



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

**Senate Committees on Economic Development and Tourism
and Agriculture and Environment**

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

3:00 p.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 224 and Videoconference

In Support

House Bill No. 1615, HD2, Relating to the Hawaii Technology Development Corporation

Chairs and DeCoite and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Wakai and Rickards, and Members of the Senate Committees on Economic Development and Tourism, and Agriculture and Environment:

The Office of the Governor **supports** House Bill No. 1615, HD2. This bill declares the State an ocean cluster; establishes the Office of Marine Affairs within the Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation; creates and funds a Marine Affairs Coordinator position; transfers the functions of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Marine Affairs to the Office of Marine Affairs; and appropriates funds for consultant support to advance the marine affairs declaration of intent.

Hawai'i's identity, economy, and long-term resilience are inseparable from the ocean. Our ocean economy spans diverse sectors and is rooted in generations of Native Hawaiian stewardship. This positions Hawai'i as a global leader in sustainable ocean development. The Office of the Governor believes that establishing an Office of Marine Affairs within the Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation would provide the focused leadership needed to better coordinate efforts across agencies and partners, accelerate implementation, and strengthen Hawai'i's competitiveness for federal funding and private investment.

By strengthening coordination and focus, this bill advances economic diversification, supports workforce development, and reinforces responsible ocean stewardship.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



**TESTIMONY WITH COMMENTS ON HB1615 HD2
RELATING TO THE HAWAII TECHNOLOGY
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

Ke Kōmike ‘Aha Kenekoa o ka Ho‘omohala Waiwai a me ka ‘Oihana Ho‘okipa Malihini
(Senate Committee on Economic Development and Tourism)

Ke Kōmike ‘Aha Kenekoa o ka ‘Oihana Mahi‘ai a me ke Ao Kūlohelohe
(Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment)

Ke Kapitala ‘o Hawai‘i
(Hawai‘i State Capitol)

Malaki 25, 2026

3:00pm

Lumi 224

Aloha e Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai and Members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development and Tourism a me Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards and Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) provides **COMMENTS** on **HB1615 HD2**, which declares the State an ocean cluster and establishes the Office of Marine Affairs within the Hawai‘i Technology Development Corporation for administrative purposes only. The measure further establishes a Marine Affairs Coordinator, a Marine Affairs Task Force, names the Chief Executive Officer of OHA, or designee, as a member of the Marine Affairs Task Force and appropriates funding, including for consultant services, to support implementation.

OHA appreciates being expressly named as a statutory member of the Marine Affairs Task Force and, if enacted, willingly accepts this kuleana. OHA has longstanding experience in marine governance, including serving as Co-Trustee of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument and Co-Manager of Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Sanctuary. OHA is also statutorily charged with assessing the policies and practices of other agencies impacting Native Hawaiians and Hawaiians pursuant to HRS §10-3. OHA’s participation in this task force therefore brings both beneficiary advocacy and constitutional public trust expertise to the statewide marine policy discussion.

At the same time, OHA is concerned that as written the bill unduly prioritizes economic development goals over conservation and preservation mandates. While the bill tasks the Office of Marine Affairs with developing a statewide strategy “that prioritizes the sustainable use, conservation, and stewardship of marine resources”, page 5 at lines

17-20, the remainder of the Office's and coordinator's enumerated duties appear to exclusively focus on economic development goals.

Moreover, "Blue economy" is defined in the bill as "industrial and economic activities" that preserve "the health of oceanic and aquatic ecosystems." Page 4 line 20 to page 5 line 2. However, industries included in the definition such as energy, aquaculture, and fisheries do not always preserve the health of oceanic ecosystems. On the contrary, individual projects and industries differ greatly in their impacts on human communities and natural ecosystems, and governing permits and regulations must include specific conditions and restrictions to minimize negative impacts on culture and the environment.

Accordingly, as one step towards ensuring greater balance in this bill, OHA respectfully requests the following amendment to the coordinator's enumerated duties., explicitly embedding a clear framework would ensure that marine coordination strengthens—not supplants—existing conservation safeguards.

To better reflect the balance needed for the development of marine resources, page 11, line 14, would be amended to read:

"...determine financial requirements for the total and optimum development of the State's marine resources based on the goals and needs of the State, consistent with constitutional and statutory mandates related to natural resource protection."

Additionally, as a technical amendment, OHA notes that the language for the OHA representative (page 9 lines 16-17) should be amended to read as follows:

The chairperson of the board of trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, or the chairperson's designee.

HB1615 HD2 presents an opportunity to improve interagency alignment and reduce fragmentation in marine governance. With appropriate guardrails, the measure can support innovation and economic diversification while maintaining Hawai'i's obligations to protect reef ecosystems, cultural practices, and public trust resources for present and future generations.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



NATURAL ENERGY LABORATORY OF HAWAII AUTHORITY



An Authority of the State of Hawaii attached to the Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism

Statement of
Laurence Sombardier, Deputy Director
For Riley M. Saito, Executive Director
Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii Authority
before the

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

3:00 pm

State Capitol, Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

in consideration of

HB 1615, HD2
RELATING TO THE HAWAII TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION.

The Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawai'i Authority (NELHA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on HB1615, HD2 which recognizes the State of Hawai'i as an ocean cluster, establishes the Office of Marine Affairs and a dedicated staff position, and transfers the personnel and functions of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Marine Affairs to the new office.

NELHA is a self-sufficient state agency supporting more than 55 companies and generating an estimated annual economic impact of \$148 million for Hawai'i, according to the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization's analysis for calendar year 2022. Our mission includes advancing ocean research, innovation, and technology development at the 870-acre Hawai'i Ocean Science and Technology (HOST) Park on Hawai'i Island.

A robust and environmentally responsible blue economy is essential to strengthening Hawai'i's economic resilience, protecting natural resources, addressing climate-related challenges, and creating high-quality local jobs. Hawai'i already possesses many of the foundational assets needed to lead globally in this sector, including:

- A strategic location in the Pacific
- World-class infrastructure such as HOST Park
- Exceptional marine biodiversity
- Indigenous knowledge systems, including sustainable loko i'a practices
- Leading research institutions in ocean and climate sciences
- Established and successful ocean-focused businesses
- Strong public support for marine stewardship

Centralized leadership through an Office of Marine Affairs would help coordinate efforts across agencies and stakeholders, leverage existing strengths, and develop a cohesive statewide strategy. A dedicated office can also ensure that data, research, and community input are translated into actionable policy that advances Hawai'i's blue economy in a sustainable and culturally grounded manner.

