



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

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 2475, H.D. 1, RELATING TO LABELING REQUIREMENTS.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION & COMMERCE

DATE: Thursday, February 26, 2026 **TIME:** 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 329

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Travis T. Moon or Christopher J.I. Leong, Deputy Attorneys
General

Chair Matayoshi and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments to address concerns raised in testimony about this bill.

This bill establishes the definition of 'ōkolehao and labeling restrictions for 'ōkolehao packaging.

The bill as currently drafted does not appear to be preempted by federal law. The United States Constitution's Supremacy Clause provides that the laws of the United States are declared to be supreme to those of the individual states. See U.S. Const. art. VI, cl. 2. The Federal Alcohol Administration Act (27 U.S.C. § 201, *et seq.*) (FAA Act) establishes a permit process for importing, producing, or purchasing distilled spirits, wine, and malt beverages and sets forth alcoholic beverage labeling requirements relating to alcoholic beverages and health.

Section 216 of the FAA Act provides a preemption section that states:

No statement relating to alcoholic beverages and health, other than the statement required by section 215 of this title, shall be required under State law to be placed on any container of an alcoholic beverage, or on any box, carton, or other package, irrespective of the material from which made, that contains such a container.

Because the labeling requirements in this bill do not relate to alcoholic beverages and health, the Department believes it is unlikely that the FAA Act preempts the bill, as drafted.

Furthermore, the bill as currently drafted does not appear to be subject to a compelling challenge under the Foreign Commerce Clause. The United States Constitution provides Congress with the authority to regulate commerce with foreign nations. See U.S. Const. art. I, § 8, cl. 3. The Foreign Commerce Clause is implicated if "a particular state action unduly threatens the purpose of the clause: to ensure a unified national voice in foreign commerce matters raising inherently national concerns and to ensure that individual states do not work to the detriment of the whole nation." *Colgate-Palmolive Co. v. Franchise Tax Bd.*, 10 Cal. App. 4th 1768, 1778 (1992) (citing *Japan Line, Ltd. v. Los Angeles Cnty.*, 441 U.S. 434, 448-449 (1979)). A state law violates this standard if "it either implicates foreign policy issues which must be left to the Federal Government or violates a clear federal directive." See *Container Corp. of Am. v. Franchise Tax Bd.*, 463 U.S. 159, 194 (1983) (internal italics omitted).

Congress' purpose for the FAA Act's labeling requirement is to "establish a comprehensive Federal program, in connection with the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages in or affecting interstate commerce, *to deal with the provision of warning or other information with respect to any relationship between the consumption or abuse of alcoholic beverages and health...*" 27 U.S.C. § 213 (emphasis added). Based on the wording of the FAA Act, it is unlikely that the Foreign Commerce Clause is implicated because the bill does not violate Congress' purpose for enacting its alcoholic beverage labeling requirements.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & BIOSECURITY
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TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION & COMMERCE

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 26, 2026
2:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 329 & VIDEOCONFERENCE

HOUSE BILL NO. 2475, HD1
RELATING TO LABELING REQUIREMENTS

Chair Matayoshi, Vice Chair Grandinetti and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 2475, HD1 which establishes labeling requirements for 'okolehao products. The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity supports this bill.

Establishing labeling requirements for 'okolehao products will help the industry and benefit farmers, distillers, distributors and retailers in Hawaii. The State should regulate the traditional Hawaiian brand names and help industry grow by protecting businesses within the State. Protecting this 'okolehao product should help grow the industry from within and prevent producers from using the 'okolehao name outside of the State. We agree with the legislature that it is important to protect the State's agricultural and cultural landscape while creating an authentic visitor experience rooted in culture, place and the local production of 'okolehao.

DAB also recognizes that ki cultivation and 'okolehao distillation presents opportunity to support Hawaii farmers, while ensuring the consumers receive a product that is truthfully labeled and rooted in Hawaii. We are ready to work with producers to develop guidelines for inspection and certification of the product. However, since distilled spirits is a new product that DAB has not regulated before, it will be a development process to create regulation and inspection procedures for compliance.

DAB respectfully asks for 1 FTE Measurement Standards Inspector V position SR19 \$65,000 initially to help develop inspection processes and regulate this product.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
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February 26, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION & COMMERCE

TESTIMONY ON HB 2475, HD1
RELATING TO LABELING REQUIREMENTS

Conference Room 329 & Videoconference
2:00 PM

Aloha Chair Matayoshi, Vice-Chair Grandinetti, 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 2475, HD1, which establishes labeling requirements for 'okolehao products to ensure that products marketed under that name meet clear production and origin standards.

As an organization representing farmers and ranchers across the State, we support truth-in-labeling policies that protect Hawai'i-grown and Hawai'i-made agricultural products.

Similar to protections adopted for coffee, māmaki tea, and other locally branded products, clear standards help prevent consumer confusion, protect producers who invest in local cultivation and processing, and preserve the integrity of Hawai'i's agricultural identity.

HB 2475, HD1, defines 'okolehao as a distilled spirit made with Hawai'i-grown ki and distilled and bottled in the State. Establishing these standards ensures that products using the 'okolehao name reflect authentic Hawai'i agricultural production and value-added processing.

Clear labeling requirements support local farmers by encouraging in-state cultivation of ki and reinforcing the connection between agriculture, manufacturing, and Hawai'i's broader visitor and retail economy. They also help maintain consumer confidence in products associated with Hawai'i's name and cultural heritage.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Date: February 24th, 2026

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

My name is Naehalani Breeland, and I am the President and Co-Founder of Ola Brew, a Hawai'i Island community- and employee-owned brewery and distillery. Our mission is to strengthen Hawai'i's agricultural economy by sourcing local ingredients, and creating value-added products that reflect our islands' unique culture and heritage.

I am here in strong support of HB2475 because this bill protects Hawai'i's historic distilled spirit, 'Ökolehao, while unlocking its economic potential. 'Ökolehao is made from kī or ti root, a canoe plant with many daily uses, and has a documented history spanning over 230 years. This timeline begins its early distillation in iron pots in the 1790s to international recognition at the 1889 Paris Exposition, federal acknowledgment in the 1940s, and Congressional recognition in 1968. But never a legal definition.

HB2475 establishes clear production and labeling standards: at least 51% Hawai'i-grown kī root, distilled and bottled in Hawai'i. This ensures the economic benefits remain local. Legally protecting 'Ökolehao now positions it for economic growth similar to Kentucky bourbon, which generates \$10.6 billion annually, supports 24,000 jobs, and contributes \$372 million in state and local taxes. Even capturing a fraction of that market would create significant opportunities for Hawai'i farmers, distillers, and related industries.

History also shows the cost of inaction. Kona coffee has suffered economic dilution for decades because labeling and definitions were delayed. Strict protections were established only after long legal battles and settlements exceeding \$41 million. HB2475 ensures 'Ökolehao does not face the same fate, protecting both its heritage identity and economic value from the start.

By passing this bill, Hawai'i can create a thriving, place-based 'Ökolehao industry that strengthens agriculture, supports local jobs, attracts tourism, and builds a globally recognized premium export of the true spirit of Hawai'i.

Mahalo for your consideration and support of HB2475.

Naehalani Breeland, President



Hawaiian Ola Brewing Corporation

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HB-2475-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 12:25:01 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Philip Fukushima	Iron Bottom Spirits	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha to the Committee, Written Testimony Only I'm writing on behalf of Iron Bottom Spirits, located at 75-6099 Kuakini Hwy, Kailua-Kona, HI, in support of House Bill 2475, to create labeling requirements for Okolehao, a traditional spirit of Hawaii. Iron Bottom Spirits and its investors have spent the last 5 years building its distillery in Kailua-Kona, which represents an investment of tens of millions of dollars. The distillery is fully complete and is in the process of starting production. One of several products in development is Okolehao. We fully support this legislation as part of a greater effort to establish Okolehao as a product that is uniquely Hawaiian and can be produced only in the State of Hawaii. Our belief is Okolehao can be developed into a product such as tequila and which can be produced solely in Hawaii and exported globally. The eventual economic impact to Hawaii could be in the billions of dollars. For example, tequila currently contributes \$3 billion annually to Mexico's GDP. This economic impact would support Hawaiian agriculture and manufacturing and create many jobs locally. Efforts are underway at the federal level to designate Okolehao as a Hawaii-only product. This state legislation would mirror those efforts. If any of the committee members would like to visit our Kailua-Kona distillery on your next trip to the Big Island, please reach out. Mahalo, Philip Fukushima, Iron Bottom Spirits, Kailua-Kona, HI, Tel (808) 989-3200

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB2475 HD1

Relating to ‘Ōkolehao; Distilled Spirits; Labelling Requirements
(Date of Hearing: 02/26/2026)

To:

Chair and Members
House Committee on Consumer Protection and Commerce
Hawai‘i State Legislature

From:

Mr Alexander Molyneaux
Founder and Owner / Kahuna Spirits Ltd
Sunbury-on-Thames, Surrey, United Kingdom

alexmolyneaux@hotmail.co.uk

+44 7545 783559

Re: Oppose *HB2475 HD1* — Establishes labeling requirements for ‘ōkolehao products.

