



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 1598, RELATING TO THE HAWAII CLIMATE INSTITUTE.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

DATE: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 **TIME:** 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 309

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Candace J. Park, Deputy Attorney General

Chair Garrett and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

This bill establishes the Hawaii Climate Institute at the University of Hawaii (UH), requires UH to hire support staff, and provides appropriations.

This bill also requires that six percent of the additional revenue cumulatively generated by any increase to the transient accommodations tax rates pursuant to section 237D-2(a)(6) and (c)(4), HRS, beginning on January 1, 2026, and section 237D-2(e) beginning on July 1, 2026; and by assessment of the transient accommodations tax on gross rental proceeds derived from cruise fares pursuant to section 237D-2(a), be allocated to UH annually to support the Hawaii Climate Institute.

This bill implicates article X, section 6, of the Hawai'i Constitution, which gives the Board of Regents of the University of Hawai'i "exclusive jurisdiction over the internal structure, management, and operation of the university." Section 6 further provides: "This section shall not limit the power of the legislature to enact laws of statewide concern. The legislature shall have the exclusive jurisdiction to identify laws of statewide concern." We recommend an amendment that adds a statement identifying this bill as a law of statewide concern.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

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
BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
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RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
FIRST DEPUTY

CIARA W.K. KAHANE
DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

AQUATIC RESOURCES
BOATING AND OCEAN RECREATION
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CONSERVATION AND COASTAL LANDS
CONSERVATION AND RESOURCES
ENFORCEMENT
ENGINEERING
FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
Acting Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
HIGHER EDUCATION

Wednesday, February 4, 2026
2:00 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 309 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of
HOUSE BILL 1598
RELATING TO HAWAII CLIMATE INSTITUTE

House Bill 1598 proposes to establish a Hawaii Climate Institute at the University of Hawaii to support climate resilience and adaptation initiatives of the University and the State. It also transfers the International Pacific Research Center of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa's School of Ocean and Earth Sciences and Technology (SOEST) to the Hawai'i Climate Institute. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this bill.**

The Department has a close working relationship with the University and has used the sea level rise data and coastal erosion modeling from SOEST to help develop the 2017 and 2022 State Sea Level Rise and Adaptation Reports as well as the resulting policies.

The work conducted at the University has largely been funded by federal grants, which can be subject to the influence of changing national priorities. Climate science and sea level rise modeling continue to advance. If the State wishes to continue to base its policies on science, the Department believes that we should invest directly in the development and support of scientific resources.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

JOSH GREEN M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR



GARY S. SUGANUMA
DIRECTOR

KRISTEN M.R. SAKAMOTO
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF TAXATION

Ka 'Oihana 'Auhau
P.O. BOX 259

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TESTIMONY OF
GARY S. SUGANUMA, DIRECTOR OF TAXATION

TESTIMONY ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. No. 1598, Relating to the Hawaii Climate Institute.

BEFORE THE:

House Committee on Higher Education

DATE: Wednesday, February 4, 2026

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: Conference Room 309

Chair Garrett, Vice-Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee:

The Department of Taxation (DOTAX) offers the following comments regarding H.B. 1598 for your consideration.

H.B. 1598 establishes a new Hawai'i Climate Institute at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa with dedicated positions and funding partly from transient accommodations tax (TAT) revenues. The measure has an effective date of July 1, 2026.

Section 2 starting on page 5, line 20, creates a new section 304A-C, Hawaii Revised Statutes, that allocates six percent of the additional revenue cumulatively generated by increases in the TAT rate under sections 237D-2(a)(6), 237D-2(c)(4); and 237D-2(e) and assessment of the TAT on cruise fares.

DOTAX notes that this provision will create administrative difficulties. To determine the precise amount of additional revenue cumulatively generated, DOTAX would need to identify amounts of TAT reported from the increased tax rates and cruise fares, aggregate those amounts, and reconcile the amounts reported with the amounts actually collected. Discrepancies will arise because the amount of tax collected often does not match the amount of tax reported for various reasons, including errors in payment or reporting or intentional underpayment.