We also note that other measures under consideration address related aspects of blue economy development. Aligning the efforts envisioned across these bills would help prevent duplication and strengthen their overall impact.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.



Statement of
Valerie Harmon
Founder and CEO
Namaka Algae, Inc.
before the
**Joint Senate Agriculture & Environment (AEN) and Economic Development & Tourism (EDT)
Committees**

Monday, March 24, 2026
3 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 308 & Videoconference

In consideration of
HB 1615
RELATING TO THE HAWAII'Ī TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

AEN Chair Gabbard, AEN Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Committee on
Agriculture & Environment.

EDT Chair DeCoite, EDT Vice Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committee on Economic
Development & Tourism

Namaka Algae, Inc. strongly **SUPPORTS** HB1615, which directs the Hawaii Technology Development Corporation to contract for a consultant to advance the state's ocean technology and innovation initiatives and provides critical funding for this purpose. Hawaii's unique geographic position and rich ocean resources present a significant opportunity to lead in the emerging blue economy, a sector projected by the OECD to reach \$3 trillion globally by 2030. Developing robust ocean technology not only aligns with HTDC's mission to position Hawaii as a premier innovation hub in the Pacific, but also creates high-quality jobs, attracts investment, and diversifies our economy beyond tourism.

Namaka Algae, Inc. is a technology first company focused on low-cost algae biomass for fish superfoods. We produce in Hawaii for Hawaii markets and plan to expand to the US mainland and globally for larger market access and profitability. Aquaculture has the potential to provide efficient, low carbon footprint protein to feed our growing populations, and at Namaka we aim to support the growth of this industry by providing quality, reliable and nutritious feed ingredients made from microalgae. We support HTDCs programs which benefit our company greatly. The focus on Marine and Ocean tech and industries is vital to continue the growth and expansion of our industries to support job growth, and ultimately improved food security for our Islands.



In summary, HB1615 is a timely and necessary measure to catalyze Hawaii's leadership in ocean innovation, drive sustainable economic growth, and realize the vision of a resilient, tech-enabled future for our islands.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments.

Aloha,

Valerie Harmon



Blue Startups

55 Merchant Street, Suite 1700
Honolulu, HI 96813

To be presented to the FIN Committee on
Monday, March 2, 2026 at 2:00 PM

Regarding **HB1615 HD1**:
“Relating to the Hawai‘i Technology Development Corporation”

Testimony in Support

Date: March 1, 2026

From: David Holt
Program Director, Blue Startups
david@bluestartups.com

Committee on Finance:

Chair Rep. Chris Todd,
Vice Chair Rep. Jenna Takenouchi,
and esteemed members of the Committee

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

My name is David Holt, and I am the Program Director at Blue Startups. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of HB1615**.

Blue Startups was founded to help **diversify Hawai‘i’s economy** by building a stronger technology sector. For more than a decade, we have supported entrepreneurs building companies in Hawai‘i.

Blue Startups is launching an **Ocean Tech Program** this summer designed to position Hawai‘i as a **global testbed for ocean innovation** aligned with **HTDC’s Ocean Technology** priority.

Hawai‘i’s ocean and coastal strengths have the power to touch energy, food systems, transportation, climate resilience, research, and tourism.

We strongly support the Committee in passing **HB1615** and advancing it through the remaining referrals.

A **Marine Affairs Coordinator** can help align strategy with execution. This includes identifying barriers, building partnerships, and pursuing public and federal resources that local companies

and researchers can use to test, deploy, and scale solutions in Hawai'i. The bill's focus on investment readiness and commercialization pathways is especially important for turning ideas into **jobs** and deployable projects.

HB1615 supports outcomes that matter statewide. It strengthens **economic diversification**. It improves **resilience** through coastal and ocean-related innovation. It expands pathways to **higher wage jobs** in technology-enabled ocean sectors. It helps attract and retain **talent and investment** by presenting a clear statewide strategy and a coordinated entry point for engagement across all islands.

HB1615 is a practical step toward stronger coordination and stronger results for Hawai'i's **blue economy**. We respectfully urge the Committee to **pass HB1615** with a recommendation of support and advance it through the remaining referrals.

Mahalo,

David Holt
Program Director
Blue Startups





Hawai'i Angels
335 Merchant Street, Suite #516
Honolulu, HI 96813

Statement of **Alexi Drouin**
Assistant Director, Hawai'i Angels

Regarding HB1615 HD2:
"Relating to the Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation"

Testimony in Support

Date: March 22, 2026

To:

Committee on Agriculture and Environment

Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair

Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair

Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

Senator Lynn DeCoite, Chair

Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committees,

My name is Alexi Drouin, and I am the Assistant Director of Hawai'i Angels, Program Operations at Blue Startups, and Ambassador for Hawai'i Tech Week. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support of HB1615**.

Hawai'i Angels is a statewide startup investing group. We support founders with early capital, and we convene entrepreneurs and investors through a regular pitch forum. Our work depends on a strong pipeline of local companies and the partners that help them grow in Hawai'i.

HB1615 strengthens Hawai'i's ability to compete in the **blue economy** by directing the **Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation (HTDC)** to establish the **Office of Marine Affairs and a Coordinator** within HTDC to develop, coordinate, and implement **ocean technology and innovation initiatives**. This includes building a statewide strategy, coordinating cross-agency work, identifying gaps and opportunities, pursuing funding, supporting workforce development, and reporting progress.

This approach supports outcomes that matter statewide. It grows **high-skill jobs**. It accelerates **economic diversification**. It strengthens **resilience** through ocean observation and coastal

solutions. It improves Hawai'i's ability to **attract and retain talent and investment**. It also increases **statewide participation** across all islands.

For Hawai'i Angels, clearer statewide coordination and strategy in ocean innovation helps more founders understand where the opportunities are and how to connect to **public and private partners**. It also helps outside investors see Hawai'i has an organized **pipeline** and credible **infrastructure** for ocean technology development.

For these reasons, Hawai'i Angels respectfully urge the Committee to **pass HB1615** with a recommendation of **support** and advance it through the remaining referrals.

