

# DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM

KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI  
A HO'OMĀKA'IKA'I

No. 1 Capitol District Building, 250 South Hotel Street, 5th Floor, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
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Statement of  
**JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA**  
Director

Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism  
before the

**House Committee on Economic Development and Technology**  
and

**House Committee on Tourism**

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

10:00 AM

State Capitol, Conference Room 423

In consideration of

**HB1612**

**RELATING TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.**

Chairs Ilagan and Tam, Vice Chairs Hussey and Templo, and members of the Committee.

The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports HB1612, which establishes a business competitiveness goal for the State to achieve a ranking of being in the top thirty states in the United States for business climate by 2045, with interim goals and requires an annual report.

Act 142 of Session Laws of Hawai'i 2024 (SB2974 CD1) established a Business Revitalization Task Force within DBEDT to identify methods to improve Hawai'i's general economic competitiveness and business climate, including the mitigation of regulatory and tax burdens. The results and recommendations of the task force are listed in the task force report.<sup>1</sup>

The bill includes the sum of \$300,000 from general revenues of the State of Hawaii for fiscal year 2026-2027 to cover the costs of independent research, staffing, travel, and other administrative expenses as outlined in this bill. For "staffing" specified in the bill, we would like to request two full time employees.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

<sup>1</sup> DBEDT (2025). Business Revitalization Task Force Report.  
[https://dbedt.hawaii.gov/economic/files/2025/12/Business-Revitalization-Final-Report-12\\_4.pdf](https://dbedt.hawaii.gov/economic/files/2025/12/Business-Revitalization-Final-Report-12_4.pdf)



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The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports HB1612, which establishes a business competitiveness goal for the State to achieve a ranking of being in the top thirty states in the United States for business climate by 2045, with interim goals and requires an annual report.

HB1612 is a direct and necessary next step following the work of the Business Revitalization Task Force established pursuant to Act 142 (SB2974). That task force was charged with identifying methods to improve Hawai'i's overall economic competitiveness, business climate, and governmental efficiency, including mitigation of regulatory and tax burdens. The Task Force's findings made clear that Hawai'i's economic performance challenges are structural and require a sustained, measurable, and long-term policy framework, not one-time adjustments.

HB1612 implements that recommendation. The measure establishes a formal, measurable statewide goal: improving Hawai'i's national business climate ranking into the top 30 states by 2045, with clear interim benchmarks in 2030, 2035, and 2040. This transforms the Task Force's strategic direction into an operational accountability structure.

Importantly, HB1612 does not focus on a single policy lever. Instead, it recognizes that economic competitiveness is multi-dimensional: spanning workforce, infrastructure, cost of doing business, regulatory efficiency, innovation, education alignment, access to capital, and quality of life. All of which are reflected in the national ranking metric outlined in the bill. These are the same cross-sector drivers identified by the Task Force as influencing Hawai'i's long-term economic vitality.

Hawai'i has already demonstrated the value of setting clear, measurable statewide mandates in other policy areas:

- Act 151 (Food Production) established a goal of doubling local food production, which has helped align agriculture, infrastructure, workforce, and market efforts under a shared target.
- Act 97 (Renewable Portfolio Standard) set long-term clean energy benchmarks that now guide investment, grid planning, and technology deployment.

HB1612 applies that same proven policy model to economic competitiveness. Without measurable benchmarks, economic development efforts remain fragmented. This bill establishes a shared scorecard and requires annual reporting to the Legislature on progress and policy options, ensuring continuous course correction and legislative engagement.

By codifying an economic competitiveness goal:

- The State signals long-term policy stability to investors and employers.
- Agencies gain a unifying framework to align regulatory reform, infrastructure planning, workforce initiatives, and innovation policy.
- The Legislature receives structured, recurring analysis and legislative options rather than episodic proposals.

DBEDT Testimony

HB 1612

February 4, 2026

Page 3 of 3

HB1612 is not about chasing a ranking for its own sake. It is about using a nationally recognized benchmark as a proxy for economic health, job opportunity, wage growth potential, business formation, and long-term affordability for residents.