POSITION: OPPOSE

My name is Alexander, and I am the founder of Kahuna Okolehao, a business based in the United Kingdom that produces an authentic and traditional form of ‘ōkolehao. Our spirit is based on careful historical research and reflects a sincere commitment to cultural and historical preservation. It respectfully recognises the spirit’s shared British Polynesian heritage and ensures that consumers are accurately and transparently informed about its origins, history and cultural significance. We handcraft our ‘ōkolehao in close adherence to its historic roots, employing traditional pot-still distillation and ingredients historically used by early ‘ōkolehao distillers. Our methods preserve the authenticity, historical integrity, and traditional character of the spirit, ensuring it remains faithful to the legacy of ‘ōkolehao, while being produced responsibly and transparently by our UK-based distillery. At the heart of Kahuna Okolehao is a deep respect for the people and cultures of the Pacific Islands. With every batch we produce, we support selected Pacific organisations working to preserve and protect cultural heritage, ancestral knowledge and empower future generations across the region.

I respectfully oppose HB2475 HD1 which seeks to narrowly define and restrict the use of the term ‘ōkolehao by imposing a specific production formula and geographic

origin requirement for labeling purposes. While protecting cultural heritage and promoting authentic products are laudable objectives, the bills' current formulation rests on historically and factually inaccurate assumptions about the origins and evolution of 'ōkolehao. By codifying a rigid and incomplete definition into statute, the legislation would not only misrepresent the historical record but also impose unjustified regulatory burdens on lawful producers, including those operating internationally who produce spirits in good faith under established regulatory frameworks.

I have dedicated more than half a decade to rigorous research on the history and cultural context of 'ōkolehao, including extensive fieldwork and archival study throughout the Pacific, particularly in Hawai'i. I am a history graduate of King's College London, and my work has involved careful examination of a broad range of primary sources, including historical newspapers, shipping records, government documents, correspondence and early firsthand accounts as well as relevant secondary scholarship. Through this research, I have developed a comprehensive understanding of the spirit's origins, production methods and evolution over time. The historical record demonstrates that many commonly held assumptions about 'ōkolehao, particularly those suggesting a single fixed formula or geographic limitation are incomplete, oversimplified, or inconsistent with documented evidence. My work is guided by a commitment to historical accuracy and cultural integrity. The product we develop and produce seeks to reflect the spirit's authentic and historically grounded reality, rather than perpetuating the simplified and selectively rewritten narratives currently about 'ōkolehao that have increasingly shaped the modern marketplace and, in doing so, risk distorting and diminishing 'ōkolehao's true historical legacy.

'Ōkolehao origins are actually traced back to Britain and are deeply intertwined with British maritime and naval history. In the late 1700s and 1800s, British sailors, including ship captains, HMS *Bounty* mutineers, castaways, whalers, missionaries, beachcombers and traders travelled across the Pacific Islands, introducing the previously unknown art of distillation. Through their experiments with local ingredients, they created 'ōkolehao in its earliest forms, initially using the root of a cordyline plant known as ti. Over time, its recipes and mash bills evolved, giving rise to the many variations of 'ōkolehao throughout the Pacific.

The earliest known record of 'ōkolehao dates to the 1790s, when William Stevenson, an escaped British convict from Bo'ness, Scotland, arrived on the shores of O'ahu, Hawai'i. Stevenson fashioned a makeshift still using iron whaling pots and a gun barrel to distil a spirit from the root of ti plant a type of cordyline. He is widely credited as the first person in history to produce this spirit. However, the story of 'ōkolehao does not begin and end in Hawai'i, as is mistakenly assumed. In the same decade, *Bounty* mutineer William McCoy arrived on Pitcairn Island and distilled a strong

liquor from the same cordyline root in 1796. Today, the Pitcairn Islands Study Center, a specialized research archive and collection dedicated to the history, culture, and people of the Pitcairn Islands and housed at Pacific Union College in Angwin, California, recognizes in its *Pitcairn Island Encyclopedia* this spirit as 'ōkolehao, highlighting its broader historical and cultural significance across the Pacific.

Beyond the documented distillation of 'ōkolehao on Pitcairn Island, numerous 19th century historical records describe its production by British sea captains, sailors, beachcombers, castaways, whalers, missionaries, traders, as well as local chiefs and inhabitants across the Pacific. Drawing from both primary sources and secondary historical analyses, I have traced evidence of this spirit's distillation in Tahiti, Bora Bora, the Marquesas Islands, Fiji, the Cook Islands, Huahine, Mo'orea, Ra'iātea, Taha'a, Futuna, Rapa Iti, the Tuamotus, Tonga, Kosrae, and even New Zealand. Together, these records demonstrate that 'ōkolehao was not confined to a single island group but formed part of a broader pattern of cross-cultural exchange and adaptation throughout the Pacific in the nineteenth century. Some examples of the historical sources supporting this argument include the letters and reports of the London Missionary Society, which document the presence and impact of 'ōkolehao throughout the Society Islands. In 1852, Hawaiian missionary Luther Halsey Gulick recorded the distillation of ti root spirits on Kosrae, Micronesia. That same year, British beachcomber Thomas Clifton Lawson reported that the practice of distilling this spirit had spread widely throughout the Marquesas. British naturalist, traveler, and writer John Whetham Boddam-Whetham noted in his 1876 work *Pearls of the Pacific* that the inhabitants of Futuna were distilling ti root during his visit. Likewise, in the mid-to-late 1870s, British travel writer Herbert Stonehewer Cooper documented island life in *The Coral Lands of the Pacific*, recording the distillation of ti root spirits in Tonga. British Naval Captain John Erskine, serving aboard HMS *Havannah*, recorded during his 1849 voyage through the Western Pacific that inhabitants in Fiji were distilling a form of 'ōkolehao from ti root as well as from banana and sugarcane. His account highlights a broader historical reality; 'ōkolehao was never confined to just *Cordyline fruticosa*, nor was it produced according to any fixed or standardized mash bill.

19th and early 20th century records demonstrate that 'ōkolehao was also distilled from a wide range of ingredients, including rice, pineapple, molasses, sugarcane, sweet potato, potato, kiawe beans, pandanus, prickly pear, honey, corn, sugar, oranges, papaya, grapes, banana, breadfruit, guava, taro, watermelon, and *Cordyline australis*. Moreover, contemporary Hawaiian-language newspapers such as *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa*, *Ka Lāhui Hawai'i*, and *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika*, along with English-language publications including the *Evening Star*, *The Hawaiian Star*, *The Hawaiian Gazette*, *The Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, *Evening Bulletin*, *The Honolulu Republican*, and *The Daily Astorian*, consistently reported 'ōkolehao being produced from many different ingredients often without any reference to ti root at all. These

records make it clear that the claim that ti root must be present for a spirit to be classified as 'ōkolehao is historically inaccurate, unsupported, and a misinterpretation of the evidence. In fact, many Pacific islands outside Hawai'i such as Bora Bora, Fiji, the Marquesas Islands, New Zealand, and Taha'a historically distilled versions of 'ōkolehao using ingredients other than ti root. There is no historical record supporting a requirement that 'ōkolehao contain 51% ti root or any other specific ratio; any such figure is entirely invented.

For over two centuries, 'ōkolehao was distilled across the islands of the Pacific. While its production declined and disappeared on many islands over time, its historical presence demonstrates that 'ōkolehao is far more than a uniquely Hawaiian spirit. It is a British Polynesian spirit with a geographic and cultural heritage spanning much of the Pacific. Although it was known by different names on different islands, it remained the same type of distilled spirit. Like vodka or gin, 'ōkolehao is a generic category of spirit, defined by its method of production, typically pot distillation and usually the use of ingredients indigenous to the Pacific Islands, rather than by a single region, ingredient, or recipe. It is not the same as geographically protected spirits such as Tequila, Armagnac, Cognac, or Champagne, which are intrinsically tied to their regions and traditions, and whose names reflect that exclusive geographic origin. By contrast, 'ōkolehao evolved across islands, adapting to local resources, and reflects a shared Pacific history of distillation and cultural exchange. It is also worth noting that 'ōkolehao was commercially produced in California between 1987 and 2003 by the LeVecke Corporation and has been distilled in the United Kingdom since 2021 by Kahuna Okolehao.