Mahalo,

Alexi Drouin
Assistant Director
Hawai'i Angels





DATE: 3/23/2026

TO: Senator Mike Gabbard
Chair on Committee on Agriculture and Environment

Senator Herbert M Richards III
Vice Chair on Committee on Agriculture and Environment

Senator Lynn DeCoite
Chair on Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

Senator Glenn Wakai
Vice Chair on Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

FROM: Hohonu

RE: **H.B. 1615 – Relating to Marine Affairs**
HEARING DATE: 3/25/2026 3pm

Dear Chairs Gabbard and DeCoite, Vice Chairs Richard III and Wakai and members of the Committee on Agriculture and Environment and Committee on Economic Development and Tourism,

Hohonu **strongly supports** House Bill 1615 as a catalyst for growing the ecosystem of companies around the state working in the blue economy. Hohonu was founded in 2019 in Hawai'i by Dr. Brian Glazer, a professor at UH Manoa, to address persistent gaps in flood monitoring. Today, Hohonu operates flood monitoring networks across 18 states, including Hawai'i, serving federal partners, state agencies, counties, municipalities, institutions of higher education, and the private consulting sector. Hohonu is headquartered in Honolulu where it designs, develops and manufactures its water level sensors.

Leadership from the Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation, and the use of an expert focused on planning and executing a blue economy strategy, will have the positive effect of coordinating the local blue economy ecosystem and aligning stakeholders in both the private and public sector. Companies, especially hardware companies like Hohonu, thrive when there is a strong, connected ecosystem of companies growing the local skill base and supply chain. There are compounding benefits to having related companies in a single area: similar job opportunities allow local talent to develop related skills early on, knowledge spillover accelerates innovation, local suppliers and service providers can specialize and grow to meet increased demand and a cluster attracts more investment and more outside interest from buyers.

Hohonu is in a strong position to grow and thrive, but as we grow we will be constrained by the local availability of specialized talent, availability of suppliers capable of scaling with us and logistics challenges related to both fulfillment of orders and imports of necessary components. These challenges are neither unique to Hohonu nor new. The Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation is well positioned to address these problems across a blue economy cluster and we have a better chance at solving them by bringing in expertise and focus.

Hawai'i is a unique and challenging location to start a technology company and it requires a focused, highly collaborative effort to be successful. We believe House Bill 1615 will enable that collaboration and success and **we strongly support its passage**

Mahalo for your time and the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Noah Pentelovitch
Head of Hardware
Hohonu

Statement of
Anthony Mau PhD
Founder, CEO
Kupu Place Aquaponics LLC
before the
Committee on Finance

Sunday, March 23, 2026
5:30 Am

In consideration of
<HB1615>
RELATING TO THE HAWAI'I TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Chair Christ Todd and Vice Chair **Jenna Takenouchi** and Members of the Committee on **Finance**.

Kupu Place strongly **SUPPORTS <Bill Number HB1615>**, which will formally recognize the State of Hawai'i as an ocean cluster, establish the Office of Marine Affairs and a Marine Affairs Task Force under the Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation (HTDC), and provide essential funding for capacity building to advance Hawai'i's ocean technology and innovation ecosystem. This bill is a pivotal investment in Hawai'i's economic future—strengthening our leadership in the blue economy, expanding economic opportunities across the Pacific, and positioning our islands as a global model for regenerative and sustainable ocean innovation.

Hawai'i's blue economy contributes over \$10 billion to our GDP and supports 100,000 jobs, with marine business activity growing 23% in the past decade. As the U.S. largest island state in the Pacific and ocean steward in the second largest Exclusive Economic Zone, Hawai'i is not only uniquely positioned to innovate but to attract federal, philanthropic, and private investments to sustain the local blue economy and address critical marine issues across the Pacific. Hawai'i is currently the only U.S. Pacific state touching the Pacific Ocean without a designated ocean cluster. This measure would help recognize the sustainable blue economy and the important initiatives to build economic resiliency for the state.

Advancing ocean technology and innovation directly aligns with HTDC's mission and leverages our natural strengths, positioning Hawai'i as a strategic innovation hub in the Pacific. This bill will create future-ready jobs and unlock additional federal, philanthropic, and private funding to not only sustain our economy but address critical marine challenges.

Kupu Place is the largest producer of specialty produce (microgreens) in the State, focused on reducing importation and increasing access to healthy food. We employ 12 farmers in roughly 1.5 acres of production. However, prior to moving forward as an agricultural company, our dream was to produce sustainable seafood for Hawaii using technology like aquaponics and regenerative aquaculture. This bill directly impacts companies like ours, focused on developing the next generation of farmers to implement innovative food systems and strategies to feed our community without compromising the environment. This bill supports entities focused on blue foods, and would help to bring in federal funding to support infrastructure development, establish funding mechanisms for startups, create a business ecosystem with support services for our business, and really focus on industries that leverage Hawaii's unique resources for its people. We still have a vision to produce blue foods, and we envision the work that HTDC is leading to bring in necessary resources that will connect land and sea.

In summary, **Bill 1615** is a timely and necessary measure to catalyze Hawaii's leadership in ocean technology and innovation while realizing the vision of a resilient economic future for our islands.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments.

Sincerely,

Anthony Mau Ph.D.

Founder, Kupu Place Aquaponics LLC



Statement of
Gregory Wong
Co-Founder and Engineer at WaiHome LLC
before the
Senate Committee on Economic Development and Technology
& Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment

Monday, March 25, 2026 | 3:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

In consideration of
HB1615 HD2
RELATING TO THE HAWAII TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

To: Chair Gabbard, Chair DeCoite, and Members of the Committees

WaiHome LLC stands in strong support of HB1615, HD2. **As a Hawaii-based company developing technology specifically to protect our reefs from wastewater pollution, we believe the establishment of the Office of Marine Affairs and the Marine Affairs Task Force is essential for Hawaii's future.**

We urge your support for this measure for the following reasons:

- *Strategic Coordination for Local Startups:* Hawaii-born companies like WaiHome often struggle with "siloes" regulations between land-use, health, and marine agencies. The Marine Affairs Task Force provides the necessary forum to align these departments, ensuring that innovative wastewater solutions can move from the lab to our coastlines faster.
- *Retaining Hawaii's Tech Talent:* By formally declaring Hawaii an "ocean cluster," this bill signals to the world—and to our local engineering graduates—that the State is committed to high-wage, technology-enabled careers. WaiHome currently employs 4 local technical staff; this bill provides the industry infrastructure we need to double that number and manufacture our systems locally.
- *Solving Island Problems with Island Solutions:* Mainland technologies often fail in Hawaii's unique volcanic and coastal environments. HB1615, HD2 prioritizes Native Hawaiian knowledge and regenerative technology as core components of our blue economy. **This place-based approach is exactly how we designed our excavation-free systems, and we believe it is the only way to meet our 2050 cesspool mandate effectively and affordably.**

I urge the committees to pass HB1615, HD2 to help Hawaii lead the global blue economy through innovation and stewardship. Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments,



Gregory Wong
Co-founder and Engineer
WaiHome LLC

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Economic Development and Tourism
Senator Lynn DeCoite, Chair
Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair
Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair

Wednesday, March 25, 2026, at 3:00PM
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

RE: HB1615 HD2 Relating to the Hawaii Technology Development Corporation

Aloha e Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai, Chair Gabbard, and Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber testifies in strong support of House Bill 1615 House Draft 2 (HB1615 HD2), which declares that the State is an ocean cluster; establishes the Office of Marine Affairs within the Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation for administrative purposes only; establishes and appropriates funds for the Marine Affairs Coordinator position; requires the Marine Affairs Coordinator to submit annual reports to the Governor and Legislature; transfers the functions of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Marine Affairs to the Office of Marine Affairs; and appropriates funds for the Office of Marine Affairs to procure the services of a consultant to support the marine affairs declaration of intent.

HB1615 HD2 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Small Business. This bill promotes the growth of Hawaii's blue economy, encompassing industries such as marine technology, offshore renewable energy, aquaculture, ocean data systems, and marine robotics—all sectors that can build a stronger, more resilient Hawaii economy.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that the global ocean economy could exceed \$3 trillion by 2030. With Hawaii's strategic geographic position in the Pacific, access to world-class ocean research assets, and a talented local workforce, the State is well-positioned to serve as a regional hub for these emerging industries. According to analyses by UHERO, innovation-driven sectors provide higher-than-average wages and greater economic stability. Developing a blue economy will not only diversify our industries beyond tourism—which still accounts for 17.1% of the State's GDP (2023)—but also generate new, high-skill jobs for local residents.

Furthermore, Hawaii currently imports about 85–90% of its food and about 67% of its energy (2024). Expanding ocean innovation in areas like offshore renewable energy and sustainable aquaculture

supports State goals to reduce dependence on imports, enhance food and energy security, and work towards reaching 100% clean energy by 2045.

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.

We respectfully ask to pass House Bill 1615 House Draft 2. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Blue Startups

55 Merchant Street, Suite 1700
Honolulu, HI 96813

To be presented to the AEN-EDT Committee on
Wednesday, March 25, 2026 at 3:00 PM

Regarding **HB1615 HD2**:
"Relating to the Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation"

Testimony in Support

Date: March 22, 2026

From: Chenoa Farnsworth
Managing Director, Blue Startups
chenoa@bluestartups.com

Committee on Agriculture and Environment

Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair
Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair

Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

Senator Lynn DeCoite, Chair
Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committees,

My name is Chenoa Farnsworth, and I am the Managing Director at Blue Startups. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of HB1615**.

Blue Startups was founded to help **diversify Hawai'i's economy** by building a stronger technology sector. For more than a decade, we have supported entrepreneurs building companies in Hawai'i.

Blue Startups is launching an **Ocean Tech Program** this summer designed to position Hawai'i as a **global testbed for ocean innovation** aligned with **HTDC's Ocean Technology** priority.

Hawai'i's ocean and coastal strengths have the power to touch energy, food systems, transportation, climate resilience, research, and tourism.

We strongly support the Committee in passing **HB1615** and advancing it through the remaining referrals.

A **Marine Affairs Coordinator** can help align strategy with execution. This includes identifying barriers, building partnerships, and pursuing public and federal resources that local companies and researchers can use to test, deploy, and scale solutions in Hawai'i. The bill's focus on investment readiness and commercialization pathways is especially important for turning ideas into **jobs** and deployable projects.

HB1615 supports outcomes that matter statewide. It strengthens **economic diversification**. It improves **resilience** through coastal and ocean-related innovation. It expands pathways to **higher wage jobs** in technology-enabled ocean sectors. It helps attract and retain **talent and investment** by presenting a clear statewide strategy and a coordinated entry point for engagement across all islands.

HB1615 is a practical step toward stronger coordination and stronger results for Hawai'i's **blue economy**. We respectfully urge the Committee to **pass HB1615** with a recommendation of support and advance it through the remaining referrals.

Mahalo,

Chenoa Farnsworth
Managing Director
Blue Startups





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Kurtistown, Hawaii
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March 22 2026

**Joint Senate Agriculture & Environment (AEN) and
Economic Development & Tourism (EDT) Committees**

In consideration of HB1615 **RELATING TO HTDC**

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

Marine Genetics strongly **SUPPORTS HB 1615**, which formally recognizes the State of Hawai'i as an ocean cluster and establishes the Office of Marine Affairs and a Marine Affairs Task Force under the Hawaii Technology Development Corporation (HTDC). This bill is a critical step to strengthen Hawai'i's leadership in the blue economy and grow economic opportunities across the Pacific Islands.

Hawai'i's blue economy contributes over \$10 billion to our GDP and supports 100,000 jobs, with marine business activity growing 23% in the past decade. As the U.S. largest island state in the Pacific and ocean steward in the second largest Exclusive Economic Zone, Hawai'i is not only uniquely positioned to innovate but to attract federal, philanthropic, and private investments to sustain the local blue economy and address critical marine issues.

SB2907 provides dedicated leadership, strategic coordination across the public and private sectors, and annual reporting for Hawai'i blue economy activities, ensuring that economic development, technology advancement, and cultural stewardship remain priorities. The bill will help attract new funding opportunities, create future-ready jobs, and support collaboration across public-private sectors.

I founded and developed the world's first SPF shrimp breeding company which was based at NELHA. We commercialized the Hawaii-born SPF shrimp technology and sold SPF broodstock to 26 countries. This Hawaii-born technology transformed the global shrimp industry and resulted in a 6x growth in the industry. Hawaii companies now export over \$20M/year in SPF products. After 20 years in business, we sold the company to an Asian multinational. My experience is a good example of what Hawaii can achieve in Ocean Industries if the industry receives government support.