Accordingly, DOTAX requests that section 304A-C be amended by specifying a fixed percentage of total TAT revenues instead of basing the allocation on “additional revenue cumulatively generated.”

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



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Charles "Chip" Fletcher, PhD

Dean

School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology

and

Malte Stuecker, PhD

Director, International Pacific Research Center

and

Vassilis Syrmos, PhD

Interim Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 1598 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII CLIMATE INSTITUTE

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology (SOEST) and the International Pacific Research Center (IPRC) strongly support House Bill 1598, which appropriates funding to establish the Hawai'i Climate Institute at the University of Hawai'i to support climate resilience and adaptation initiatives of the State.

The establishment of the Hawai'i Climate Institute at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa represents a critical and forward-looking investment in the State's resilience and economic security. Anchored in the University's demonstrated expertise in climate modeling and the longstanding success of SOEST and IPRC, the Institute would unify scientific, public health, Native Hawaiian knowledge, and public policy disciplines to address the growing challenges posed by climate change. Through collaborative, community-driven research on sea level rise, coastal erosion, flooding, heat, wildfire, and other climate hazards—already integral to Hawai'i's resilience laws and planning frameworks—the Institute will deliver actionable information directly supporting State and county decision-making.

In addition to advancing research and policy, the Hawai'i Climate Institute will catalyze the development of new undergraduate, graduate, and General Education curricula, courses, and degrees focused on climate resilience, clean energy, and adaptation. These offerings will span disciplines—from ocean and earth science, data science, and engineering to public health, social work, Hawaiian knowledge, and agriculture—and will be co-designed with faculty, community partners, and students to ensure relevance to Hawai'i's most pressing climate challenges. By embedding climate content across General Education requirements, creating new climate-focused degree pathways, and expanding experiential and place-based learning opportunities, the Institute will help prepare a diverse, climate-literate workforce ready to serve Hawai'i's communities, agencies, and industries.

House Bill 1598 includes the creation of eight new, tenurable faculty positions that together would anchor the Hawai'i Climate Institute's interdisciplinary mission and its service to the State:

- Four positions at SOEST would strengthen Hawai'i's capacity to generate cutting-edge ocean, atmosphere, and terrestrial climate projections essential for infrastructure, resource, and land use planning. We recommend that at least one of these positions be established at the associate professor or professor level (F4/5M9).
- One position at the Thompson School of Social Work and Public Health would focus on community-engaged, population-based research and policy design to advance health equity and social resilience in the face of climate impacts.
- One position at the John A. Burns School of Medicine would address climate-related health risks and strengthen applied research and training focused on the changing health needs of Hawai'i.
- One position at the Hawai'iinuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge would elevate Hawaiian knowledge systems as core dimensions of climate adaptation, ensuring that Institute initiatives remain connected to Native Hawaiian communities and responsive to their needs.
- One faculty position in the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience to specialize in climate-informed agriculture and natural resource management, integrating applied research, extension, and workforce development to support resilient local food systems and rural communities.

The allocation of general and Green Fee funds to establish the Institute is a fiscally responsible investment that will generate significant long-term savings for the State. Proactive investment in climate research now will substantially reduce future costs associated with infrastructure damage, emergency response, and economic disruption, which are far more expensive when undertaken reactively.¹ By leveraging an interdisciplinary and data-driven approach, the Institute will develop robust climate projections and adaptation strategies to strengthen infrastructure planning, resource management, and sustainable development statewide. Moreover, this initiative will enhance Hawai'i's ability to attract federal and philanthropic funding, maximizing the return on State investment while advancing national leadership in climate adaptation science. The Hawai'i Climate Institute will thus serve as an essential instrument for ensuring that public policy, land use decisions, and community resilience efforts are informed by the best available science for the long-term benefit of Hawai'i and its people.

While House Bill 1598 presently contemplates one-time appropriations this legislative session and the use of Green Fee revenues, the University respectfully advocates for stable, ongoing annual funding for the Hawai'i Climate Institute and stands ready to provide the Legislature with annual reports and briefings on its activities, expenditures, and outcomes.

