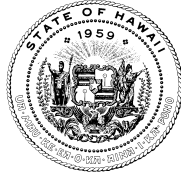


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
STATE OF HAWAII
*Ke Kia'āina o ka Moku'āina 'o
Hawaii*

SYLVIA J. LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR
STATE OF HAWAII
*Ka Hope Kia'āina o ka Moku'āina
'o Hawaii*



KALI WATSON
CHAIRPERSON, HHC
Ka Luna Ho'okele

KATIE L. LAMBERT
DEPUTY TO THE CHAIR
Ka Hope Luna Ho'okele

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS
Ka 'Oihana 'Āina Ho'opulapula Hawaii'i

P. O. BOX 1879
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96805

TESTIMONY OF KALI WATSON, CHAIR
HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HAWAIIAN
AFFAIRS
ON MARCH 24, 2026 AT 1:00PM IN CR 224

HB2309, HD1, RELATING TO THE HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION ACT, 1920

March 24, 2026

Aloha Chair Richards, Vice Chair Lamosao, and members of the Committee:

The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) strongly **supports** this bill which amends the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920, as amended, to include sibling's children as qualifying relatives of lessees for the purposes of lease transfer and lease successorship, in the same manner currently allowed for spouses, children, grandchildren, and siblings.

Sections 208 and 209 of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920, as amended, specifies only certain relatives may qualify for lease successorship or transfer including:

- (1) Your spouse, children, grandchildren, brother or sister provided the person or persons designated have at least 25 percent Hawaiian blood;
- (2) Father and mother, the widows or widowers of your children, widows or widowers of your brothers and sisters, or your nieces and nephews, provided that person or persons designated have at least 50 percent Hawaiian blood.

The law was changed effective October 27, 1986 by lowering the Hawaiian blood requirement to 25 percent in the case of spouse and children, effective June 27, 1997 in the case of grandchildren, and effective April 20, 2005 in the case of brothers or sisters.

This legislative proposal was approved by the Hawaiian Homes Commission and included in the Governor's Administrative Package. Certain lessee beneficiaries do not have a qualifying Native Hawaiian spouse, child, grandchild or sibling to succeed or transfer their lease. Certain lessee beneficiaries have also indicated a desire to

transfer or succeed their lease to their Native Hawaiian niece or nephew. This bill will allow lessee beneficiaries to transfer or succeed a lease to a one-quarter Native Hawaiian niece or nephew of the lessee as a qualifying relative. Nieces and nephews would be considered qualifying relatives of the lessee that would have priority before surviving spouses of the children, and surviving spouses of the siblings.

This bill does not change the blood quantum requirement to qualify for application to the DHHL Waiting List, nor does it change the blood quantum requirement for lease successorship or transfer. This measure simply allows for an expanded opportunity to maintain beneficiary leases within beneficiary families. Lastly, proposed amendments to the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920, as amended, requires review and approval by the U.S. Department of the Interior as well as Congressional review and consideration.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT HOUSE BILL 2309 HD1

RELATING TO THE HAWAIIAN HOMES
COMMISSION ACT, 1920, AS AMENDED

Ke Kōmike ‘Aha Kenekoa o ke Kuleana Hawai‘i
(Senate Committee on Hawaiian Affairs)

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

Malaki 24, 2026

1:00PM

Lumi 224

Aloha e Chair Richards, Vice Chair Lamosao and Members of the Committee on Hawaiian Affairs:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) submits testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB2309 HD1**, which amends Sections 208 and 209 of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA), 1920 related to successorship.

This measure expands the categories of qualified relatives eligible to receive or succeed to a Hawaiian Home Lands lease by adding nieces and nephews at the one-quarter Hawaiian blood quantum threshold. It further clarifies sibling transfer provisions and aligns succession language with the pathway established under Act 80, which provides for a blood quantum threshold for certain successors pending Congressional consent. In addition, the bill maintains federal mortgage compatibility under Section 247 loan authority, preserves existing Hawaiian Home Loan Fund and Hawaiian Home General Loan Fund protections, and recognizes that certain provisions remain subject to federal review under 43 C.F.R. Part 48. This ensures continued compliance with federal oversight requirements applicable to amendments to the HHCA while promoting generational stability within Native Hawaiian ‘ohana.