In summary, HB1615 is a timely and necessary measure to catalyze Hawai'i's leadership in ocean technology and innovation while realizing the vision of a resilient economic future for our islands.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments.

Sincerely,

Jim Wyban, Founder/CEO
Marine Genetics LLC

HB-1615-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 8:12:42 AM

Testimony for EDT on 3/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alana Marsili	Testifying for Privateer Space Inc.	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Statement of Privateer Space

Before the Joint Committee on Agriculture and Environment (AEN) and Economic Development and Tourism (EDT)

In consideration of HB1615 – RELATING TO THE HAWAI‘I TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (HTDC)

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support** of HB1615.

HB1615 plays an important role in strengthening the Hawai‘i Technology Development Corporation (HTDC) as a central driver of innovation, economic diversification, and applied technology development across the State. As Hawai‘i navigates increasing environmental pressures alongside shifting global economic dynamics, continued investment in HTDC ensures the State is positioned to lead in solutions that are both locally grounded and globally relevant.

From an Agriculture and Environment (AEN) perspective, HTDC enables the development and deployment of technologies that support sustainable resource management, climate resilience, and environmental monitoring. These capabilities are increasingly essential as Hawai‘i faces challenges ranging from watershed health and coastal degradation to food security and ecosystem protection. Supporting innovation in these areas allows the State to better understand and manage its natural resources while building long-term resilience.

From an Economic Development and Tourism (EDT) perspective, HTDC serves as a critical engine for high-value job creation, industry growth, and the expansion of Hawai‘i’s innovation economy. By supporting local companies and attracting new investment, HTDC helps diversify the State’s economy beyond traditional sectors, while positioning Hawai‘i as a hub for technology development across the Pacific.

Privateer Space is a Hawai‘i-based geospatial intelligence company focused on commercial data integration, artificial intelligence, and maritime domain awareness. Our work supports governments and partners in understanding activity across ocean and coastal environments, with applications that directly intersect with environmental stewardship, resource management, and

economic activity. Programs supported by HTDC have been instrumental in enabling companies like ours to build locally, create skilled jobs, and contribute to Hawai‘i’s growing innovation ecosystem.

Importantly, HTDC supports dual-use capabilities—technologies that serve both commercial and public sector needs. This model is particularly well-suited for Hawai‘i, where solutions developed to address local environmental and infrastructure challenges can scale to broader markets across the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

At a time when the State is facing increasing environmental complexity and economic transition, HB1615 ensures that Hawai‘i continues to invest in the infrastructure, partnerships, and talent needed to compete and lead.

For these reasons, Privateer Space strongly supports HB1615.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,
Alana Marsili
Director of Government & Foreign Relations
Privateer Space



23 March 2026

Statement of:
Neil Anthony Sims, CEO, Ocean Era, Inc.
before the
**Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment, and
Senate Committee on Economic Development and Tourism**

DATE: Wednesday, March 25th, 2026

TIME: 3:00 p.m.

Conference Room 224

In consideration of
HB1615 HD2
RELATING TO THE HAWAI'I TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

TO: Chair Gabbard; Vice-Chair Richards; Chair DeCoite; Vice-Chair Wakai, and members of the respective committees.

r.e. In **Strong Support** of House Bill No. 1615 HD2

Dear Chairs, Vice-Chairs, and members of the Committees,

Our company - Ocean Era, Inc. – and our team of scientists and technicians – all strongly support HB1615 HD2, that declares that Hawaii State is an Ocean Cluster; establishes the Office of Marine Affairs in HTDC under a Marine Affairs Coordinator; and contracts for the services of a consultant to support the development, coordination, and implementation of ocean technology and innovation initiatives.

It is highly appropriate – given the potential value of the Blue Economy for future high-tech development in the state – that there be a specific focus on these Ocean Cluster economic opportunities. HTDC can help accelerate these exciting growth areas. However, there is clearly a need for greater support, through establishing this Office, and providing an expert review of the opportunities and cautions that would accompany an accelerated ocean industry focus. There are great benefits that could flow from Hawaii's Blue Economy, but it is essential that we learn from the experiences of other ocean clusters, around the world, and build on those, in a way that is culturally sensitive and appropriate for our islands and our people.

HTDC has a dedicated, exceptionally-skilled team, but the ocean cluster represents a far wider range of cultural, recreational, subsistence and industry interests and backgrounds. It would therefore be invaluable to set up a discrete Office of Marine Affairs within HTDC, that is appropriately staffed and supported by specialized expertise, as we start to approach these questions.

I moved to Hawaii early in my career as a marine biologist, because of the exceptional opportunities that were offered here in the ocean space. I have worked at NELHA for over 35 years, founding a number of various aquaculture start-ups. I have seen many grand aspirations falter and fail because they did not have a clear mandate, or the initial expert guidance from the outset. I would hope that – through this declaration, the setting up and staffing of the office and the hiring of a consultant – that HTDC can ensure that the Ocean Cluster initiative moves forward smoothly, with focus, and with broad community support.

We would be most grateful for your support through this bill, to ensure the success of HTDC's Ocean Cluster initiative.

Thank you in anticipation.
Sincerely, with aloha,



Neil Anthony Sims, M.Sc.
Founder, CEO, Ocean Era, Inc.



Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Nicholas Ulm. I am the CEO and Founder of Hawaii Ocean Power Solutions (HOPS). My company produces Hālonā WEC, which is a wave energy buoy that aims to reduce the cost of powering our local blue economy activities. The buoy produces power on the same principles that makes the Halona blowhole spout and was developed as a part of my PhD at the University of Hawaii.

I have dedicated the last decade and the entirety of my adult life to addressing our state's food and energy security needs. I was born and raised here on Oahu; I would like to see more people like me continue to be able to make it here. My story is like that of so many of our kama'aina. I spent as much time in the ocean as I did in the classroom. I went to college in the continental US, received a degree in engineering, and unlike many of the friends I grew up with, I was privileged enough to be able to come back to the islands.