For these reasons, DBEDT supports HB1612 as the implementation vehicle for the Business Revitalization Task Force's findings and as a necessary step toward a more competitive, resilient, and opportunity-driven Hawai'i economy.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.



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Statement of  
**JENNIFER CHUN**  
Acting Administrator  
Research and Economic Analysis Division  
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism  
before the  
**House Committee on Economic Development and Technology**  
and  
**House Committee on Tourism**  
Wednesday, February 4, 2026  
10:00 AM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 423

In consideration of  
**HB1612**  
**RELATING TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.**

Chairs Ilagan and Tam, Vice Chairs Hussey and Templo, and members of the Committee.

The Research and Economic Analysis Division of the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports HB1612, which establishes a business competitiveness goal for the State to achieve a ranking of being in the top thirty states in the United States for business climate by 2045, with interim goals and requires an annual report.

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**Executive Officers**

**Kit Okimoto**, Okimoto Corp., *Chair*  
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**Jill Tamura**, Tamura Super Market, *Secretary/Treas.*  
**Lauren Zirbel**, HFIA, *President and Executive Director*  
**Paul Kosasa**, ABC Stores, *Advisor*  
**Toby Taniguchi**, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*  
**Joe Carter**, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, Odom, *Advisor*  
**Eddie Asato**, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*  
**Gary Okimoto**, Safeway, *Advisor*  
**Maile Miyashiro**, C&S Wholesale, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Economic Development and Technology, and Committee on Tourism  
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION  
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: February 4, 2026

TIME: 10am

RE: HB1612 Relating to Economic Development

Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

HFIA is in support of this measure. As the measure notes, "Hawaii ranks among the least competitive states for business in national assessments, including CNBC's America's Top States for Business, which ranked Hawaii fiftieth in 2024 and forty-ninth in 2025. Businesses in Hawaii face high regulatory burdens, elevated costs, and slow governmental processes, which collectively hinder economic growth and threaten the long-term prosperity of the State and its residents."

HFIA was pleased to participate in the Business Revitalization Task Force in 2024 and 2025. We support the goal of improving Hawaii's Business Competitive Ranking. We believe that immediate progress in this area can be made especially by reducing the tax burden on businesses and consumers, and reducing the regulatory burden on businesses. We look forward to continuing to engage with the legislature and other stakeholders as we work to help businesses in our state survive and succeed.



[\*\*COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY\*\*](#)

Rep. Greggor Ilagan, Chair

Rep. Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair

[\*\*COMMITTEE ON TOURISM\*\*](#)

Rep. Adrian K. Tam, Chair

Rep. Shirley Ann Templo, Vice Chair

DATE: Wednesday, February 4, 2026

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

Support HB1612

Aloha Chairs Ilagan and Tam, Vice Chairs Hussey and Templo, and committee members,

My name is Antoinette Davis, and it has been my honor to serve as Executive Director of the Activities and Attractions Association of Hawaii (A3H), a not-for-profit 501(c)(6) trade organization, since 1997. A3H supports the establishment of a statewide business competitiveness goal.

Hawaii sits on the bottom or near the bottom year after, as being a good place for small business owners. We need to change. Top 30, by 2045 is not aggressive enough, I would propose top 25, by 2035. Creating this “North Star” that can help in future fights over cumulative regulatory costs, permitting timelines and overall public/private facility improvements that could become reality.

A3H supports and wants to reinforce the inclusion of the visitor industry economy metrics, especially the permitting timelines and compliance costs. The goal should be to shift the thinking of the state government to collaborate with the businesses as oppose to constantly policing them.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and the opportunity to testify.