While the intent to recognize cultural heritage is important, HB2475 HD1 would enshrine a specific production method and geographic limitation in law that is built on incorrect information about 'ōkolehao's history and threatens to place undue regulatory burdens on lawful producers everywhere, including those operating outside Hawai'i who produce the spirit accurately, faithfully and legally. 'Ōkolehao's heritage is rooted in a centuries-old Pacific cultural exchange between British and Polynesian communities, encompassing but not limited to Hawai'i. It is not confined to a single location or rigid formula, as HB2475 HD1 proposes. For these reasons, I respectfully oppose this bill and urge a careful re-examination of the historical record, recognizing that 'ōkolehao is a complex British Polynesian spirit with a history and presence both in Hawai'i and internationally. My testimony will further address specific provisions of the bill and the concerns they raise.

1. "51% Ti Root (Kī)" Requirement Is Factually Inaccurate

HB2475 HD1 defines 'ōkolehao, in part, as a spirit that "is distilled from a fermented mash, at least fifty-one per cent of which is derived from kī root (*Cordyline fruticosa*)

grown in the State.” This rigid percentage requirement is not supported by documented historical practice and appears to lack a clear evidentiary foundation. As drafted, it risks conflicting with the bill’s stated purpose by narrowing a historically diverse and adaptive tradition into a modern statutory formula that does not reflect the historical record. While early ‘ōkolehao is widely described as being made from baked kī root, historical accounts consistently show that producers supplemented and at times entirely replaced kī with other fermentable ingredients such as sugarcane, rice, pineapple, sweet potato, honey and other locally available starches to increase alcohol yield and improve drinkability. Numerous Hawaiian and English language newspapers from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries document recipes and prosecutions involving ‘ōkolehao made without kī root at all.

Contemporary newspaper evidence from Hawai‘i during this period clearly demonstrates that ‘ōkolehao was produced from a broad range of ingredients, often with no use of kī (ti) root. For example, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* in an article dated May 1, 1875, reported from West Maui: “The manufacture of okolehao from molasses, prickly-pear, and water-melon, and swipes of sweet-potatoes, is very ingeniously performed all over the county”. Decades later, the same paper on July 30th, 1901 featured an article titled “OKOLEHAO FROM HONEY”.

The *Hawaiian Star* provides further documentation. On November 24th, 1902, page 5, in an article titled “OKOLEHAO MADE FROM KIAWE BEANS” it mentions the following “the mash is a very interesting composition. So far as it can be roughly analysed by appearance it is composed of kiawe beans, corn, bran and a few potatoes and honey.” On May 26th, 1904, page 5, the paper recorded an incident involving a Japanese okolehao distiller called Takita: “Pineapples were largely used in the manufacturer of Takita’s okolehao, and the pineapples were stolen, ti is believed, from the Wahiawa colonists. The Japanese hut and the still were hidden away in a gulch and the okolehao-makers evidently stole pineapples from the planters. There is no ti plant in the vicinity and no ti was used in making the okolehao. A part of the okolehao seized is 90 proof, while the rest is much weaker. It is made from beans, hops and sugar, as well as pineapple.”

Additional reports reinforce this pattern. The *Hawaiian Star*, June 29th, 1906 page 8 titled “RICE OKOLEHAO” it mentions a Chinese man being arrested in Kauai for having a still in his procession. “He was using it, it is alleged to make okolehao from rice”. The *Hawaiian Star*, August 16th, 1906, refers to an okolehao of a rather poor quality made from sugar only. The *Hawaiian Star* on May 21st, 1907, second edition page 6 states “had they been able to have operated the still for any time, they would have turned out okolehao in wholesale quantities. The mash consisted of bran, sugar and potatoes.”

These repeated contemporaneous accounts demonstrate that 'ōkolehao was historically an adaptive and resourceful spirit, produced from a variety of locally available fermentable ingredients. While early forms were associated with baked kī root, the historical record does not support the claim that 'ōkolehao was exclusively or even consistently made from kī. The assertion that 'ōkolehao can only be distilled from at least 51% kī root is therefore inconsistent with documented historical evidence and reflects a poor understanding of the spirit.

It is widely documented that 'ōkolehao was produced from a variety of ingredients, often without any reference to kī (ti) root at all. The assertion that kī is required for a spirit to be classified as 'ōkolehao is therefore unsupported by the historical record and reflects a misunderstanding of the spirit's true heritage and evolution. By codifying an arbitrary fifty-one percent threshold, the statute imposes a requirement that is not grounded in cultural practice, agricultural history, or documented production standards. There is no official recipe, historic production tradition, regulatory precedent, or archival evidence establishing that at least fifty-one percent of the mash must be derived from kī root for a spirit to be considered authentic 'ōkolehao. Such a mandate risks excluding otherwise legitimate and traditionally produced 'ōkolehao from qualifying under the law. In doing so, the provision may ultimately undermine the credibility and cultural integrity of the statutory definition, raising serious questions about whether it genuinely reflects the character of 'ōkolehao or merely enforces an arbitrary numerical formula.

2. The Bill's Geographic Restriction Is Not Consistent with Proven Production History

As noted previously, 'ōkolehao has not been produced exclusively in Hawai'i, as the Act suggests. Historically, the spirit was made across the Pacific Islands for well over a century, reflecting a broader regional tradition rather than a single, geographically confined origin. In more recent decades, documented commercial production outside Hawai'i further confirms this pattern and demonstrates that 'ōkolehao has long been recognized as a spirit defined by its traditional ingredients and production methods rather than by strict geographic boundaries. Accordingly, HB2475 HD1's proposed geographic restriction is inconsistent with the established historical production of 'ōkolehao and risks creating an inaccurate and exclusionary statutory definition of the spirit, one that does not fully reflect its true historical development, cultural diffusion, and continued production beyond Hawai'i.

The historical record does not support limiting 'ōkolehao to a single location, as documented evidence shows that 'ōkolehao was commercially produced outside Hawai'i for a substantial period of time, including manufacture in California from approximately 1987 through the early 2000s. Court proceedings in David E.

Fazendin vs. Hawaiian Distillers further revealed that 'ōkolehao was manufactured by Hawaiian Distillers at Mira Loma, California as part of the LeVecke Corporation, reinforcing that production was not geographically confined to Hawai'i and establishing a clear precedent that the spirit has historically been defined by its ingredients and production methods rather than location alone. Because HB2475 HD1 seeks to impose a strict geographic limitation, it conflicts with this proven production history; geographic exclusivity is typically justified only when continuous, location-specific production defines a product's identity, yet 'ōkolehao's documented manufacture outside Hawai'i demonstrates that it has long been recognized and produced beyond the islands without losing its identity.

Modern production further reinforces this reality, as Kahuna Okolehao, has been actively researching, developing, and producing 'ōkolehao in the United Kingdom since 2021, reflecting the continued evolution and international recognition of 'ōkolehao as a distinct distilled spirit rather than a location-restricted commodity. Imposing a geographic restriction despite this history would contradict documented fact, create an artificial definition inconsistent with the spirit's traditional basis in raw materials and production methods, disrupt legitimate producers operating in good faith outside Hawai'i and risk legal and commercial inconsistency by codifying a definition that conflicts with historical evidence. For these reasons, HB2475 HD1's geographic restriction should be reconsidered in favor of a definition grounded in traditional raw materials, fermentation and distillation methods, which more accurately reflects the historical record.

Unlike geographically protected spirits such as Tequila, Cognac, Armagnac, or Champagne, 'ōkolehao is not inherently tied to a specific region. Spirits with geographic protection must be produced within a legally defined area, and their names explicitly indicate that origin. For example, Tequila can only be produced in the town of Tequila and its surrounding designated region in Mexico; Cognac must be distilled and aged in the Cognac region of France; and Champagne can only come from the Champagne region of France. These protections exist because the unique characteristics, quality, and reputation of these spirits are directly linked to their place of production, including local climate, soil, water, and long-established regional practices.