This happened because I was attracted back to Hawaii, back to UH for my PhD in the Ocean & Resource Engineering Department because we have one of the best programs in the country. A program supported by a strong blue economy locally, with companies able to hire local graduates. We have strong innovation and workforce development programs, with groups like Purple Mai'a and KUPU. I hope I am not the first to tell you that this blue economy structure turns out to have an incredibly high hire rate within the first month of graduation. That these are good paying jobs here locally. That they are deeply fulfilling for those of us who grew up here.

Although UH was able to help me to form the technological foundations, it was limited in how much they could support the commercialization. I was privileged to be supported by UH HITIDE and Hatch Blue through the Ocean Foundry Incubator program, both supported in part through the state. This was my first interaction with state supported business development and it was transformative to my company. But right when we started to see growth, it sunsetted and the federal administration changed. Everyone knew this was coming, but there was a lack of overarching coordination at a higher state level to make sure that this lapse didn't come for companies like mine.

So HOPS had to look elsewhere for support. Both programs directed us towards the NOAA Ocean Enterprise Accelerator. This is a federally funded program that was set up during the previous administration to bring blue economy technologies to full commercial readiness. The federal government administered this funding to ocean cluster organizations. As is made clear by this bill, Hawaii does not currently have that designation. We currently do not have the coordination at the state level to receive those funds to support our ocean-based economy.

So I again had to look to the continental US for support. I was privileged to be accepted into a program in Los Angeles called Braid Theory, which is located at Altasea. Their program networked us with all the other ocean clusters across the country and what I saw simultaneously

made me excited and disappointed. These clusters were only a few years old, but in the time since their founding, the companies that sprung up around them had rapidly grown from the coordination and connectivity the clusters provided. Why wasn't this something that was present in the community that I had come from?

The coordination at the state or municipal level brought together community organizations who had issues with technologists who had solutions to meet both needs. I saw these cluster organizers connecting harbor masters who had issues with pollution management with community organizers concerned on the pollution impacts and technology companies with solutions to pollution mitigation. The cluster worked to orchestrate collaboration to address the issue. It centered the process on shared values and provided avenues for trust, while helping the economy to grow. It was not exploitative or extractive, it was collaboratively competitive. It produced the excellence that we strive for here locally.

This can happen here in Hawaii. We managed to get started a federally supported pilot program here in Hawaii for blue economy technologies, that starts this summer. HTDC brought in the community and stakeholders to set the values. Hawaii companies pushed the feds to set up the program with these values in mind, and actually convinced them to buy in. One of these pilots is a training program for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders to become remotely controlled underwater vehicle pilots. This program will not require a college degree, is 4 weeks long, and can be used for verification of the efficacy of conservation projects under the Green Fee.

We have the grassroots foundations for a strong blue economy, it's time for the state to start better coordinating support for the local blue economy. HTDC has done great work this past year to coordinate with the local blue economy, but it still feels like efforts are happening in silo.

We need to enable them with better organizational coordination to pursue these federal opportunities. I implore you to designate Hawaii as an ocean cluster to create structures that will support kama'aina like me, who just want to keep generations of ocean loving people in Hawaii.

Hawai'i Ocean Power Solutions (HOPS) respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of **HB1615**.

Dear Chairwoman DeCoite, Chairman Gabbard, Vice-chairman Wakai, Vice-chairman Richards, and esteemed members of the committee, my name is Joshua Baghdady and my career is a testament to the power of the blue economy to connect people, ideas, and activities for the health and sustainability of our blue planet. I wish to testify in **strong support** of House Bill 1615 (HD2) to establish Hawai'i as an ocean cluster.

I was homeschooled in the coastal state of South Carolina and studied electrical engineering at Clemson University. In graduate school, I was fortunate enough to work on a project funded by the Office of Naval Research investigating the use of semiconductor lasers for underwater wireless communications. While presenting my work at a marine technology conference in California, I met a physical oceanographer and marine ecologist from the US Coast Guard who became my mentor in all things relating to the ocean. I was intrigued by this linkage of technology and marine stewardship and decided to pivot my career in this direction. My mentor introduced me to Margo Edwards, the director of the Applied Research Laboratory at UH, and I began my professional career here in Hawai'i in 2017. Over the past decade I have been involved on a myriad of marine-related projects, from ocean sensing with robots, buoys, and undersea cables to supporting ecology studies of Hawaiian green sea turtle resting habits in Pearl Harbor. I have also been involved at the national and international levels as an ocean advocate, co-founding both the Marine Technology Society Early Career Ocean Professionals program and the UN Ocean Decade Early Career Ocean Professionals Network Programme. I was in the room at the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France in June 2025 when around 30 countries adopted the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction to establish international protections for the High Seas. This experience and exposure have convinced me that the blue economy is society's pathway to sustainable development in the 21st century, and I look forward to working with the state to catalyze a new era of economic prosperity for Hawai'i that is anchored in the largest and most precious natural resource our species has the privilege to steward: our oceans. Thank you very much.

Statement of
Doreen Wong
Ocean Technology and Innovation Advisor
before the
Committee on Agriculture and Environment and
Committee on Economic Development and Tourism

Wednesday, March 25, 2026
3:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

In consideration of
HB1615 RELATING TO HAWAII TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Chair Gabbard and Vice Chair Richards and Members of the Committee on Agriculture and Environment, and

Chair DeCoite and Vice Chair Wakai and Members of the Committee on Economic Development and Tourism,

I'm Doreen Wong, a climate, infrastructure, and sustainability professional, focusing on the sustainable blue economy, ocean technology and innovation. I strongly urge you to **SUPPORT HB 1615**, which recognizes Hawai'i as an ocean cluster and establishes a coordinated statewide structure, including an Office of Marine Affairs, a Marine Affairs Task Force, a dedicated coordinator position, with consulting support. This measure is a timely investment in Hawai'i's long-term economic resilience. It strengthens statewide coordination so we can move from plans to implementation, especially important now as the state recovers from a series of disasters and these efforts are important to the future of Hawai'i.

I bring 14 years of experience working at the intersection of technology innovation, policy, and finance across global, regional, and local levels. I currently advise NOAA-funded Ocean Enterprise Accelerators, including UC San Diego's StartBlue and VentureWell, and have collaborated with Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation (HTDC) and the University of Hawai'i to develop our state's ocean technology and innovation ecosystem. As a Contributing Member of the 1000 Ocean Startups coalition, a global network of over 60 incubators, accelerators, venture capital firms, and other capital providers (several with ties to Hawai'i), I have seen firsthand the rapid growth of this sector and the funding opportunities that Hawai'i has, at times, missed out on.