In conclusion, passing House Bill 1598 and funding climate research at the University, is a strategic investment in Hawai'i's future. This vital research will help to protect the natural beauty that attracts tourists and generates significant revenue, while also mitigating future costs associated with climate change impacts. This investment is not merely an expenditure, but a

¹ Last month, researchers at the University of Hawai'i published an article estimating that by the end of the century it will cost Kaua'i County alone upwards of \$3 billion for property acquisition, deconstruction, and infrastructural realignment due to sea level rise and coastal erosion. The authors noted that "Half of the total costs through 2100 is for immediate (2025) needs (\$1.7 billion), 94% of which is road infrastructure and the water supply pipes underneath." K-D. Tavares, R.O. Setter, T. Dreizin, A. Clinton, A. Summers, M. Coffman, Just beach, *Climate Risk Management* (2026), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crm.2026.100790>.

crucial step towards ensuring Hawai'i's environmental, economic, and social resilience in the face of an increasingly uncertain future.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



February 3, 2026

House Committee on Higher Education
Hawaii'i State Legislature
Via Electronic Transmission

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 1598, Relating to the Hawaii Climate Institute
Hearing: Wednesday, February 4, 2026, 2:00 PM CR 309 Via Videoconference

To: The Honorable Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and members of the committee,

The Surfrider Foundation, Hawaii'i Region, submits testimony in strong support of HB1598 which appropriates funding to establish the Hawaii'i Climate Institute at the University of Hawaii'i.

Surfrider Foundation is a grassroots activist network dedicated to protecting our oceans, waves, and beaches for all people. Through our Coast and Climate Initiative, we address climate change impacts on Hawaii'i's coasts through stewardship, community-led planning, and advocacy. As an entirely coastal state, Hawaii'i is on the front lines of climate change, with coastal communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems increasingly threatened by sea level rise, erosion, flooding, and extreme weather. Accurate, Hawaii'i-specific climate impact projections are essential to effective adaptation strategies, including managed retreat and infrastructure planning.

The proposed Hawaii'i Climate Institute at University of Hawaii'i at Mānoa is a forward-looking investment in statewide resilience. Building on UH's proven expertise in climate modeling through the School of Ocean and Environmental Science Technology (SOEST) and the International Pacific Research Center, the Institute will deliver actionable research on sea level rise, coastal erosion, flooding, groundwater inundation, heat, and wildfire risk. By integrating climate science, public health, Native Hawaiian knowledge, and policy, the Institute will directly inform state and county decision-making.

Surfrider Hawaii'i regularly relies on SOEST climate data, including the Hawaii'i Sea Level Rise Viewer, to guide our advocacy and stewardship work, particularly in erosion hotspot areas such as the North Shore of O'ahu. Surfrider Foundation serves as a convening leader of the North Shore Coastal Resilience Working Group, a community-driven effort to address chronic coastal erosion on the North Shore, O'ahu. We work closely with SOEST members on the working group, who are actively engaged and play a key role in ongoing discussions to identify strategic, long-term solutions to coastal erosion and beach loss. SLR-XA projections provide the scientific backbone for coastal management and long-term adaptation strategies in coastal erosion hotspot areas such as the North Shore of O'ahu.

Proactive investment in climate research will reduce future public costs from infrastructure damage, emergency response, and disaster recovery. With sea level rise projected to increase by several feet by the end of the century, HB1598 is a timely and necessary step to prepare Hawai'i's communities and future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB1598 on behalf of Surfrider Foundation's three Hawai'i chapters and members statewide.

Hanna Lilley
Hawai'i Regional Manager
Surfrider Foundation



Care for 'Āina Now Coalition

LATE

February 4, 2026

Hawai'i State Legislature
House Committee on Higher Education

Re: Testimony in **Comments** for HB 1598, Relating to the Hawai'i Climate Institute

Aloha Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and esteemed members of the committee,

On behalf of our coalition's leadership committee, we are writing to provide **comments** on HB 1598, relating to the Hawai'i Climate Institute. This bill establishes the Hawai'i Climate Institute within the University of Hawai'i to lead climate resilience and adaptation efforts, funds it with 6% of new Transient Accommodations Tax revenues (including cruise fares), and transfers the International Pacific Research Center from University of Hawai'i at Mānoa to the new institute, along with additional appropriations.

