4) Any other sources of revenue permitted by law.

(b) Expenditures from the search and rescue special fund shall be administered and approved by the state search and rescue coordinator pursuant to applicable state law for:

(1) Operational and administrative expenses of the office;

(2) Procurement of tools, equipment, and technology necessary for search and rescue operations and related activities;

(3) Development and implementation of training and certification programs;

(4) Support for interagency coordination and communication systems; and

(5) Public outreach and education efforts aimed at reducing the need for search and rescue operations.

(c) The state search and rescue coordinator shall maintain transparent financial records of all special fund expenditures to be included in the annual report to the legislature and governor."



SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the establishment of the office of the state search and rescue coordinator pursuant to this Act.

The sums appropriated shall be expended by the office of the state fire marshal for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 5. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 to be deposited into the search and rescue special fund.

SECTION 6. There is appropriated out of the search and rescue special fund the sum of \$ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 for expenses of the office of the state search and rescue coordinator, pursuant to this Act.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the office of the state search and rescue coordinator for the purposes of this Act.



1 SECTION 7. If any provision of this Act, or the
2 application thereof to any person or circumstance, is held
3 invalid, the invalidity does not affect other provisions or
4 applications of the Act that can be given effect without the
5 invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions
6 of this Act are severable.

7 SECTION 8. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2025;
8 provided that the state search and rescue coordinator pursuant
9 to section 2 shall be appointed no later than January 1, 2026.

10
INTRODUCED BY: 



S.B. NO. 1177

Report Title:

State Search and Rescue Coordinator; Search and Rescue; State Fire Marshal; New Position; Search and Rescue Special Fund; Appropriations

Description:

Establishes within the Office of the State Fire Marshal the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator. Provides for the authority and duties of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator. Establishes the search and rescue special fund. Appropriates moneys.

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