Geographic protection of a spirit requires a continuous and well-documented connection between the product and its place of origin. Spirits like Cognac or Tequila have been consistently produced in their designated regions for decades or even centuries, establishing a strong historical and cultural link to their geographic source. By contrast, 'ōkolehao production has been intermittent, with commercial production in Hawai'i ceasing entirely between 2003 and 2009, and with documented instances of production occurring outside the State, including in California and more recently the United Kingdom. Additionally, from the 1940s through the early 2000s, much of

the 'ōkolehao produced and sold in Hawai'i was made as a substitute or imitation of the original spirit, rather than reflecting authentic traditional methods, further breaking any continuous production history. These gaps demonstrate that 'ōkolehao lacks the sustained, location-specific production required for geographic protection, making the proposal to codify it as a regionally protected product historically and practically unsound.

It's defining qualities of fermentable island ingredients and distillation methods can be replicated outside the islands. Because its character does not depend on location, 'ōkolehao lacks the legally enforceable connection to a region that geographical protections require. The name 'ōkolehao itself is not geographic; unlike "Tequila" or "Champagne," it does not reference a region. For a geographical protection, the name generally must identify the region of origin, which 'ōkolehao does not. For these reasons, granting 'ōkolehao geographic protection would be inconsistent with its historical production and defining characteristics. Legislation seeking to protect the spirit should instead focus on authentic ingredients and traditional production methods, which accurately reflect its heritage and preserve its cultural significance.

3. The Generic Character of the Term 'Ōkolehao

The historical and commercial record demonstrates that 'ōkolehao functions as a generic spirit, not a product that can be confined to a single formula, producer group, or narrowly defined geographic indication. From its earliest documented references in the nineteenth century, the term "ōkolehao" was used descriptively to denote a locally produced distilled spirit, rather than a fixed mash bill, uniform production method, or protected place of origin. Over time, its ingredients, production techniques, and commercial presentation evolved alongside changes in agriculture, trade, and technology. This longstanding variability is inconsistent with the legal principles underlying geographic protection, which require a stable, clearly defined product identity intrinsically linked to a specific geographic environment and consistently applied production standards.

A useful international parallel is *rakia*. *Rakia* developed across a broad region of Southeastern and Central Europe and has been produced in multiple countries under diverse local traditions and names. It is not made from a single fermentable ingredient; depending on the region, it may be distilled from plums, grapes, apricots, pears, quince, figs, or other fruits. While certain subcategories (such as national designations) may receive limited protections, the term "*rakia*" itself functions generically to describe a category of traditional fruit distillates rather than a single protected product tied to one country or formula. Its identity rests in a shared distilling tradition, not a rigid statutory definition.

‘Ōkolehao presents a comparable case. Historically, it has not been defined by one exclusive raw material or an unbroken, uniform production standard tied to a single locality. Instead, it emerged as a regional distilling tradition that adapted over time. Attempting to retroactively impose a narrow geographic indication framework onto such a historically fluid and commercially descriptive term risks misrepresenting its true nature. Like vodka or gin, ‘ōkolehao has long been marketed as a type of spirit rather than a protected regional brand, with broad commercial use and considerable variation in ingredients, fermentation, and distillation. It has never been consistently regulated by a formal consortium, tied to a specific production area, or codified under enforceable standards. Under both international and domestic principles, once a term becomes generic in common use, it cannot be retroactively monopolized as a geographic indication. ‘Ōkolehao’s long history as a descriptive, category-level spirit therefore weighs decisively against its eligibility for GI-style exclusivity.

4. Regulatory Overlap and Conflicts with Federal Law

HB2475 HD1 acknowledges that the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) regulates distilled spirits in interstate commerce. TTB, a federal agency, has its own classification and labeling framework for distilled spirits, including *distilled spirits specialty* designations. State-imposed definitions that override federal labeling regimes especially for interstate and imported products can create confusion for producers, importers, distributors, and consumers.

Regulatory alignment is critical to ensure fair and consistent interstate commerce, especially for alcoholic beverages that require federal COLA (Certificate of Label Approval) review before sale. Discrepancies between federal and state definitions could result in products being compliant nationally but restricted in Hawai‘i, creating unnecessary trade barriers that may violate principles of interstate commerce.

Under current TTB regulations, ‘ōkolehao is recognized as a Distilled Spirits Specialty (DSS) product with no set standard of identity like other well-established categories. This federal classification allows producers to legally make and sell ‘ōkolehao as long as they submit the appropriate formula and label applications to the TTB and provide a truthful statement of composition. In practice, this system enables Hawaiian distillers to market ‘ōkolehao nationally and internationally without being restricted by narrowly defined state standards, providing flexibility that encourages innovation and adaptation to market demand.

The existing federal approach is also cost-effective and efficient. Distillers submit their formula and label once to the TTB, and upon approval, they can distribute their product across all states without navigating multiple, potentially conflicting state

review processes. Compliance under the TTB is predictable, and the agency provides guidance and tools, such as the Distilled Spirits Formula Tool, to simplify submissions. By applying uniform standards across the United States, the TTB system avoids duplicative regulation and the associated costs of multiple label runs, re-registrations, or legal consultations. This centralization benefits Hawaii economically without the need for a separate state-level regulatory regime that could fragment markets or impose redundant administrative burdens.

Moreover, the TTB classification provides market access and legal certainty today. Hawaiian 'ōkolehao products are already entering the national marketplace legally under the DSS designation, demonstrating that the federal system works to support economic activity while maintaining legal clarity. In contrast, HB2475 HD1's state-specific production and labeling mandates risk creating conflicts with federal regulations. For instance, a product federally approved as DSS but not meeting the thresholds defined by HB2475 HD1 could remain legal to sell elsewhere in the U.S. while being barred from marketing as "ōkolehao" in Hawaii. Such a dual regulatory system could increase compliance costs, generate potential litigation, and create uncertainty for producers, ultimately discouraging investment and slowing economic development.

The TTB's federal system already provides a workable, cost-effective framework that allows 'ōkolehao to be legally produced, labeled, and sold nationwide while supporting Hawaiian producers and economic growth. Federal classification ensures uniform market access, predictable compliance, and regulatory clarity. Imposing a separate state labeling regime, as HB2475 HD1 proposes, risks duplicative regulation, higher costs, and legal conflicts.

5. Uncertain Economic Benefit

Supporters of HB2475 HD1 cite protections similar to those for bourbon or tequila as a model for economic growth and cultural preservation. While these spirits have indeed benefited from strong geographic and labeling protections, it is important to note key differences: bourbon and tequila have well-established global reputations, decades of market recognition, and legal protections under federal and international frameworks. 'Ōkolehao, in contrast, is a relatively small, niche product with limited awareness in Hawai'i and globally. There is no guarantee that state-specific labeling alone will generate comparable economic gains, and the bill's strict mandates may actually create barriers to market growth. Visitors already travel specifically for those experiences because the products are widely known and marketed internationally. 'Ōkolehao lacks this level of global brand awareness or demand. The U.S. Supreme Court has noted in legal contexts that at least historically 'ōkolehao sales

represented well under 1 % of total liquor sales in Hawai'i (in a 1980s case regarding taxation).

HB2475 HD1 imposes restrictive definitions, requiring at least 51% locally grown ki root, in-state distillation and bottling which may reduce market flexibility for producers. Small and medium-sized distillers could face significant costs to comply, such as sourcing ingredients exclusively from Hawai'i, investing in additional infrastructure, or reformulating existing products. These additional burdens limit experimentation and innovation, which are essential for craft and niche spirits to attract new customers and enter competitive markets.

Ultimately, while HB2475 HD1 aims to promote Hawaii's economy and protect cultural heritage, the economic benefits are uncertain, and the bill could inadvertently limit the very growth and opportunities it intends to support.

6. HB2475 HD1 Risks Violating the Foreign Commerce Clause

HB2475 HD1's requirement that 'ōkolehao be both distilled and bottled in Hawai'i is overly restrictive and poses significant legal and economic risks for foreign producers. By defining the spirit solely by its in-state production, the bill excludes foreign distillers who adhere to traditional methods, effectively granting a competitive advantage to local producers while barring legitimate international competitors. This restriction directly implicates the U.S. Constitution's Foreign Commerce Clause, which gives Congress exclusive authority to regulate trade with other nations and prohibits states from enacting laws that discriminate against or place an undue burden on foreign commerce. State laws that impede foreign trade are subject to strict judicial scrutiny and are frequently struck down unless the state can demonstrate a compelling local interest that cannot be achieved through less restrictive means. By effectively preventing foreign-produced 'ōkolehao from being marketed in Hawai'i and the United States, HB2475 HD1 not only risks legal invalidation but also limits consumer choice, reduces competition and undermines the global recognition and economic growth potential of 'ōkolehao.

