



**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS
560 N. NIMITZ HWY., SUITE 200
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817**

**REPORT TO THE 2026 LEGISLATURE
Pursuant to Senate Resolution 75, S.D. 1 (2025)**

I. BACKGROUND

Senate Resolution 75, S.D. 1 (2025) ("SR 75") requests that the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) establish and provide legislative engagement forums to educate and empower the Native Hawaiian community regarding the legislative process. SR 75 affirms that informed and meaningful civic participation requires access to accurate information about the legislative and electoral processes and how citizens can engage directly with elected officials and candidates about issues of concern.

Similarly, OHA's constitutional mandate and statutory duties includes advocacy, with the goal of bettering the conditions of Native Hawaiians. See e.g., Hawai'i Revised Statutes § 10-3; Haw. Const. Art. XII, § 5. Thus, consistent with OHA's fiduciary duties, its ten-year strategic plan *Mana I Maui Ola*, and bi-annual budgets set by the Board of Trustees, OHA staff routinely engage beneficiaries in legislative advocacy.

OHA's efforts to support beneficiary engagement in the legislative process include but are not limited to posting relevant information on OHA's website (www.oha.org/advocacy), creating and hosting legislative how-to videos, distributing OHA action alerts during legislative session, and hosting in-person and online forums about the legislative process. Educational materials and articles about legislation and legislative advocacy are also shared on social media and through OHA's award-winning newspaper, *Ka Wai Ola*.

II. PROGRAM METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

During calendar year 2025, OHA's Public Policy staff implemented a series of legislative education and engagement activities. These activities were designed to increase legislative literacy, strengthen community advocacy capacity, and expand opportunities for Native Hawaiian participation in state decision-making.

Legislative engagement activities included a combination of in-person workshops, community-based forums, and virtual learning opportunities. Each engagement focused on practical "how-to" guidance, including understanding the legislative calendar, tracking bills, submitting testimony, and engaging legislators on issues of importance. Workshop format emphasized hands-on, interactive participation, such as guided navigation of

legislative and OHA websites, rather than presentation-only delivery. Outreach and participation were supported through the development and dissemination of informational flyers and digital announcements. These materials were distributed through OHA email lists, partner organization networks, neighborhood boards, educational institutions, and social media platforms.

To support assessment and continuous improvement, OHA collected attendance information and administered post-event surveys following select engagements. Facilitator observations, survey feedback, and cross-divisional discussions were reviewed collectively to inform program adjustments, identify collaboration opportunities, and guide the development of future engagement activities. Legislative engagement activities post 2025 legislative session are detailed in section IV, below.

III. COMMUNITY SURVEY

A. Overview

To more broadly inform its legislative package development, OHA conducted a community survey online and through in-person (hard copy) engagement. The survey opened on August 1, 2025, and closed on October 15, 2025. It included a total of fourteen questions that aimed to gather specific information on demographics, familiarity with and understanding of OHA's strategic plan, preferred methods of engaging in legislative advocacy, and legislative priorities.

The survey received over 600 individual responses from participants. Survey responses showed strong interest in continued engagement with OHA's legislative advocacy. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64.37%) requested email updates, and an additional 16.3% expressed interest in both receiving email updates and actively helping to support specific proposals. Importantly, 57.65% of respondents have already participated in the legislative process, indicating a solid base of experienced advocates already knowledgeable and engaged in the legislative process.

Respondents to OHA's legislative engagement survey were geographically diverse, with the largest share from O'ahu (50.08%), followed by Hawai'i Island (23.19%), Maui (10.76%), and Kaua'i (4.71%). Nearly 10% of respondents reside outside Hawai'i, reinforcing the importance of inclusive advocacy strategies that reach the broader Hawaiian diaspora. Survey results showed engagement skews older, with respondents aged 65+ comprising the largest group (38.15%). However, meaningful participation from middle-aged adults (45–64) and younger cohorts (25–44) indicates the strong potential for intergenerational advocacy strategies, particularly through digital tools and training.

B. Priority Policy Areas

OHA survey respondents identified three legislative priorities, which also align with OHA's strategic plan, Board of Trustee Policies, and historic advocacy efforts:

- **Housing affordability, access, and security** (94% Extremely or Very Important)
- **Land, Water, and Cultural Resource Protection** (93% Extremely or Very Important)
- **Education, including immersion schools, higher education access, and workforce training** (91% Extremely or Very Important)

These results provide strong empirical support for OHA's ongoing legislative advocacy in these areas.

C. Participation Preferences

Survey respondents favored low-barrier digital engagement. Submitting testimony online (64.87%) and receiving email or text alerts (59.33%) were ranked highest for participation preferences. Attending community forums (37.98%) and in-person hearings (27.23%) remain important but secondary, reinforcing the value of hybrid advocacy models.

D. Engagement Tools

Survey respondents indicated preference for the following engagement tools that OHA uses to increase participation in the legislative process:

- Legislative updates from OHA (65.88%)
- Sample testimony templates (50.59%)
- Virtual workshops and training (48.57%)
- Plain-language legislative process guides (43.53%)

Survey results verified that emails and legislative updates that OHA routinely sends during session best help the community engage with the legislative process. Moreover, OHA will continue to host virtual workshops and in-person trainings, and distribute legislative process guides, as it has historically, with the goal to reach first time voters and other under-engaged demographics during calendar year 2026.