The blue economy is one of the fastest growing sectors, encompassing maritime, logistics and supply chain, coastal resiliency, marine conservation, energy, blue/aquatic foods, biotechnology, ocean data, and outdoor recreation. [Hawai'i's blue economy](#) is already contributing over \$10 billion to our state's GDP and supports 100,000 jobs, with marine business activity growing 23% in the past decade. As the largest U.S. island state located in the second largest Exclusive Economic Zone, Hawai'i is uniquely positioned to support the Pacific Islands in attracting federal, philanthropic, and private investments to address place-based marine challenges.

To realize this potential, Hawai'i needs a more coordinated and innovation-driven approach to marine challenges. HB1615 is designed to complement existing efforts and establish a unified structure for the state's approach that incorporates technology and innovation. Recognizing Hawai'i as an ocean cluster elevates the blue economy as a statewide priority, improves

coordination on marine challenges, enhances our readiness for funding opportunities, and supports the creation of quality, locally relevant jobs.

Hawai'i's 2025 Ocean Resources Management Plan Evaluation and Refresh calls for stronger collaboration across state and county agencies, and especially with the private sector and other fields, including economists, realtors, tourism, and technology. We need dedicated local capacity to bring agencies, businesses, and communities across the public and private sectors together and to move from planning and reporting to developing and implementing solutions.

The recent storms and heavy flooding statewide underscore the need for better coordination and support of technology tools and resources to help us prepare for and respond to climate risks and extreme weather events. Hawai'i-based innovators are already developing tools for flood monitoring, sea level rise projections, stormwater management, maritime operations, and more. These tools can aid emergency responders and communities in advance and in real time. However, without a supportive government structure and local funding and resources, it is difficult for these innovators to deliver their solutions today. Instead, several of them have been focused on deploying their solutions in other states that already have established ocean clusters with local government backing.

Other U.S. coastal states and global regions, including San Diego, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Maine, New England, Florida, Norway, Iceland, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand, have created ocean clusters to drive local leadership, economic growth, innovation, and workforce development. Hawai'i is currently the only U.S. Pacific state touching the Pacific Ocean without such a structure in place, despite having the important ingredients: world-class marine science expertise from University of Hawai'i, Indigenous knowledge, infrastructure like NELHA and PaclOOS, and a growing base of local innovators to help the state succeed.

Over the past eight months, I have worked with HTDC and more than 80 organizations to build a coalition around Hawai'i's sustainable blue economy, ocean technology and innovation. **Now** is the moment to match that momentum with the coordination capacity mentioned in HB1615, so we can deliver community benefits in Hawai'i and the broader Pacific Islands and support the long-term economic resilience outlined in UHERO's recent report, [*Beyond the Price of Paradise: Is Hawai'i Being Left Behind?*](#)

“Addressing the cost of living remains essential, but without meaningful improvements in productivity and real income growth, the same economic pressures driving outmigration today will persist and intensify over time. With thoughtful, locally-driven policy and a renewed commitment to long-term value creation, Hawai'i can move from being ‘left behind’ toward building a more dynamic and resilient future.”

By passing HB1615, Hawai'i can lean into its natural strengths and serve as a global model for sustainable and regenerative ocean innovation in the Pacific. HB1615 is a timely and necessary measure to formalize Hawaii's leadership in the blue economy and realize its full potential in marine industries. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of **HB1615**.

Sincerely,



Doreen Wong
Ocean Technology and Innovation Advisor

DATE: 2026-MAR-24

TO: Senators Mike Gabbard, Herbert Richards, Lynn DeCoite, Glenn Wakai, Donovan Dela Cruz, Sharon Moriwaki

FROM: Brennan Yamamoto

RE: HB1615

Aloha Senators Mike Gabbard, Herbert Richards, Lynn DeCoite, Glenn Wakai, Donovan Dela Cruz, Sharon Moriwaki, Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Senate Committees on Agriculture and Environment; Economic Development and Tourism; Ways and Means; and others to whom this testimony concerns. My name is Brennan Yamamoto and I am submitting this testimony in strong support of HB1615.

I was born and raised on Oahu, graduating from Moanalua High school in 2009, and subsequently earning my mechanical engineering BS, MS, and PhD degrees from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa from 2009 to 2019. I then worked for the Applied Research Laboratory at the University of Hawai'i from 2020 to 2025 as a Robotics Engineer, developing multiple maritime systems and technologies in service of Hawai'i's local community and the United States Department of Defense. I am currently the Robotics Engineering Lead for HavocAI, the industry leader for collaborative autonomous systems in the maritime domain, where we partner closely with PacMar Technologies, a local multi-generational naval architecture and maritime technology company, to develop and test fleets of cutting-edge autonomous robotic systems in waters just south of Honolulu.

Hawai'i is surrounded by a diverse and easily accessible ocean environment, making it an ideal location to develop ocean-related technologies from multiple sectors, including, but not limited to: marine biology, renewable energy, environmental protection, aquaculture, naval architecture, and robotic/autonomous systems. Unfortunately, a lack of an effective, forward-thinking government agency specifically responsible for incubation of these emerging technologies has limited growth in these sectors. I can reference one prominent example from personal experience.

While working with the Applied Research Laboratory at the University of Hawai'i in 2022, I was involved in research toward detecting sea disposed munitions in littoral (shallow) waters; this problem directly affects Hawai'i residents and many coastal communities around the world. This process involves evaluating the effectiveness of cutting-edge sensing and robotic technologies in real-world environments seeded with inert, surrogate munitions. Hawai'i's exceptional diversity of littoral zones, year-around access to the ocean, proximity to world class maritime biology resources at the University of Hawai'i, and *real* public benefit from the solutions discovered in this research, made Hawai'i an excellent candidate for evaluating these emerging technologies. Unfortunately, the bureaucratic structures associated with permitting use of new technologies in the ocean simply do not exist, which dramatically delayed project timelines, reducing eligibility for future federal funding, and negating the benefits our persistent access to the ocean provides. A government agency tasked with stewardship and advocacy of ocean technologies can *proactively* support similar ocean technology development efforts while better preserving the environment and the safety of the people of Hawai'i.

