STAND. COM. REP. NO. 2528

Honolulu, Hawaii

FEB 2 0 2026

RE: S.B. No. 2938
S.D. 1

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
Regular Session of 2026
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Government Operations, to which was referred S.B. No. 2938 entitled:

"A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO SEARCH AND RESCUE,"

begs leave to report as follows:

The purpose and intent of this measure is to:

(1) Establish the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor;

(2) Provide for the authority and duties of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator;

(3) Designate participating agencies and their duties with regard to state search and rescue operations and training;

(4) Establish the Search and Rescue Special Fund;

(5) Require annual reports to the Legislature from the Coordinator; and

(6) Appropriate funds to establish the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator and for expenses of the Office.

Your Committee received testimony in support of this measure from the Civil Air Patrol, Hawai'i Wing; Oahu Search and Rescue; and Hawai'i SAR Alliance.

Your Committee received comments on this measure from the Department of the Attorney General.

Your Committee finds that the State's unique geographic conditions pose significant challenges for search and rescue (SAR) operations, compounded by the fragmentation of SAR efforts in the State across over a dozen different agencies and jurisdictions. Other states have integrated SAR operations into their state infrastructure, allowing them to perform unified operations and efficiently capture revenue for reinvestment into their respective SAR offices. Your Committee recognizes these states as models for how to improve the State's decentralized and reactive SAR system. This measure will enhance public and environmental safety, as well as the fiscal efficiency and economic resiliency of the State's SAR system, through the establishment of a centralized, proactive SAR Coordinator.

Your Committee acknowledges the concern raised in testimony by the Department of the Attorney General that establishing the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor may be subject to challenge under article V, section 6, of the Hawaii State Constitution, which requires all executive and administrative offices to be placed within one of the principal departments of the executive branch, unless the offices are temporary and established for special purposes. During the hearing, your Committee received testimony from a county rescue official that noted, during search and rescue operations, a primary challenge is quickly securing support from state assets, particularly those within the Department of Defense. Your Committee further notes that, absent an emergency proclamation by the Governor, certain state resources may not be readily available, and therefore, placing the coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) would better position the State to expedite coordination and deployment of available assets when time is critical. Your Committee also finds that, because HI-EMA is housed within the Department of Defense and is often responsible for coordinating access to those resources, HI-EMA is a more appropriate location for the search and rescue coordinator than the Office of the Governor.

Therefore, amendments to this measure are necessary to address this concern.

Accordingly, your Committee has amended this measure by:

(1) Establishing the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency under the Department of Defense, rather than within the Office of the Governor;

(2) Requiring the State Search and Rescue Coordinator to be hired by, and report directly to, the Administrator of Emergency Management, rather than the Governor;

(3) Amending section 1 to reflect its amended purpose;

(4) Inserting an effective date of July 1, 2525, to encourage further discussion; and

(5) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity and consistency.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Government Operations that is attached to this report, your Committee is in accord with the intent and purpose of S.B. No. 2938, as amended herein, and recommends that it pass Second Reading in the form attached hereto as S.B. No. 2938, S.D. 1, and be referred to your Committees on Ways and Means and Judiciary.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the members of the Committee on Government Operations,

Operations,

ANGUS L.K. MCKELVEY, Chair

The Senate
Thirty-Third Legislature
State of Hawai'i

Record of Votes
Committee on Government Operations
GVO

Bill / Resolution No.:*	Committee Referral:	Date:
SB 2938	GVO, WAM/JDC	2/12/2026

☐ The Committee is reconsidering its previous decision on this measure.

If so, then the previous decision was to: _____

The Recommendation is:

☐ Pass, unamended 2312 ☑ Pass, with amendments 2311 ☐ Hold 2310 ☐ Recommit 2313

Members	Aye	Aye (WR)	Nay	Excused
MCKELVEY, Angus L.K. (C)	✓			
GABBARD, Mike (VC)	✓			
HASHIMOTO, Troy N.	✓			
MORIWAKI, Sharon Y.	✓			
AWA, Brenton	✓			
TOTAL	5	—	—	—

Recommendation: ☑ Adopted ☐ Not Adopted

Chair's or Designee's Signature

Distribution: Original — File with Committee Report; Yellow — Committee; Pink — Drafting Agency

*Only one measure per Record of Votes

Revised: 01/02/26