Toni

Toni Marie Davis  
Executive Director  
Activities & Attractions Association of Hawaii, Inc.  
Statewide 501 (c) (6) not-for-profit Trade Association  
PO Box 598, Makawao, Hawaii 96768  
(808)871-7947



P.O. Box 253, Kunia, Hawai'i 96759  
Phone: (808) 848-2074; Fax: (808) 848-1921  
e-mail [info@hfbf.org](mailto:info@hfbf.org); [www.hfbf.org](http://www.hfbf.org)

February 4, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1612**  
RELATING TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Conference Room 423 & Videoconference  
10:00 AM

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice-Chair Hussey, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawai'i's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate, and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

**The Hawai'i Farm Bureau supports HB 1612**, which establishes a business competitiveness goal for the State to achieve a ranking of being in the top thirty states in the United States for business climate by 2045.

This measure reflects the work and recommendations of the Business Revitalization Task Force and represents an important step toward improving Hawai'i's overall business climate. Agriculture is a business, and Hawai'i's farmers and ranchers are directly affected by the State's regulatory environment, workforce challenges, cost of doing business, and access to capital.

HB 1612 establishes a clear, long-term business competitiveness goal for the State, with interim benchmarks and annual reporting. The rankings provide a useful framework for measuring progress and identifying areas where Hawai'i must improve to remain economically viable. For agriculture, issues such as permitting delays, workforce availability, infrastructure, and regulatory complexity directly impact the ability to start, expand, and sustain farming and ranching operations.

As a member of the Business Revitalization Task Force, HFB appreciates that this bill emphasizes sustained policy development and stakeholder engagement rather than one-time reforms. Agriculture is a long-term investment, and consistent attention to improving the business climate is essential to growing local production, diversifying the economy, and strengthening rural communities.

Improving Hawai'i's business competitiveness benefits all sectors, including agriculture, by helping reduce barriers, attract investment, and create conditions where local businesses can succeed. HB 1612 provides an important framework for accountability and progress toward those goals, and we urge the Committees to support this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.



## Testimony to the House Committee on Economic Development & Technology (ECD)

Representative Greggor Ilagan, Chair

Representative Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair

**Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 10:00AM**

**Conference Room 423 & Videoconference**

### **RE: HB1612 Relating to Economic Development**

Aloha e Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports House Bill 1612 (HB1612), which establishes a business competitiveness goal for the State to achieve a ranking of being in the top thirty states in the United States for business climate by 2045, with interim goals.

HB1612 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Economic Action. This bill unifies the state under a north star goal that will improve Hawaii's economic competitiveness so that business growth is less encumbered and business resilience is strengthened.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii recognizes that the state ranking of #47 Best State to do Business reflects the challenging economic environment our members are faced with. The Chamber, by virtue of its programming across business advocacy, education, and workforce development, is already dedicated to creating impact across the ten board categories of competitiveness listed in the bill language. Further, the Chamber believes that the CNBC ranking is a fair and accurate ranking system that evaluates business competitiveness and supports a statewide initiative to improve the state ranking.

For these reasons we support HB 1612 and respectfully ask for its passage. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is the state's leading business advocacy organization, dedicated to improving Hawaii's economy and securing Hawaii's future for growth and opportunity. Our mission is to foster a vibrant economic climate. As such, we support initiatives and policies that align with the 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii that create opportunities to strengthen overall competitiveness, improve the quantity and skills of available workforce, diversify the economy, and build greater local wealth.



# holomua

COLLABORATIVE

## OUR MISSION

To support and advance public policies that make Hawai'i affordable for all working families.

## OUR VISION

Collaborative, sustainable, and evidence-based public policies that create a diverse and sustainable Hawai'i economy, an abundance of quality job opportunities, and a future where all working families living in Hawai'i can thrive.

