



## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 9 DESIGNATING HAWAII AS A PURPLE HEART STATE**

Committee on Public Safety  
Rep. Della Au Belatti, Chair  
Rep. Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 9:00 AM  
Conference Room 411 or via Videoconference

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Military Affairs Council ("MAC") supports HB 9.

The MAC was established in 1985 when the Chamber was appointed by the State to serve as the liaison to the military. The MAC advocates on behalf of Hawaii's military, and is comprised of business leaders, academic institutions, State and County officials, members of the CODEL, community leaders, labor unions and organizations and retired U.S. flag and general officers. The MAC works to support Hawaii's location as a strategic U.S. headquarters in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region which is crucial for U.S. national and homeland security.

Designating the State of Hawaii as a Purple Heart State is a meaningful way to honor and express our deepest gratitude to the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces who have been wounded or killed in the line of duty. The Purple Heart is among our nation's most revered military decorations, awarded to those injured or killed in combat by enemy action. By officially recognizing Hawaii as a Purple Heart State, we affirm our collective respect for the sacrifices made by these heroes and their families.

HB 9 complements House Concurrent Resolution 94, adopted in 2025, which requested that August 7, 2025, be proclaimed as Purple Heart Day to honor the courageous service of the United States Armed Forces. Among these heroes are the distinguished Purple Heart recipients whose valor, resilience, and dedication to duty embody the highest ideals of service. Their sacrifices merit our lasting respect and gratitude.

Becoming a Purple Heart State places Hawaii among a network of communities across the nation that are dedicated to honoring veterans. This national recognition would bring positive attention to Honolulu and its commitment to supporting those who have served. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support.

**Written Testimony of Carlos A. Santana**  
**Veteran, United States Army**  
**Chairman, Veterans Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai`i**  
**February 1, 2026**  
**Prepared for the Hawai`i State Legislature – Public Safety Committee**  
**For consideration of HB9: Designating Hawai`i as a Purple Heart State**

**Proponent Testimony**

My name is Carlos A. Santana and I am a veteran of the United States Army and current Chairman of the Veterans Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai`i. I fully support HB9, and encourage all legislators to support it as well.

Several states have already designated themselves as “Purple Heart States.” This designation recognizes the sacrifices of service members wounded or killed in combat. Some states also have stretches of highways designated as part of the “Purple Heart Trail” to pay tribute to these veterans. Hawai`i does have highways designated to honor these brave service members.<sup>1</sup>

Recently, a prominent case regarding a Purple Heart recipient from Hawai`i is that of Sae Joon Park. Mr. Park is a South Korea-born U.S. Army veteran who was forced to self-deport in June 2025 after living in the U.S. for nearly 50 years. Mr. Park served a U.S. Army Infantryman and was seriously wounded during a firefight in Panama in 1989, for which he received the Purple Heart. He moved the U.S. at age 7 and lived in Hawai`i. Following his military service, Park struggled with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which led to drug addiction and subsequent felony convictions. In June 2025, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) directed Park to self-deport to South Korea, a country he had not lived in for nearly five decades. As of this writing, his legal tea, led by a University of Hawai`i law school graduate, is working on his case to allow him to return to his home in Hawai`i. Let’s show Mr. Park that we have not forgotten is service and sacrifice.

I fully support HB9, and encourage all legislators to support it as well. This legislation will show military veterans have the support and appreciation of the people of Hawai`i.

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<sup>1</sup> Route 311 (Maui), Interstate H-2 (Oahu), HI-51 (Kauai).

**HB-9**

Submitted on: 1/30/2026 6:00:48 PM  
Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

**Comments:**

I strongly support designating Hawai'i as a Purple Heart State. We have had numerous Hawai'i residents who were awarded the Purple Heart. It is only fitting that our State be defined as a Purple Heart State. Please pass this bill. Thank you.

Mike Golojuch, Lt Col, USAF(Ret)

Subject

Letter of Strong Support for Designating Hawaii as a Purple Heart State

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To the Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

I write today in heartfelt support of the bill to designate Hawaii as a Purple Heart State. I offer this letter not only as a citizen, but as a veteran who has given twenty-four years of service to this nation and who lives every day with the lasting effects of line-of-duty injuries.

I am a 100% disabled veteran. Over the course of my military career, I served during the Vietnam era, the Panama action, and Desert Storm. I did not serve in a direct combat role at the moment I was injured, but I have known many friends who did. I have walked beside them, trained with them, and cared for them. I have watched brave men and women return home forever changed. I have also stood at gravesides and memorials, knowing that some sacrifices can never truly be repaid.

For twenty years, I served as a Combat Medic. In that role, I witnessed firsthand the extraordinary courage, service, and sacrifices made by our service members in the line of duty. I saw young soldiers who, despite their fear, moved forward to protect others. I saw individuals who carried wounded friends through fire, who refused to quit even when their own bodies were failing, and who demonstrated extraordinary fidelity and essential service in ways that rarely make headlines.

The Purple Heart is more than a medal. It is a symbol of blood shed, of pain endured, and of lives permanently altered in defense of our nation. It represents not only those who were wounded or killed in armed combat with an enemy force, but also those harmed as a result of international terrorism or while held as prisoners of war. Each Purple Heart tells a story of sacrifice that deserves to be remembered and honored.