IV. 2025 LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Post 2025 legislative session, OHA Advocacy division conducted the following legislative engagement and education activities:

Date	Event	Location	Attendance
July 1, 2025	Hawai‘i Island DHHL Homestead Association Legislative Debrief	OHA Hilo Office	10
Sept 3, 2025	Hawai‘i Island DHHL Homestead Association Meet and Greet with Legislators	OHA Hilo Office	15
October 6-9, 2025	‘Ōpio Aloha ‘Āina Advocacy	Hawaiian Council Convention, Tulalip tribal lands	~35
Oct.29, 2025	Advancing Ea Through Legislative Engagement: Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs OHA Advocacy Workshop	Kona, Hawai‘i Island	~25
November 14, 2025	Ka Waihona o ka Na‘auao Charter School Workshop	Nānākuli, O‘ahu	45
December 11, 2025	Community Empowerment Webinar	Online	120

The events included in the table above were focused exclusively on increasing beneficiary comfort with the state legislative process and encouraging beneficiary participation in state legislative advocacy, consistent with SR 75. OHA regularly hosts a plethora of other in-person forums and island-specific meetings that are outside the scope of this report but covered in OHA’s regular annual report and allow OHA additional opportunities to engage with our beneficiaries on issues of priority concern to specific communities.

Additionally, OHA is currently in the process of hosting community educational events and listening sessions around military lease renewal. The first of these forums was held November 26, 2025, at UH Hilo and the second was held December 17, 2025, at Mā‘ili Community Center on O‘ahu. A third is scheduled for January 14, 2026, at Waimea High School, and at least two others will take place in the Kahuku and Wahiawā communities in early 2026. The constitutional amendment process is covered briefly in this presentation and a hard-copy handout, as well as general information about the role of the legislature with respect to land use decisions. Approximately 80 individuals attended each of these events.

Finally, all positions that OHA takes on legislative proposals during session are approved by the Board of Trustees during publicly noticed Sunshine Law meetings that beneficiaries often view or attend. These publicly noticed meetings and discussions of legislative proposals allow for further beneficiary advocacy and engagement around issues of concern at the State Capitol.

**A. July 1, 2025: Hawai‘i Island Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL)
Homestead Association Debrief Session**

In collaboration with East Hawai‘i homestead association leadership from Ka‘ū, Keaukaha, Panaewa, Ka‘ūmana, Pi‘ihonu, and Pi‘ihonua, OHA convened a meeting to debrief the 2025 legislative session and strategize for the 2026 legislative session. Homestead communities took a leadership role with OHA committing to invite and host Hawai‘i Island legislators at a follow up meeting. Topics of discussion included the importance of in-person advocacy and electoral participation and the need for opportunities to educate state legislators about the State’s fiduciary duties under the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA).

**B. September 3, 2025: Hawai‘i Island DHHL Homestead Association Meet and Greet
With Legislators**

As a follow up to the July 1st meeting, OHA hosted a beneficiary-led meeting with Senator Lorraine Inouye, Senator Tim Richards, and Representative Keohokapu Lee-Loy in early September. While OHA hosted the gathering at its Hilo Office, the meeting was led by the Homestead Association who spoke directly with their legislators about issues of concern. The meeting focused on DHHL governance and leasing, questions concerning Act 279 appropriations and spending by DHHL, and opportunities for stronger alignment between state and county policymakers. Beneficiaries again emphasized the need for legislators to receive training on the State’s fiduciary obligations under the HHCA.

C. October 6 - 9, 2025: OHA ‘Ōpio Advocacy Workshop

OHA lead the Aloha ‘Āina Advocacy session for ‘ōpio at the 2025 Hawaiian Council Native Hawaiian Convention. Middle and high school students from Kamehameha Schools, Hawai‘i middle schools and several Hawai‘i charter schools discussed current topics, practiced their advocacy skills, and created strategy plans. The session prepared the youth to be more involved in advocacy campaigns and to identify issues areas where they could make change in their communities.

**D. October 29, 2025: Advancing Ea Through Legislative Engagement: Association of
Hawaiian Civic Clubs Advocacy Workshop**

OHA delivered a legislative advocacy workshop during the annual convention of the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs (AHCC) which took place this year in Kona on Moku o Keawe. The workshop hosted by Trustee Brickwood Galuteria and OHA’s Chief Advocate provided an overview of the public lands trust, the history of OHA, and guidance on monitoring legislation at the State Capitol. To further engage the community, OHA’s Board of Trustees also conducted a regular board meeting at the Convention during which several of OHA’s 2026 legislative package bills were adopted.

E. November 14, 2025: Ka Waihona o ka Na‘auao Charter School Workshop

OHA conducted a workshop on the legislative process for the faculty and staff of Ka Waihona o ka Na‘auao, a Hawaiian-focused public charter school. The workshop focused on the structure of the Hawai‘i State Legislature, bill introduction and referral processes, committee hearings, and testimony submission. This workshop provided information on how to engage in the legislative session, highlighted key legislators relevant to the area where the school is located, and potential advocacy ideas and discussion topics for (teachers) to include as part of their lesson plans with students.

F. December 11, 2025: OHA Community Empowerment Webinar: Building Pilina through Legislative Engagement

OHA advocacy staff hosted a virtual webinar providing an overview of the legislative process, practical guidance on preparing testimony and tracking bills, and a presentation of OHA’s 2026 legislative package which consists of six proposed bills adopted by the OHA Board of Trustees. Links to important websites and online resources were sent to registered participants via email following the webinar, as well as a survey to inform future such webinar sessions.

CONCLUSION

OHA’s legislative engagement activities designed to educate and empower Native Hawaiian communities regarding the legislative process align closely with the mandate in SR75. OHA will continue to support informed civic participation and legislative engagement as core agency duties consistent with OHA’s constitutional and statutory mandates in the coming years. As OHA reestablishes its highly successfully Aha‘Ōpio program in the coming months, we look forward to future opportunities to amplify the voices of our beneficiaries at the Hawai‘i State Capitol.

Mahalo nui.