## BOARD MEMBERS

Jason Fujimoto  
Meli James, *Board Chair*  
Micah Kāne  
Brandon Kurisu  
Brad Nicolai  
Mike Pietsch  
Sunshine Topping

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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Page 1 of 1

**Committee:**

**House Committee on Economic Development and Technology**

**Bill Number:** **HB 1612, Relating to Economic Development****Hearing Date and Time:** **February 4, 2026 at 10:00am (Room 423)****Re:** **Testimony of Holomua Collaborative- Support**

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Committee Members:

We write in support of House Bill 1612, Relating to Economic Development. This measure establishes a clear business competitiveness goal for Hawai'i: achieving a top thirty national ranking for our business climate by 2045, supported by necessary interim milestones.

Holomua supports initiatives that help keep all local working families in Hawai'i by addressing issues of affordability. For Hawai'i to be affordable for local working families, we need to ensure that our local business community is provided with the opportunities necessary to expand and succeed in an uncertain economy. The struggles that businesses face to thrive in Hawaii are an unfortunate reality that has permeated the public consciousness. *Only 19% of respondents in a recent survey of 3200 local residents agree that "Hawai'i is a good place to do business."* This statement also shows a high percentage of disagreement, with 44 percent *disagreeing* that Hawai'i is a good place to do business. And 9 out of 10 respondents agree that Hawai'i needs to recruit and retain critical workforce members.<sup>1</sup>

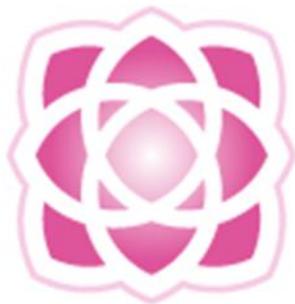
Establishing a formal business competitiveness goal can reverse these trends. In the short term, passing this measure signals to the public that leadership recognizes the status quo is unsustainable. In the long term, this bill will cultivate thriving small businesses and a more resilient economy statewide.

Small local businesses are essential to a strong economy. They diversify income, create jobs, and ensure that wealth stays within our communities while preserving the unique culture of Hawai'i. We respectfully ask for your support of HB 1612.

Sincerely,

Matthew Prellberg  
Policy and Communications Director

<sup>1</sup> 2025 Affordability Survey, Holomua Collective. [www.holomuacollective.org/survey-25](http://www.holomuacollective.org/survey-25).



**HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY AND COMMITTEE ON TOURISM  
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM 423  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2026 AT 10:00 A.M.**

To The Honorable Representative Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
The Honorable Representative Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology

To The Honorable Representative Adrian K. Tam, Chair  
The Honorable Representative Shirley Ann Templo, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee on Tourism

**STRONG SUPPORT FOR HB1612 RELATED TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Maui Chamber of Commerce recognizes the importance of establishing clear, measurable goals to improve the state's business climate. HB1612 is significant to our mission, as it sets a statewide target to rank among the top thirty states for business climate by 2045, with interim benchmarks and annual progress reporting. This approach provides much-needed direction for economic strategy, particularly as Maui and other communities continue to recover from recent economic disruptions.

Improving Hawaii's business climate is essential to our mission. Setting a competitive business climate goal aligns with our support for long-term economic growth and diversification. By focusing on business climate improvements, the state can encourage investment, job creation, and innovation across multiple sectors—including technology, manufacturing, and the creative industries. The bill's reporting requirements also promote transparency and accountability, which are essential for tracking progress and making data-driven policy adjustments over time.

We appreciate that HB1612 recognizes the need for ongoing assessment and resource allocation to achieve its objectives. However, we note that improving business climate rankings typically requires a comprehensive approach, including regulatory reform, infrastructure investment, workforce development, and support for emerging industries. It is important that implementation of this measure avoids placing additional tax burdens or regulatory hurdles on local businesses, as this could counteract the intended benefits and hinder economic recovery, especially for small and struggling enterprises.



Committee on Economic Development & Tourism and Committee on Tourism

February 4, 2026

Page 2.

To maximize the bill's positive impact, we recommend that the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism engage regularly with business stakeholders and chambers of commerce statewide, including those on Maui, to ensure the benchmarks reflect real-world challenges and opportunities. We also encourage ongoing evaluation of policies that affect business costs and competitiveness, with a focus on supporting both established and emerging industries. We look forward to continued collaboration to ensure Hawai'i's economic future is resilient, inclusive, and prosperous.