OHA’s constitutional and statutory responsibilities include advocating for the betterment of Native Hawaiians and supporting public policies that promote stable housing, community well-being, and the responsible stewardship of land. **OHA supports this measure because it expands eligible successorship and reflects the lived reality of Hawaiian ‘ohana structures, where extended family members often serve as caregivers**

and household anchors. Allowing nieces and nephews to succeed to leases reduces lease cancellations due to technical heir limitations, preserves improvements built over generations, advances the rehabilitative purpose of the HHCA of 1920. The HHCA was enacted as a rehabilitative trust to restore Native Hawaiians to the land and promote self-sufficiency. Ensuring generational continuity of homestead leases is central to that purpose. The bill also supports long term demographic realities.

Native Hawaiians continue to experience housing insecurity, overcrowding, and displacement. Strengthening succession rights under the HHCA promotes housing stability, protects generational wealth-building opportunities, and reduces the risk of trust land reverting due to narrow successor eligibility rules.

For these reasons, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs urges the committee to **PASS HB2309 HD1** this measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

HB-2309-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2026 7:32:25 AM

Testimony for HWN on 3/24/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shelby Pikachu Billionaire	Testifying for Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands & Ohana Unity Party	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

** Aloha Chair and esteemed members of the Committee,

E komo mai, aloha nui loa. My name is ****Master Shelby “Pikachu” Billionaire, HRM****, Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I., and I serve as Chairman of the Ohana Unity Party (www.Ohanaunityparty.com). As the ****number one testifier and supporter on the record**** for Native Hawaiian land justice across this session — having lifted my voice for the Public Land Trust bills and every measure that protects our kuleana to ‘āina — I rise today in ****strong, unwavering support**** of ****HB2309 HD1****.

This bill is simple, pono, and long overdue — like adding one more strong fiber to the sacred lei of our ‘ohana so it never breaks. For nearly a century, Hawaiian homestead leases have been passed only to spouses, children, grandchildren, and siblings. When those direct lines were not available, ‘ohana often watched helplessly as cherished homesteads returned to the Department or were lost. HB2309 HD1 simply adds ****“sibling’s child”**** (our nieces and nephews) to the qualified relatives list in both Section 208 (transfers) and Section 209 (succession upon death), while keeping the exact same blood quantum requirements already in law (one-quarter Hawaiian or native Hawaiian as applicable).

Nothing is taken away — only added so that the ‘āina stays in the bloodline where it belongs. Our ‘āina is our mother. When a kama‘āina Hawaiian Home Lands lessee pours their sweat, raises their keiki, and plants their roots on a homestead, that ‘āina should not slip through the fingers of the next generation just because the law forgot to name the niece or nephew. This measure mends that small but painful gap. It strengthens ‘ohana continuity, reduces the number of leases that must be canceled or surrendered, and honors the original promise of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920 — to rehabilitate and keep Native Hawaiians on their own land, generation after generation.

The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands retains full oversight and approval authority, so nothing changes in the careful stewardship that protects the trust. No new funds are needed. This is pure, clean justice. The Ohana Unity Party and I stand 100% behind HB2309 HD1.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this bill swiftly and unanimously so that our Hawaiian homestead ‘ohana can breathe easier knowing their ‘āina will stay with their own blood — not returned to the State because one name was missing from an old list. Mahalo nui loa for your

kuleana to the lāhui and for hearing this testimony from your top supporter on Hawaiian land matters. I am ready and eager to provide oral testimony or answer any questions.

A hui hou, me ke aloha pumehana,

****Master Shelby “Pikachu” Billionaire, HRM**** Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I.
Chairman, Ohana Unity Party

HB-2309-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2026 7:57:49 AM

Testimony for HWN on 3/24/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alice Abellanida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this bill.