I am a proud product of the State of Hawai'i, graduate of the UH system, and an advocate for diversifying opportunities for talented *kama'āina* to work in high technology at home in the islands. I believe that Hawai'i can and should be a pioneer in ocean technology, and that the efforts proposed in this bill are the first steps toward developing a thriving local ocean technology industry that will serve many future generations of engineers and scientists.

Mahalo for your time and the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Brennan Yamamoto, PhD and Gizmologist

HB-1615-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 8:59:49 AM

Testimony for EDT on 3/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Philip Davy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am a biotech entrepreneur and educator based in Honolulu. I strongly support HB1615, establishing Hawai‘i as an ocean cluster and creating the Office of Marine Affairs—a strategic imperative for our islands’ economic future.

Economic Engine with Proven ROI

NOAA estimates Hawai‘i’s blue economy already contributes ~\$10 billion annually and supports 100,000 jobs. This legislation catalyzes the next phase of growth. Research shows sustainable blue food production alone delivers a 10-fold return on investment. We cannot leave this opportunity fragmented across agencies.

High-Value Job Creation & Innovation Leadership

SB2907 positions Hawai‘i to capture the \$3 trillion global blue economy by 2030—shifting toward innovation-driven sectors: marine biotech, ocean robotics, coastal resiliency, and advanced aquaculture. This creates high-wage employment competing with off-island opportunities, retaining our talented workforce in knowledge-intensive roles that cannot be outsourced.

Equity & Community Resilience

The Marine Affairs Task Force will ensure sustainable growth serves all communities, including Native Hawaiian coastal populations, strengthening cultural connections to ocean resources while building economic resilience against climate impacts and providing local food security alternatives.

Immediate Federal Funding Unlocked

Coordinated state leadership attracts EDA grants, NOAA partnerships, and USDA aquaculture funding currently underutilized. This bill removes bureaucratic silos, enabling us to compete for resources already flowing to other coastal states.

This is strategic positioning, not just policy—**Hawai‘i’s geographic advantage in the Pacific demands decisive action now.**

Mahalo for advancing this transformative measure.

Philip Davy

HB-1615-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/21/2026 10:38:21 AM

Testimony for EDT on 3/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Comment

IRAN WAR IS COSTING TAXPAYERS 1BILLION \$ A DAY. LEGISLATURES MUST BE FISCAL RESPONSIBLE THIS SESSION IN MEASURES SEEKING FUNDING, TAX-CREDIT, ETC.

1615 HB RELATING TO THE HAWAII TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION.

DATE: March 24, 2026

TO: **Senator Gabbard**, Chair, Agriculture and Environment
Senator Richards, Vice Chair, Agriculture and Environment
Senator Decoite, Chair, Economic Development and Tourism
Senator Wakai, Vice Chair, Economic Development and Tourism

FROM: George Yarbrough, IEDC Economic Recovery Corps Fellow

RE: H.B. 1615 HD2 – Relating to the Hawaii Technology Development Corporation
HEARING DATE: March 25

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Agriculture and Environment, Economic Development & Technology Committee:

I submit this testimony in **strong support of House Bill 1615 HD2**, which appropriates funding for the Hawai'i Technology Development Corporation (HTDC) to contract for subject matter experts to support the development, coordination, and implementation of ocean technology and innovation initiatives.

For the past several years, I have worked alongside HTDC and its team which include subject matter experts to support the development of Hawai'i's technology ecosystem. In the past 6-8 months I have witnessed firsthand HTDC, with expert support, move at the speed of private enterprise and convene the overall tech community and ocean tech community like no other time before. There is true momentum happening in this agency that would not have happened without the help of experts that can support the amazing HTDC team faster and provide quick operational breadth. The work in the past 8 months has also brought together government agencies to start the development of a coordinated oceans strategy, finally.

Working with experts and contractors is critical for government agencies seeking to move quickly in building infrastructure for long-term operations and growth. These experts provide the specialized expertise and bandwidth that allow agencies to accelerate strategy development during interim periods before permanent staff and sustained resources are in place. Equally important, experts help translate planning strategies into actionable implementation roadmaps with clear milestones and stakeholder roles.

Perhaps most importantly, this support expert capacity is essential for positioning Hawai'i to compete for large federal grants. The federal Ocean Regional Opportunity and Innovation Act (S.1392/H.R.3048), currently before Congress, would direct the Secretary of Commerce to designate at least seven "Ocean Innovation Clusters" nationwide and provide grants for their establishment and operation. A experts can galvanize Hawai'i's ocean tech community quickly around a shared vision and coordinate the cross-sector partnerships required to submit competitive applications for these multi-million dollar opportunities. If we don't move quickly, this opportunity will pass us.

This investment positions Hawai'i to leverage significantly larger federal funding while building the foundation for a sustainable ocean innovation ecosystem. I urge the committee to pass H.B. 1615.

Mahalo for your time and the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

George Yarbrough
IEDC Economic Recovery Corps Fellow | gyarbrough@economicrecoverycorps.org

HB-1615-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/24/2026 12:40:32 PM

Testimony for EDT on 3/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dylan Howell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dylan Howell, and I submit this testimony in **strong support of HB1615**.

Hawai‘i is not lacking talent, ideas, or opportunity. It is lacking **execution capacity**.

Across the State, we see strong research, promising startups, and strategic sectors like advanced manufacturing and cybersecurity gaining traction. Yet progress is consistently slowed by limited capacity to coordinate efforts, support commercialization, and compete effectively for federal funding and private capital.

HB1615 addresses this directly.

This bill is not about adding structure, it is about enabling **execution at the level required to compete**. Strengthening HTDC’s capabilities in priority sectors and strategic outreach is a high-leverage move that will translate existing momentum into real economic outcomes: more companies scaling, more capital entering the State, and more high-quality jobs for local residents.

Right now, Hawai‘i is leaving opportunity on the table.

Other regions are moving faster, better coordinated, and more aggressively positioning themselves. Without targeted investment in capacity and coordination, Hawai‘i will continue to underperform relative to its potential.

With it, the State can unlock what is already here.

From direct experience working across Hawai‘i’s innovation ecosystem, the pattern is clear: when coordination improves, participation increases, partnerships accelerate, and capital follows.

HB1615 enables that shift.

This is a focused, high-impact investment in Hawai‘i’s economic future. I strongly urge your support.

Mahalo,

Dylan Howell