Sincerely,

Pamela Tumpap  
President

To advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business, advocating for a responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics.



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Statement of  
**Meli James and Brittany Heyd**  
**Cofounders**  
**Mana Up**

HB1612, Relating to Economic Development

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and committee members,

We support HB1612, which establishes a long-term business competitiveness goal for the State of Hawai'i with interim benchmarks and annual reporting.

Mana Up is a statewide initiative that provides entrepreneurs in Hawai'i with the resources and tools to grow their businesses and scale globally. As these entrepreneurs continue to grow, they also contribute to the expansion of our local economy. As part of our mission, we aim to sustain the local economy through economic diversification, local job creation, community giveback, investment, and a regenerative culture of entrepreneurship, providing a better future for generations to come here in Hawai'i.

Improving the State's business climate directly supports local entrepreneurs' ability to grow, hire, and invest in Hawai'i. Low business competitiveness rankings reflect structural challenges that affect all sectors, particularly small and emerging companies striving to enter new markets, hire talent, access capital, and compete globally. A transparent, measurable framework for competitiveness will help policymakers and stakeholders identify barriers, track progress, and collaborate on solutions that benefit Hawai'i's entire economic ecosystem.

Mana Up supports efforts to strengthen Hawai'i's business climate because doing so expands opportunities for homegrown brands to thrive, creates jobs, and grows Hawai'i's economy in ways that honor local culture, place, and values.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the committee to pass HB 1612.

Sincerely,

Meli James | Cofounder, Mana Up  
Brittany Heyd | Cofounder, Mana Up



**TITLE GUARANTY  
HAWAII**

February 4, 2026

**Testimony in support of HB 1612, Relating to Economic Development**

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Committee Members,

We write in support of HB 1612, Relating to Economic Development, which supports local businesses and workers by establishing clear, long-term goals to improve Hawai'i's business climate and by promoting accountability and transparency in how the State measures progress.

Title Guaranty of Hawai'i is the oldest and largest title company in the State, but at our core, we remain a locally rooted, family-owned business. Since 1896, we have been owned and operated by a kama'aina family and have grown alongside Hawai'i's communities. Today, we employ more than 250 local residents statewide, many of whom have built long-term careers with our company.

A predictable, efficient, and competitive business environment is essential for locally owned companies like ours to continue investing in Hawai'i's workforce and communities. Hawai'i's consistently low national business ranking reflects systemic challenges, including high costs and slow, complex government processes, highlights the uncertainty for employers, workers, and consumers alike face in today's economy.

HB 1612 recognizes that improving the business climate requires sustained focus, measurable goals, and coordination across state agencies. By establishing interim benchmarks and requiring annual reporting, this measure creates a framework for long-term planning rather than fragmented or reactive policymaking. Improving Hawai'i's business climate will also help uplift the economic security and overall well-being of local working families by supporting job stability, workforce retention, and long-term investment in our communities.

For these reasons, Title Guaranty Hawai'i urges the Committee to pass HB 1612 and support policies that strengthen Hawai'i's local business ecosystem and economic future.

Sincerely,

Mike B. Pietsch  
President and Chief Operating Officer  
Title Guaranty of Hawai'i



Title and Escrow is our business. Hawaii is our home.



**HB-1612**

Submitted on: 1/31/2026 1:51:57 PM  
Testimony for ECD on 2/4/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacob Wiencek	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee members,

This legislation is ***LONG OVERDUE!*** Hawaii consistently ranks as one of the most **UNCOMPETITIVE** states in the Union and that has very real and negative impacts for working- and middle-class families trying to make it. It also negatively impacts our small- and medium-sized business owners who are the lifeblood of our economy. We must aggressively push to become more economically competitive on a national and global scale. Let's not waste anymore time.

I **STRONGLY URGE** the committee to **SUPPORT** this bill!