HB-2309-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2026 12:35:54 PM

Testimony for HWN on 3/24/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lu Ann Mahiki Lankford-Faborito	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

strong support

HB-2309-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2026 1:05:11 PM

Testimony for HWN on 3/24/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L.Perry, Strongly Support

2309 HB RELATING TO THE HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION ACT, 1920.

HB-2309-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2026 6:20:03 PM

Testimony for HWN on 3/24/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Julia Estigoy-Kahoonei	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please extend opportunity of Hawaiian homelands to all 'ohana as we need to make sure our kanaka can live and stay here on their homeland

HB-2309-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2026 10:23:13 PM

Testimony for HWN on 3/24/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tiare Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of HB2309 HD1

Aloha e Chair Richards, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Members of the Senate Committee on Hawaiian Affairs,

Mahalo nui loa for setting this important measure for hearing and for your continued kuleana to strengthen Native Hawaiian rights and ‘ohana.

I am submitting this testimony as an OHA beneficiary to express my strong support for HB2309 HD1. This bill amends the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920, to include sibling’s children (nieces and nephews) as qualifying relatives for the transfer and successorship of Hawaiian homestead leases. By expanding the definition of who can inherit or receive a lease, it keeps ‘āina in Native Hawaiian ‘ohana instead of letting leases revert to the Department when there are no closer relatives.

This change is pono and long overdue. Many of our ‘ohana are large and multi-generational — nieces and nephews often step up to care for kupuna and carry on the legacy of the homestead. Allowing them to qualify (if they meet blood quantum requirements) honors the true spirit of Prince Kūhiō’s vision: stable homes and land connection for our lāhui across generations. It prevents the heartbreaking loss of family homesteads and helps reduce the long waitlists by keeping leases within the extended family.

OHA has already been a lifesaver for my ‘ohana. Their Mālama Home Improvement Loan helped us make critical safety repairs on our home. The Mālama Business Loan supported our Native Hawaiian-owned family business, and the OHA food assistance card kept food on our table during the government shutdown. These programs show how vital stable housing and family support are. HB2309 HD1 takes that same aloha one step further by protecting Hawaiian Home Lands succession for the next generation of our ‘ohana.

As a resident of Kahalu‘u, O‘ahu, I respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB2309 HD1 so that more Native Hawaiian families can keep their kuleana to the ‘āina and build stronger futures for our lāhui.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify,

Tiare Smith

Kahalu'u, O'ahu

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

House Bill 2309 HD1

Relating to the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920

Hearing Date: To Be Determined

Committee: To Be Determined

Submitted by:

R. Kana'iaupuni Gomes

Honolulu, Hawai'i

Email: rkgomes@gmail.com

Phone: 808-348-4074

Position: Support with Amendments

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is R. Kana'iaupuni Gomes, and I am writing as an individual concerned citizen in **strong support of the intent** of House Bill 2309 HD1, which amends the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920, to include sibling's children (nieces and nephews) as qualifying relatives for homestead lease transfers and successorship.

Why I Support This Bill

I support HB2309 HD1 because it recognizes the reality of Native Hawaiian family structures and 'ohana caregiving patterns. Many of our families rely on lateral and multi-generational relationships, where nieces, nephews, aunts, and uncles play central roles in caring for one another and perpetuating our connection to 'āina.

This bill has several important strengths:

- **Expands 'ohana continuity:** Including sibling's children acknowledges that homestead lands should remain within families who have deep, functional ties to the lessee and the land, not just lineal descendants.
- **Modernizes language:** Replacing gendered terms like "husband, wife" and "brothers, sisters" with "spouse" and "siblings" makes the law clearer, more inclusive, and easier to understand.
- **Maintains protections:** The bill preserves blood quantum requirements, the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands' approval authority, and other core HHCA safeguards, ensuring that homestead lands remain for Native Hawaiian beneficiaries.
- **Consistency across frameworks:** By amending both the current one-quarter Hawaiian and the pending one-thirty-second Hawaiian successorship provisions in parallel, the bill reduces confusion and ensures fair treatment regardless of which blood quantum framework ultimately governs.