7. Comment on the Agricultural Origin Requirement

The provision requiring that 'ōkolehao be "distilled from agricultural products, at least fifty-one per cent of which were cultivated and harvested within the State" appears inconsistent with the stated intent of the measure. The purpose of the bill is to recognize 'ōkolehao as a product that is distinctive to Hawai'i and to support Hawai'i's agricultural industry. However, the allowance of a substantial portion of

agricultural inputs to be sourced from outside the State weakens the connection between the product and Hawai'i-based agriculture. Permitting nearly half of the agricultural components to originate elsewhere does not clearly advance the goal of promoting or sustaining local agricultural production. This inconsistency raises concerns regarding whether the definition meaningfully reflects the cultural and geographic identity the measure seeks to protect. A statutory framework intended to affirm 'ōkolehao as a product of Hawai'i should maintain a clear and coherent nexus to Hawai'i agriculture. As drafted, the definition appears to dilute that nexus and undermines the stated objectives of the Act.

If nearly half of the raw materials can be imported, a significant portion of the economic benefit leaves the state. That means local farmers miss out on potential revenue, land use opportunities, job creation, and long-term agricultural investment. Additionally, the current structure of the 'ōkolehao industry already limits broader agricultural benefit. Most existing producers grow their own kī plants for distillation. While this supports their individual businesses, it does not meaningfully stimulate the wider agricultural economy. Independent farmers, small agricultural operators, and diversified growers are largely excluded from participation in the supply chain. As written, HB2475 HD1 risks creating a vertically integrated model where distillers import nearly half their inputs and self-supply the rest, bypassing local farmers altogether. This concentrates economic benefit within a small number of businesses rather than expanding opportunity across Hawai'i's agricultural sector. For these reasons, the agricultural origin requirement, as currently written, does not appear fully aligned with the measure's expressed purpose.

8. Restrictions on Hawaiian Imagery and Marketing of 'Ōkolehao

As a producer of 'ōkolehao based in the United Kingdom, I intend to sell this spirit in the United States. The clause in HB2475 HD1 that restricts the use of Hawaiian imagery, place names, or motifs unless the spirit meets the bill's narrow definition directly affects my ability to market and sell a legally and accurately produced product. Our labeling clearly states that the product is distilled and bottled in the U.K., in accordance with federal labelling regulations making it impossible for a reasonable consumer to be misled about its origin.

If enacted, this provision would impose unjustified regulatory barriers on lawful international producers, restricting commerce and undermining principles of truthful commercial speech protected under the First Amendment. U.S. law safeguards the right of producers to truthfully describe and represent their products, including the use of cultural, historical, or geographic references that are not misleading to consumers. By broadly prohibiting Hawaiian imagery, even when used honestly and transparently, the bill would limit the ability of lawful producers like myself to

communicate the heritage, context, and identity of 'ōkolehao to consumers, constraining competition and market access. For these reasons, I respectfully oppose this clause and urge lawmakers to carefully consider its disproportionate impact on international producers operating legally and transparently.

9. Voluntary Certification Mark Program

The clause allowing the department to establish a voluntary certification mark program raises significant concerns regarding cost and administrative burden for the State of Hawaii. Even though the program is labeled “voluntary,” implementing and maintaining it would require substantial resources, including staff, training, oversight, and marketing, inspections, laboratory tests and diverting funds from other essential state services. Additionally, creating and managing a certification system introduces administrative complexity, with detailed regulations, application processes, and monitoring mechanisms that could overwhelm the department. There is also potential for confusion or legal challenges, as businesses that do not participate could still claim compliance, and inconsistent enforcement could lead to costly disputes. Ultimately, the limited benefits of a voluntary program, verifying only participating businesses and potentially confusing consumers, do not justify the financial and operational burdens it would place on the state. A more effective approach would be to focus on clear guidance and education for businesses rather than establishing a costly certification system.

10. Comment on Nonconsumer Package Labeling Clause

The labeling requirement that nonconsumer packages of 'ōkolehao “bear a label clearly stating that the product is ‘Hawai‘i-distilled 'ōkolehao made with Hawai‘i-grown kī”” raises significant concerns. Under the bill, up to forty nine percent of the agricultural inputs, including kī, can be sourced from outside Hawai‘i. Yet the label implies that all kī used is locally grown, which may not be accurate. This creates the potential to mislead consumers about the true origin of the product and could expose producers to unnecessary liability, even if they are following the law. In its current form, the labeling provision is inconsistent with the bill’s stated goal of promoting authentic, Hawai‘i-sourced 'ōkolehao and risks creating confusion for both producers and consumers.

Conclusion

In closing, I respectfully submit that HB2475 HD1, while well-intentioned in its desire to honor Hawai‘i’s heritage and support local industry, is built upon historical, legal

and economic assumptions that do not withstand careful scrutiny. The bill codifies a fixed 51% kī root requirement unsupported by the documented historical record; imposes a geographic restriction inconsistent with over two centuries of production history; attempts to transform a historically generic and adaptive spirit into a narrowly confined statutory product; risks conflict with established federal regulatory frameworks; raises serious concerns under the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Clauses; creates uncertainty regarding economic benefit; and introduces labeling and certification provisions that may mislead consumers, burden producers, and strain state resources.

‘Ōkolehao’s history is complex, adaptive, and rooted in cross-cultural exchange throughout the Pacific. It has evolved over time in response to available agricultural inputs, technological development and changing markets. The historical record demonstrates variability in ingredients, production methods, and location. Attempting to retroactively impose a rigid formula and exclusive geographic boundary upon such a tradition risks misrepresenting its authentic character rather than preserving it.

If the Legislature’s objective is to support Hawai‘i agriculture and promote Hawaiian-made products, there are alternative approaches that would better achieve those goals. A framework focused on clearly defined voluntary labeling for “Hawai‘i-distilled” or “Hawai‘i-grown kī” products without excluding historically accurate forms produced elsewhere would preserve consumer transparency while avoiding constitutional concerns and regulatory conflict.

I offer this testimony not in opposition to Hawai‘i’s cultural heritage, on the contrary, my work has been motivated by deep respect for the Pacific’s history and traditions, but in opposition to a statutory definition that risks distorting that history and creating legal and commercial consequences that may ultimately undermine the spirit it seeks to protect.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to reconsider HB2475 HD1 in its current form and to undertake a careful re-examination of the historical record, regulatory landscape and constitutional implications before codifying a definition of ‘ōkolehao into law.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your thoughtful consideration of these concerns.

Respectfully submitted,
Alexander Molyneaux

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

My name is Ilenia Chiaviello. Before addressing the substance of the bill, I wish to note that I am an Italian national with a longstanding interest in the history, culture, and traditional craft practices of Hawai‘i and the wider Pacific. I visited Hawai‘i in 2023 and travelled extensively across Pacific islands in 2024. My testimony is offered in good faith and out of respect for the historical and cultural integrity of okolehao.

I first encountered okolehao during my initial visit to Hawai‘i and have since consumed okolehao produced by Island Distillers and Hanalei Distillers. I also visited the Hanalei distillery on Kaua‘i, where I was disappointed to learn that there appeared to be little understanding of the documented history of okolehao. They described it as an “ancient Hawaiian spirit,” which does not align with the historical record. Despite producing and marketing the spirit, there seemed to be no awareness of William Stevenson, who is widely associated with its early development, nor of the broader historical context of the spirit.

I observed similar inaccuracies from Island Distillers on their public communications following my purchase of their product, including claims that an escaped Australian convict created the spirit, a statement that does not align with historical timelines as Australia did not exist as a nation in this period. This pattern of misinformation raised broader concerns for me about the state of historical knowledge surrounding the okolehao industry in Hawai‘i. While I am encouraged to see new interest in okolehao, including a new distillery in Hilo, I am also concerned by repeated historical inaccuracies from Ola Brew, including claims that Polynesians practiced distillation prior to external contact and may have independently produced the spirit. I encountered the following published statement: “Jacobson and Breeland are in the camp that believes the Hawaiians had likely already discerned the process of distillation for themselves, as there is evidence of early distilleries in places throughout Polynesia, such as Tahiti.” Narratives of this kind appear unsupported by verifiable historical evidence. The continued circulation of such claims risks undermining the credibility and reputation of okolehao. History and facts should not be shaped by marketing narratives at the expense of accuracy. Transparency and authenticity are essential principles, and in Italy, where I am from, these values are treated with great seriousness in the protection of artisanal food and drink heritage.