The Care for 'Āina Now Coalition has consistently advocated for state government to close the \$500 million gap in funding needed for natural resource protection and restoration. The legislature's passage of landmark Green Fee legislation was a remarkable accomplishment. We have long supported expenditure of dedicated revenue on key environmental priorities, including environmental stewardship, climate and hazard resilience, and sustainable tourism. These priorities include protecting land and aquatic resources, preserving native species, reducing wildfire and flood risks, strengthening infrastructure, supporting destination management, and improving parks and beaches. CAN strongly supports these priorities and believes investments must remain focused on these core purposes. We are currently in support of the recommendations of the Green Fee Advisory Committee.

The Care for 'Āina Now Coalition is a diverse coalition of more than 65 organizations, businesses, and community leaders from across Hawai'i dedicated to protecting, restoring, and responsibly managing Hawai'i's natural and cultural resources. CAN advocates for dedicated funding to support 'āina stewardship, climate change resilience, and natural disaster mitigation, with a strong focus on ensuring Green Fee revenues are used appropriately, transparently, and in alignment with community and environmental priorities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide comments.

Care for 'Āina Now Coalition Leadership Committee

HB-1598

Submitted on: 2/1/2026 12:41:35 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/4/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brett Kulbis	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Garrett and Committee Members,

My name is Brett Kulbis, I'm a 26yr retired Navy Veteran, who took a solemn oath to defend the Constitution from all enemies foreign and domestic, and that oath didn't expire when I retired. I live in Ewa Beach.

I STRONGLY OPPOSE BILL HB-1598.

The University of Hawai'i system already possesses comprehensive climate research capacity through established partnerships that render a new dedicated institute redundant and wasteful.

- The Pacific Island Climate Adaptation Science Center (PI-CASC) provides federal research infrastructure, interagency coordination, and peer-reviewed climate science specifically focused on Pacific adaptation priorities.
- The Cooperative Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Research (CIMAR) has operated as a NOAA research partnership since 1977, delivering oceanic and atmospheric research with federal funding security and established operational protocols.
- The Hawai'i Natural Energy Institute (HNEI) and the Water Resources Research Center, already provide the interdisciplinary research capacity, federal partnership leverage, and community engagement infrastructure the bill claims to establish.

Rather than creating a new administrative structure, the state should strengthen and coordinate existing centers through consolidation. The bill's requirement to "transfer and integrate" the International Pacific Research Center into a new institute acknowledges this reality but proposes administrative duplication rather than efficiency.

Federal research partners (USGS, NOAA) already have formal agreements with UH; creating a new institutional layer introduces organizational complexity, compliance complications, and transition risk that threatens continuity of these valuable partnerships.

Hawai'i's climate research needs are met by existing infrastructure; HB-1598 creates administrative overhead masquerading as policy innovation.

HB-1598 also represents fiscal irresponsibility during a period of severe state budget constraints and declining revenues. Hawai'i faces \$3 billion in reduced revenue projections, triggering 1.85

percent across-the-board general fund reductions and requiring the Governor to publicly acknowledge that the state must "pause deeper tax breaks" to maintain budget balance.

The state is simultaneously managing the consequences of federal research funding reductions to UH (\$83.4 million already lost), federal climate program eliminations, and persistent deficits in housing, homelessness services, and healthcare infrastructure.

Against this fiscal backdrop, dedicating 6 percent of incremental transient accommodations tax revenue to a research institute—rather than deploying it toward immediate community resilience needs—is budgetarily indefensible. The TAT mechanism itself is fundamentally unstable: Hawaii's tourism sector is contracting with visitor spending down 26 percent from 2019-2020 and continued decline projected through 2026. Total accommodations tax rates now reach 19 percent, among the nation's highest; economic research demonstrates that such rates reduce destination competitiveness, with a 10 percent tax increase reducing tourism demand by 5.4 percent.