These changes honor the trust responsibility to Native Hawaiian beneficiaries and support the cultural value of kuleana that bind our families together.

Areas for Improvement

While I support the intent of HB2309 HD1, I respectfully offer the following concerns and recommendations to strengthen the bill and ensure it truly serves beneficiaries and their families:

1. Expand the Definition of Eligible 'Ohana

Concern: The bill only adds sibling's children. Other common caregiving relationships—such as hānai children without a blood tie, cousins raised as siblings, or long-term household members—remain excluded even with DHHL approval.

Recommendation: Authorize the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands to approve transfers or successors to additional "functionally immediate" relatives (such as cousins or hānai children) under clear criteria and a waiver or variance process, while preserving the minimum Native Hawaiian blood quantum requirements. This would allow DHHL to consider the actual family dynamics and caregiving arrangements on a case-by-case basis.

2. Clarify Which Version of §209 Applies When

Concern: The bill amends §209(a) twice—once for the current one-quarter Hawaiian framework and once for the future one-thirty-second Hawaiian framework pending federal consent. This dual-amendment structure can be confusing for beneficiaries, families, and practitioners trying to understand which rules currently apply.

Recommendation: Add a non-codified section or committee report language directing the revisor of statutes to:

- Publish clear editor's notes explaining which version of §209(a) is operative before and after federal consent.
- Create a side-by-side comparison chart available on the DHHL website and in public educational materials.

This will help families navigate the law more easily and reduce disputes.

3. Improve Transparency Around Federal Approval Timing

Concern: The bill sets the general effective date as July 1, 3000, but ties the operative dates of sections 1–3 to federal approval under 43 C.F.R. part 48. This federal approval process is not well understood by most beneficiaries, and the "year 3000" placeholder can be confusing.

Recommendation: Add plain-language explanatory text in a findings or purpose section (or as a non-codified note) stating clearly that: "Native Hawaiian beneficiaries will see these changes only after federal approval is obtained from the U.S. Secretary of the Interior or Congress." Also, require DHHL to provide public notice—through its website, direct mailers, or homestead association outreach—when the federal trigger occurs and the amendments take effect.

4. Add Legislative Findings to Explain Cultural Context

Concern: The bill jumps straight into statutory amendments without explaining the cultural and policy reasons for including sibling's children. This omission may make it harder for future decision-makers, administrators, or courts to understand the bill's intent.

Recommendation: Add a findings or intent section at the beginning of the bill that:

- Recognizes multi-generational and lateral family caregiving patterns in Native Hawaiian communities.
- States an intent to promote stability and prevent loss of homesteads when siblings' children are primary caregivers or closest practical heirs.
- Affirms that blood quantum protections and DHHL's approval role remain intact and are not diminished.

This will provide important context and guidance for implementation.

5. Provide Administrative Support and Guidance for DHHL

Concern: Expanded successor and transfer options will increase the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands' workload, especially when deciding between multiple eligible relatives (spouse, children, grandchildren, siblings, sibling's children, parents, surviving spouses). Without clear prioritization criteria or guidance, this could lead to inconsistent decisions, delays, and appeals.

Recommendation: Direct DHHL (by statute or in the committee report) to:

- Adopt clear rules or prioritization criteria—such as giving preference to co-occupants, long-term caregivers, or residents who have maintained the homestead—when several eligible relatives exist.
- Create simple, accessible beneficiary forms and guidance materials explaining the new options in plain English and Hawaiian, to reduce confusion, disputes, and the need for legal assistance.
- Ensure adequate staffing and training for DHHL staff to handle the increased case-by-case determinations efficiently and fairly

Conclusion

I strongly support the intent of House Bill 2309 HD1 to expand successorship and transfer rights to sibling's children, which better reflects the realities of Native Hawaiian family structures and caregiving. However, I respectfully urge the Committee to consider the recommendations above to ensure the bill is clear, culturally grounded, administratively workable, and as inclusive as possible of the diverse 'ohana relationships that sustain our communities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify and for your consideration of these suggestions.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

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