I mean no disrespect to current producers, and I am pleased that they continue to produce this rare spirit. However, the broader historical understanding of okolehao remains limited, and in some cases appears based on superficial or insufficient research. Claims that it is an ancient Hawaiian spirit are particularly problematic, as distilled alcohol was a post-contact introduction and is not recognized as part of traditional Native Hawaiian culture. This raises an important question: how can producers market a historic craft spirit without a clear understanding of its origins or authentic methods of production? Historically, production involved an imu, open-air fermentation and pot still distillation.

I respectfully oppose HB2475 HD1.

I oppose redefining okolehao in a way that does not reflect its true history or heritage. In one distillery, I observed the use of a continuous column still to produce okolehao, a method associated with industrial-scale alcohol production rather than traditional craft practice. Pot still distillation was historically the primary method available in the region for over a century. This experience highlighted, in my view, a broader lack of historical awareness. Any statutory definition should consider historically grounded production practices, rather than focusing narrowly on unsupported ingredient ratios.

The historical record does not support the narrow definition proposed in this bill. Okolehao is associated as early as the 1790s with William Stevenson, a British figure in Hawai'i. Its development occurred during a period of maritime exchange and foreign influence. It was not created in isolation, nor was it confined to a single fixed formula as it rapidly evolved to use other ingredients. Historically, okolehao has been produced using different ingredients and methods. There was no uniform 51 % ti-root requirement. I read an article from 2003 where a company called Sandwich Island Distilling released the recipe of their okolehao they were bringing to the market where the mash bill was to be 25% ti root, 20% rice, and 55% cane sugar. I am fairly confident the okolehao I drank was not 51% ti root as it was very sweet and made with sugarcane as well. Historic production varied depending on availability of fermentables, that variation is part of its history and should be honoured not overwritten.

HB2475 HD1 imposes a rigid statutory definition that does not account for that historical flexibility. In doing so, it risks transforming a living, evolving product into a legally restricted category based on a modern formulation rather than documented tradition.

HB2475 HD1 also appears to assume strict geographic exclusivity. However, the historical record shows that okolehao developed in a context of international maritime contact and exchange with British sailors. Given these influences, it is not historically inconsistent for variations of okolehao or related spirits to have appeared beyond Hawai'i. Historical references indicate similar distillation practices in other parts of the Pacific, including Tahiti and Pitcairn. A geographically rigid definition may therefore not fully reflect the historical reality of the spirit's development.

As someone with a deep interest in history and traditional craft spirits, I took care to study okolehao before offering this testimony. My opposition is grounded not in criticism, but in respect, respect for historical accuracy, for cultural heritage, and for the importance of preserving traditional products in a way that reflects their true origins and evolution.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to reconsider HB2475 HD1 and avoid adopting a definition that may unintentionally misrepresent the historical development and character of okolehao.

Warm regards,
Ilenia Chiaviello

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to formally object to HB2475 HD1, which seeks to protect the name Okolehao by restricting its production exclusively to Hawaii, mandating a minimum Ti root content of 51%, and imposing specific labelling requirements. My objection is based on the following grounds:

I respectfully object to the proposed bill on the following grounds:

1. Provenance

- a) Okolehao is a generic name across Polynesia. The term Okolehao has historically been used across Polynesia to describe a type of distilled spirit derived from various roots or sugars. Restricting its use to a single formula or geographic origin ignores its established status as a generic term for a type of spirit, rather than a proprietary or regionally unique product.
- b) Okolehao is not a traditional Hawaiian distilled spirit as the art of distillation was introduced to Hawaii by Europeans in the 18th Century.
- c) Okolehao has been produced outside Hawaii. Records show that Okolehao has been produced in locations outside of Hawaii, including California and Great Britain. Okolehao was produced in California in the 1990's by the LeVecke corporation in Mira Loma and there are court records available to confirm this fact. Imposing geographic restrictions on the name would unfairly restrict producers outside Hawaii who are legally producing a product long recognised by this name. Furthermore, restricting the name, ingredients, and place of origin ignores history and imposes unnecessary limits on free trade and competition.
- d) Traditional ingredients have always varied and no single formulation defines Okolehao. It is very well known that a wide range of roots, vegetables and fruits have been used in the production of Okolehao. While Ti root and sugar cane are commonly used in modern formulations, the historical production of Okolehao has included a wide variety of ingredients including banana, bran, kiwae beans, rice, pineapple, sugar cane, oranges and taro for over two hundred years. Limiting production exclusively to 51% Ti root imposes an artificial and unnecessary constraint on a traditional beverage that has always exhibited diversity in its formulation.
Mandating a single formula and geographic origin does not protect Hawaiian heritage, it restricts innovation and unfairly prevents legitimate producers both inside and outside Hawaii from using a name long recognised internationally.
- e) Conflict with free trade principle. HB2475 HD1's proposed protections restrict competition and innovation by dictating specific ingredients and labelling. Such restrictions go against the spirit of free trade and open commerce, which allows producers to create and market products under widely recognised, generic names.

2. Constitutional & Regulatory Issues

I would draw committee members attention to the following issues:

- a) Federal Pre-emption Under the Supremacy Clause
The Supremacy Clause of the United States Constitution (U.S. Const. art. VI, cl. 2) provides that federal law pre-empts conflicting state law. Distilled spirits labelling for products entering interstate commerce is governed by the Federal Alcohol Administration Act (27 U.S.C. § 201 et seq.) and its implementing regulations at 27 C.F.R. Part 5, administered exclusively by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB).
Under this framework, any distilled spirit sold in interstate commerce must obtain a Certificate of Label Approval (COLA) from TTB. Federal courts have consistently held that where Congress establishes a comprehensive regulatory scheme intended to ensure national uniformity, conflicting state requirements are pre-empted. See, e.g., Capital Cities Cable, Inc.

v. Crisp, 467 U.S. 691 (1984) (holding that state alcohol regulation may not conflict with federal law governing interstate commerce).

HB2475 HD1 seeks to establish a state-specific definition and labelling requirements for Okolehao. However, there is currently no federal standard of identity for Okolehao under 27 C.F.R. Part 5. If the State mandates labelling terminology or production thresholds that differ from or exceed what TTB recognises, small producers could be placed in the untenable position of complying with state law while being denied federal COLA approval for interstate sales.

Such a conflict would trigger obstacle pre-emption because the state law would stand as an obstacle to Congress's objective of maintaining uniform national labelling standards for distilled spirits.

b) Absence of Geographic Exclusivity and Global Production History

Unlike federally recognised geographic indications such as "Cognac" or "Tequila," there are currently no federal or international legal restrictions preventing producers in other states or countries from producing and marketing a product as Okolehao, subject to general labelling rules.

Historically, products identified as Okolehao have been produced not only in Hawaii but also in other jurisdictions, including the State of California. I have also consumed Okolehao that has been made in Great Britain and the name has not been legally restricted to a single geographic origin under federal law or any international agreement.

Attempting to impose state-level exclusivity without corresponding federal recognition may therefore create confusion rather than clarity. Without federal action through TTB rulemaking, a Hawaii statutory definition cannot prevent producers elsewhere from manufacturing a similarly named product for markets outside Hawaii. This raises questions about the practical enforceability and effectiveness of HB2475 HD1's approach.

c) Limits of the Twenty-First Amendment

While the Twenty-First Amendment grants states authority over the importation and distribution of alcohol within their borders, the Supreme Court has repeatedly held that it does not authorise states to enact protectionist or discriminatory measures that burden interstate commerce. See *Granholm v. Heald*, 544 U.S. 460 (2005); *Tennessee Wine & Spirits Retailers Ass'n v. Thomas*, 588 U.S. (2019).

If HB2475 HD1's production and ingredient mandates effectively condition the use of the term Okolehao on in-state production and state-grown inputs, the statute risks scrutiny under the Dormant Commerce Clause if it burdens out-of-state commerce or interferes with federally regulated labelling in interstate markets.

Small distillers rely heavily on federal uniformity. Any state law that introduces uncertainty into the COLA process or restricts how a product may be labelled in interstate commerce directly affects economic viability.

3. Conclusions

I respectfully urge the Committee to reconsider or amend HB2475 HD1:

- a) In light of long-established historical usage and free trade principles.
- b) To avoid constitutional pre-emption issues, Commerce Clause concerns and regulatory conflicts with TTB's exclusive authority over interstate labelling.
- c) To consider the costs to the state from the bill. Okolehao is currently classified by the TTB as a Distilled Spirit Speciality which is provided at minimal cost to the state. HB2475 HD1 will significantly alter the classification exposing the state of Hawaii to significant additional

costs for a bureaucracy to administer laboratory testing, labelling compliance, litigation exposure and enforcement.