Dedicating an undefined percentage of volatile, declining tax revenue creates structural budget uncertainty. When hurricanes, wildfires, or flooding require emergency response, the state will face pressure to reprogram dedicated TAT revenue toward disaster response, as occurred during the 2023 Maui fires.

Committing permanent tax revenue to a research institute while general fund budgets are being cut across core services is fiscally reckless and abandons the state's obligation to balance competing priorities through the legislative appropriations process. The \$6 million appropriation is insufficient for the institute's stated commitments (requiring \$2.7 million for personnel overhead alone), leaving minimal research capacity—making the fiscal commitment both inadequate and wasteful.

I urge the Committee to defer indefinitely HB-1598. The bill addresses no unmet research need, as existing partnerships provide comprehensive climate research capacity with federal infrastructure security and established operational protocols. The bill creates administrative duplication rather than consolidation, introducing organizational complexity and transition risk that threatens continuity of existing federal research partnerships.

The fiscal structure is irresponsible: committing permanent tax revenue to a research institute while the state implements general fund reductions, manages \$83.4 million in UH research funding losses, and faces competing demands for immediate community resilience services contradicts responsible budget prioritization.

HB-1598 is operationally unnecessary and fiscally irresponsible.

Respectfully,

Brett Kulbis

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
Wednesday, February 4th, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.
By
Malte F. Stuecker, PhD

HB 1598 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII CLIMATE INSTITUTE

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and members of the committee:

My name is Malte Stuecker and I am an Associate Professor of Oceanography and Director of the International Pacific Research Center at the University of Hawai'i (UH) at Mānoa. My testimony is submitted as an individual and not as a representative of the University of Hawai'i.

I am in support of House Bill HB 1598, which would establish the Hawai'i Climate Institute at UH Mānoa in the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology (SOEST). The role of the institute is to provide the inter-disciplinary scientific expertise necessary to guide climate adaptation efforts across the State, and to build a climate-literate workforce by integrating these efforts with educational programs across UH, all to the benefit of the State's economy.

The Hawai'i Climate Institute would build on the enduring decades-long success of the International Pacific Research Center, the central hub at UH Mānoa for fundamental research on integrated ocean, atmosphere, and land processes, and expand it to encompass inter-disciplinary research on climate adaptation and resilience. It would deliver applied, community-driven resilience tools that address growing climate hazards (e.g., sea level rise, land and marine heat waves, flooding, wildfire), safeguard critical natural resources (e.g., freshwater supply, rainfall-dependent land ecosystems, heat-sensitive coral reefs), and advance climate-resilient development across Hawai'i's communities.

Specifically, the institute will foster cross-disciplinary collaboration on climate adaptation research across the UH system, provide robust and granular future climate projections for use in planning and policy decisions, advance UH's educational mission by integrating climate resilience and Hawaiian knowledge in curricula and degree programs, support internships/fellowships and field-based learning opportunities, build a climate-literate workforce for all economic sectors in the State, and attract and leverage federal and philanthropic funding, which together will elevate UH's leadership in global climate adaptation efforts.

I support this measure as it will ensure that Green Fee funds can be allocated to conservation efforts and climate resilience initiatives effectively and efficiently. Expert scientific guidance is critical for the success of these future investments and to date there is no institution in the State to fill this important and timely role. The Hawai'i Climate Institute situated in SOEST at UH Mānoa would fill this critical gap and deliver the information and expertise that is essential for the State's resilience in a changing climate.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

LATE

HB-1598

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 6:10:13 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/4/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
arleen velasco	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Climate science is under attack by the United States Federal government. Research must continue on climate change such that society can make the best informed decisions for the planet. UH has already contributed to understanding the impacts of sea level rise and weather pattern changes. Please fund this new institute and keep UH a leader in this field.

LATE

HB-1598

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 12:31:47 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/4/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle R Stefanik	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this Bill. I request and urge everyone to vote NO. The people of Hawaii are struggling to make ends meet. There are talks of "Pausing" or getting rid of the already passed Tax Cuts for tax payors. We should not be funding and creating more expenses related to Climate Control until the cost of living has been decreased dramatically and until the numbers of people moving to Hawaii exceeds the numbers of those leaving Hawaii. Vote NO.