- d) To consider that its intentions overreach and risk harming commerce, tradition and consumer choice.

I thank you for accepting this submission and your careful consideration.

Graeme Lamb
1 Russet Way
Nottingham
NG8 3QD
England

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- b) Okolehao is not a traditional Hawaiian distilled spirit as the art of distillation was introduced to Hawaii by Europeans in the 18th Century.
- c) Okolehao has been produced outside Hawaii. Records show that Okolehao has been produced in locations outside of Hawaii, including California and Great Britain. Okolehao was produced in California in the 1990's by the LeVecke corporation in Mira Loma and there are court records available to confirm this fact. Imposing geographic restrictions on the name would unfairly restrict producers outside Hawaii who are legally producing a product long recognised by this name. Furthermore, restricting the name, ingredients, and place of origin ignores history and imposes unnecessary limits on free trade and competition.
- d) Traditional ingredients have always varied and no single formulation defines Okolehao. It is very well known that a wide range of roots, vegetables and fruits have been used in the production of Okolehao. While Ti root and sugar cane are commonly used in modern formulations, the historical production of Okolehao has included a wide variety of ingredients including banana, bran, kiwae beans, rice, pineapple, sugar cane, oranges and taro for over two hundred years. Limiting production exclusively to 51% Ti root imposes an artificial and unnecessary constraint on a traditional beverage that has always exhibited diversity in its formulation.
Mandating a single formula and geographic origin does not protect Hawaiian heritage, it restricts innovation and unfairly prevents legitimate producers both inside and outside Hawaii from using a name long recognised internationally.
- e) Conflict with free trade principle. HB2475 HD1's proposed protections restrict competition and innovation by dictating specific ingredients and labelling. Such restrictions go against the spirit of free trade and open commerce, which allows producers to create and market products under widely recognised, generic names.

2. Constitutional & Regulatory Issues

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HB2475 HD1 seeks to establish a state-specific definition and labelling requirements for Okolehao. However, there is currently no federal standard of identity for Okolehao under 27 C.F.R. Part 5. If the State mandates labelling terminology or production thresholds that differ from or exceed what TTB recognises, small producers could be placed in the untenable position of complying with state law while being denied federal COLA approval for interstate sales.

Such a conflict would trigger obstacle pre-emption because the state law would stand as an obstacle to Congress's objective of maintaining uniform national labelling standards for distilled spirits.

b) Absence of Geographic Exclusivity and Global Production History

Unlike federally recognised geographic indications such as "Cognac" or "Tequila," there are currently no federal or international legal restrictions preventing producers in other states or countries from producing and marketing a product as Okolehao, subject to general labelling rules.

Historically, products identified as Okolehao have been produced not only in Hawaii but also in other jurisdictions, including the State of California. I have also consumed Okolehao that has been made in Great Britain and the name has not been legally restricted to a single geographic origin under federal law or any international agreement.

Attempting to impose state-level exclusivity without corresponding federal recognition may therefore create confusion rather than clarity. Without federal action through TTB rulemaking, a Hawaii statutory definition cannot prevent producers elsewhere from manufacturing a similarly named product for markets outside Hawaii. This raises questions about the practical enforceability and effectiveness of HB2475 HD1's approach.

c) Limits of the Twenty-First Amendment

While the Twenty-First Amendment grants states authority over the importation and distribution of alcohol within their borders, the Supreme Court has repeatedly held that it does not authorise states to enact protectionist or discriminatory measures that burden interstate commerce. See *Granholm v. Heald*, 544 U.S. 460 (2005); *Tennessee Wine & Spirits Retailers Ass'n v. Thomas*, 588 U.S. (2019).

If HB2475 HD1's production and ingredient mandates effectively condition the use of the term Okolehao on in-state production and state-grown inputs, the statute risks scrutiny under the Dormant Commerce Clause if it burdens out-of-state commerce or interferes with federally regulated labelling in interstate markets.

Small distillers rely heavily on federal uniformity. Any state law that introduces uncertainty into the COLA process or restricts how a product may be labelled in interstate commerce directly affects economic viability.

3. Conclusions

I respectfully urge the Committee to reconsider or amend HB2475 HD1:

- a) In light of long-established historical usage and free trade principles.
- b) To avoid constitutional pre-emption issues, Commerce Clause concerns and regulatory conflicts with TTB's exclusive authority over interstate labelling.
- c) To consider the costs to the state from the bill. Okolehao is currently classified by the TTB as a Distilled Spirit Speciality which is provided at minimal cost to the state. HB2475 HD1 will significantly alter the classification exposing the state of Hawaii to significant additional

costs for a bureaucracy to administer laboratory testing, labelling compliance, litigation exposure and enforcement.

- d) To consider that its intentions overreach and risk harming commerce, tradition and consumer choice.

I thank you for accepting this submission and your careful consideration.

Graeme Lamb
1 Russet Way
Nottingham
NG8 3QD
England

The spirit, 'ōkolehao, is the Hawaiian spirit. HB2475 not only safeguards this spirit, but it also reinforces local agriculture, and creates economic opportunities all while providing travelers and consumers with an authentic, place-based beverage experience. If the product is not made with Hawaiian kī or distilled in Hawaii it is not the true Hawaiian spirit, and will not provide any benefit to the people of Hawaii.

By mandating kī root sourced from Hawaii, HB2475 creates stable demand for local farmers, incentivizing cultivation of indigenous crops and supporting the island's agricultural sector. This fosters value-added production and encourages investment in rural communities.

Authentic 'Ōkolehao becomes a distinctive cultural attraction, similar to tequila in Mexico or bourbon in Kentucky. Tourists seeking genuine Hawaiian experiences are likely to purchase locally crafted spirits, participate in tasting tours, and engage with Hawaiian distilling heritage, generating additional visitor spending. Given that Hawaii tourism generated over \$20 billion in visitor spending in 2024, leveraging distinctive products like 'ōkolehao can enhance per-visitor expenditure and lengthen stays.

The legislation incentivizes expansion of small distilleries, creates employment in production, marketing, and tourism-related sectors, and stimulates entrepreneurial opportunities within the state. Economic multipliers extend to suppliers, transporters, and hospitality businesses.

Establishing a regulated, certified Hawaiian 'ōkolehao brand allows products to compete on a global stage, opening export markets while reinforcing Hawaii's "place-based" economic identity. Increased recognition abroad can lead to higher-value sales and long-term growth for the state's artisanal beverage industry.

Clear standards reduce counterfeit products and misuse of the 'ōkolehao name, stabilizing the market and protecting both established and emerging producers from dilution of brand value. This encourages investment and innovation within the local spirits industry.

Supporting HB2475 aligns economic strategy with cultural preservation. By safeguarding the authenticity of Hawaii's traditional spirit, the state secures a valuable asset for tourism, agriculture, and small business development. Implementation of this bill is projected to directly and indirectly support local employment, increase visitor spending, stimulate revenue for small distillers, and strengthen Hawaii's unique brand identity, providing measurable economic benefits while honoring the islands' storied traditions.

HB-2475-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 11:01:02 AM

Testimony for CPC on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Yvette Miller	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in support of SB2475. Protecting the Hawai‘i name and ensuring consumers know where their products and food are sourced is essential. This not only protects our growers and business owners, but also supports and empowers consumers to make informed choices.

Clear and accurate labeling helps educate consumers about Hawai‘i-grown products, protects Hawai‘i Island’s agricultural integrity, and promotes the value and authenticity of products truly grown and produced in Hawaii.

Thank you for your consideration and for supporting Hawai‘i’s farmers, businesses, and communities.

Yvette Miller

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

I am writing in strong support of HB2475, which establishes clear labeling requirements for 'Ōkolehao products. 'Ōkolehao is more than just a distilled spirit — it is a unique cultural and historical product of Hawai'i, deeply rooted in our islands' traditions and identity.

By setting state-level standards for labeling, HB2475 will:

- Protect authenticity by ensuring that only products meeting defined criteria can be marketed as 'Ōkolehao.
- Support local producers who honor traditional methods and use locally sourced ingredients.
- Preserve cultural heritage by safeguarding the integrity of a product that tells the story of Hawai'i's people and land.

This bill not only strengthens consumer confidence but also promotes economic opportunities for Hawai'i's agricultural and craft distilling sectors. It is a step toward ensuring that future generations can experience 'Ōkolehao as it was meant to be — authentically Hawaiian.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB2475.

HB-2475-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 1:05:04 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brett Jacobson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the CPN Committee,

I am writing in strong support of SB3248, which is essential for protecting both consumers and the cultural identity of Hawai‘i. As this committee knows, labeling standards are not just technicalities; they are safeguards of trust. Currently, without clear requirements, the name ‘Okolehao’ can be misused anywhere in the world. A product could be marketed as ‘Okolehao even with zero connection to Hawai‘i or its traditional ingredients. This is harmful both to consumers and to the authentic legacy of Hawai‘i. Historically, ‘Okolehao was crafted from kī root, reflecting a unique part of our island’s history. The bill ensures that when someone sees ‘Okolehao’ on a label, they know it is primarily made in Hawai‘i with its defining ingredients. In short, this bill is a vital safeguard for accuracy. It protects consumers from misleading claims. When consumers purchase a product labeled as 'Okolehao, they have the right to trust it represents the authentic Hawai‘i grown and made spirit. This is consumer protection at its core—ensuring transparency and honesty in the marketplace. Without clear labeling, the name loses its meaning. By passing SB3248, you uphold the authenticity of one of Hawai‘i’s historic products.

In conclusion, SB3248 will foster trust, protect consumers, and ensure that ‘Okolehao remains a genuine reflection of Hawai‘i. I urge you to pass this bill to keep the spirit of Hawai‘i true. Mahalo.

HB-2475-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 1:22:07 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eric Thornton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, members of the committee. I am writing in strong support of HB 2475, even though I’m from California. I visit Hawaii frequently, and one of the things I cherish most is the authenticity of locally made products. When I enjoy something from the islands—whether fresh local fish or coffee—I want to know it’s genuinely from Hawaii. That authenticity matters, and it’s what I share with others when I return home.

By passing this bill, I can be confident that when I recommend ‘Okolehao, it’s authentically Hawaiian. I’ve seen too many products—like Kona coffee blends or “Hawaiian” beers—that aren’t truly from Hawaii. When I tell friends about ‘Okolehao, I want to speak with pride, knowing it’s truly from the islands. Social currency—word-of-mouth—means a lot. This bill ensures that when I share ‘Okolehao with friends across the U.S., my recommendation is backed by authenticity. I don’t want to recommend something only to find out later it’s not truly Hawaiian. With this bill, I can proudly say that ‘Okolehao is protected, genuinely made in Hawaii. It would allow me, as a consumer, to be proud, confident, and accurate in sharing Hawaii’s culture. Passing this bill will ensure that ‘Okolehao becomes a symbol of authenticity—something I’ll be proud to share, wherever I travel.

HB-2475-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 1:27:49 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bethanyjacqueline Kiley	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support proper labeling requirements for 'Okolehau in Hawai'i for the reason to protect and restore its place in the state's historical and cultural environment, while also supporting the local community including; agriculture, farmers, and rural communities. Also, ensuring that consumers, both visiting and local, receive a product truthfully rooted and labeled in Hawai'i, where 'Okolehau was first created.

In the book titled, 'Fragments of Hawaiian History' recorded by John Papa I and translated by Mary Kawena Pukui, it is documented (pg 128) that in 1817, when an Argentinian ship landed in Kona, the king opened a barrel of 'Okolehau for them. This also attracted foreigners who gave the king money for the 'Okolehau. A product no one had experienced before arriving to Hawai'i.

This is documented proof that 'Okolehau not only started in Hawai'i, but was shared culturally, and supported the economy of that time, over 200 years ago.

Furthermore, Ethical Cultural Resource Management also states that; Ethical Cultural Resource Management involves the conscientious administration and protection of sites, objects, and practices holding historical, aesthetic, or social significance, prioritizing moral responsibility and stakeholder rights.

Because 'Okolehau holds historical, cultural, and social significance, proper labeling must be insured to maintain that value to the Hawaiian culture.

HB-2475-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 1:58:26 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
janelle kaplan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Fukunaga, and Members of the Committee:

I urge your support for House Bill 2475 to protect ‘Okolehao. We’ve witnessed the economic struggles Kona coffee faced due to delayed protections. For years, Kona coffee could appear on a label with only 10% Kona-grown beans, diluting authenticity. Only after a long legal battle, with settlements exceeding 41 million dollars, did stricter labeling emerge. That mislabeling cost the Kona coffee sector dearly. By 2023, court approvals estimated 81 million dollars in economic benefits over the next five years, reclaiming lost value.

We cannot wait for ‘Okolehao to face similar economic losses. By passing this bill, you protect ‘Okolehao’s identity from the start, ensuring local producers reap the full economic rewards. But this is bigger than Hawaii. This bill is the first step toward federal TTB recognition, leading to national and global protections. By acting now, you build a foundation for an industry that could drive economic growth. Your leadership today sets Hawai‘i on a path where ‘Okolehao’s future economic success is secured from the outset both locally and far beyond.

Mahalo for your consideration and for reading my testimony.

February 24th, 2026

Aloha Chair and Members of the House Committee on Consumer Protection and Commerce,

My name is Ehulani Hope Kāne of Kalua'aha, Moloka'i, and I stand in strong support of this measure to protect and clearly define 'ōkolehao, a spirit deeply rooted in our 'āina and in our people.

'Ōkolehao began with the kī plant, cultivated and revered by our kūpuna for ceremony, protection, medicine, and sustenance. When its roots were baked in the imu and fermented, and later, with the introduction of distillation, in the late 1700s, Hawai'i's heritage distilled spirit was born. It is a uniquely Hawaiian creation, shaped by our land and by the ingenuity of our ancestors.

Over time, however, the absence of a clear legal definition created confusion in the marketplace. Imitation products labeled as 'ōkolehao diluted its authenticity and misled consumers. By the mid-20th century, flavored spirits replaced true kī-root distillation, and by the 1990s authentic production had nearly disappeared. Without standards, both consumers and producers lose. Clear definitions protect buyers from misrepresentation and ensure fair competition for those committed to authentic production.

This history is personal. In the 1920s, my grandfather, Joseph Ahuna, was involved in 'ōkolehao production, helping sustain this art form during difficult times. Today, nearly a century later, his mo'opuna are working to rebuild the industry in Hawai'i, for Hawai'i. That generational continuity reflects both pride and responsibility.

Requiring Hawai'i-grown kī and in-state distillation protects consumers, strengthens local agriculture, and ensures that economic benefits remain in our communities. It preserves cultural integrity while promoting transparency and accountability in commerce.

For this Committee, this measure is about consumer trust, fair market standards, and safeguarding a heritage product from misuse. 'Ōkolehao belongs in Hawai'i, and it deserves clear protection.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Ehulani Hope Kāne

LATE

HB-2475-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 2:17:55 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noelle Lindenmann	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee

I'm writing in support of HB2475 today. I believe it's important to establish a legal definition for 'Ōkolehao in our state.

Mahalo for this opportunity to provide testimony,

Noelle Lindenmann, Kailua-Kona

LATE

HB-2475-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 3:30:39 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shannon Matson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

First in full disclosure, I am a community investor of Ola Brew. Obviously, I am in support of this bill, but not to protect my investment, rather to stand up against cultural appropriation and misuse of the name and legacy of ‘Ōkolehao. My keiki go to a Hawaiian immersion public charter school and what I have learned through their educational journey is that we should fight for the Hawaiian Language and culture to exist and thrive everywhere and in every way that we can. It seems to go without saying that foreign entities capitalizing off of a Hawaiian named spirit is just another form of capitalistic colonization, but since this hasn't already become protected in law, I guess it does need to be said. Please protect this brand, ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, and the livelihood of people of Hawaiian ancestry and those of all backgrounds who live and work here in Hawai‘i and pass this bill.

Mahalo,

Shannon M.

Hawai'i Island Resident

LATE

HB-2475-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 12:10:42 PM

Testimony for CPC on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Steven Weiss	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Our family would like to make our endorsement known regarding Ola Brew and their efforts for label requirements of the exciting Hawaiian spirit of Okolehao. We are longtime supporters of Ola Brew and have followed their wonderful efforts to support Hawai'i in a positive manner. It is inspiring to watch a local company that cares so much about the Hawaiian people, and protecting the Okolehao name and product falls right in line with that mission. As a longtime property owner in Hawai'i (35 years) and just recently establishing fulltime residency here, we are excited to witness and be a small part of the development of this product. Okolehao is truly unique and we believe it's important to preserve its uniqueness by ensuring it will always be a Hawai'i-only produced spirit. Mahalo for your consideration of this very important legislative action. Steve and Susie Weiss, Naalehu, Hawai'i