Designating Hawaii as a Purple Heart State sends a powerful message. It tells our veterans and their families that this state sees them. It tells them that their suffering was not invisible, their service was not forgotten, and their courage is woven into the identity of Hawaii itself. It is a public expression of gratitude that carries deep meaning, even though it comes without cost or burden.

I want to be clear: I honor all of my friends who earned the Purple Heart as heroes. Many of them would never call themselves that. They would say they were just doing their job. But I know the truth. That “small extra effort” in the worst moments of their lives—the step forward instead of back, the refusal to abandon a fellow soldier, the endurance of unimaginable pain—changed history for someone else. That matters.

Hawaii has long been home to a strong and proud military community. This bill reflects that tradition of respect and appreciation. It recognizes the sacrifices already made and ensures they are never minimized or forgotten.

I respectfully urge you to pass this bill and formally designate Hawaii as a Purple Heart State. It is a meaningful, dignified way to honor those who have paid a terrible price for our freedoms and to remind future generations of the true cost of liberty.

With sincere respect and gratitude,

Sgt. Paul A Wheeless

1<sup>st</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Reg., 1<sup>st</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Reg. 2<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Battalion, Retired U.S. Army

**HB-9**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 7:38:07 AM  
Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire	Ohana Unity Party	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

\*\*Aloha Chair and Honorable Members of the Committees,\*\*

As Chairman of the Ohana Unity Party and a lifelong advocate for transparency, accountability, and the protection of our keiki and 'ohana from systemic abuse, corruption, and injustice, I submit this written testimony in the strongest possible support of House Bill 9. This landmark legislation establishes a statewide Office of the Ombudsman—an independent, non-partisan watchdog empowered to investigate complaints against state and county agencies, ensure fair treatment of the public, and hold government accountable when it fails the people it serves. HB9 creates an essential safeguard for democracy in our islands: an impartial office that receives, investigates, and resolves complaints from residents about administrative actions, delays, unfair treatment, abuse of power, or violations of law by any state or county agency. The Ombudsman will have broad authority to access records, conduct confidential interviews, issue public reports, and recommend corrective action—without fear of retaliation. Annual reports to the Legislature and Governor will shine light on patterns of misconduct, systemic failures, and areas needing reform. This is not bureaucracy; it is a powerful tool for restoring public trust in a state where hidden agendas, elite impunity, and institutional apathy have eroded confidence for far too long.

\*\*Why I Stand Strongly in Support of HB9 – Key Reasons and Real-World Urgency\*\*

1. \*\*Restoring Trust in a System Riddled with Broken Accountability\*\* Hawaii's government has faced repeated scandals: election irregularities (unexplained ballot discrepancies, broken chains of custody), foster care exploitation (mirroring patterns in the Epstein files), unchecked human trafficking vulnerabilities (64% of survivors Native Hawaiian), and opaque agency practices that protect insiders while punishing whistleblowers. Without an independent Ombudsman, citizens have nowhere to turn when agencies ignore complaints or retaliate. HB9 fills this critical gap, providing a direct, confidential channel for everyday Hawaiians to demand justice—exactly what the aloha spirit requires.

2. \*\*Protecting the Vulnerable – Ties to Trafficking, Foster Care, and Corrections Failures\*\* The Epstein files exposed how powerful networks prey on the vulnerable—foster youth, the disabled, the ill. In Hawaii, similar systemic blind spots persist: Native Hawaiian overrepresentation in prisons (39% of population), trafficking (average first exploitation age 11, youngest reported cases age 4), and corrections costs soaring past \$250 million annually while older inmates suffer untreated conditions. An Ombudsman can investigate complaints from these

populations, uncover patterns of neglect or abuse, and recommend reforms—preventing further harm and ensuring agencies fulfill their duty of care.

3. **\*\*Fiscal and Democratic Imperative\*\*** Independent ombudsman offices in other states (e.g., Alaska, Washington) save millions by resolving disputes early, reducing litigation, and exposing waste or misconduct. In Hawaii, where public trust in government is low (especially among younger generations deterred from civic engagement by perceived corruption), HB9 would rebuild faith in democracy. It empowers residents—especially Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and marginalized communities—to hold agencies accountable without needing expensive lawyers or political connections.

4. **\*\*Real-World Example: The Need for Oversight in Corrections and Beyond\*\*** Consider the case of Kincaid "Mana" Olayan, founder of "God Forgives Bad Boys and Bad Girls," who turned his life around after incarceration but still faced systemic barriers. Stories like his highlight how lack of independent oversight allows agencies to delay or deny fair treatment. An Ombudsman could investigate similar complaints, ensuring agencies respond humanely and efficiently—preventing the cycle of despair that traps too many in our islands.

5. **\*\*Guided by Wisdom and Aloha\*\*** As the Dalai Lama teaches: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." Mahatma Gandhi reminds us: "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." HB9 embodies these principles by giving voice to the voiceless and holding power accountable. In a state where elite impunity (from Epstein-linked networks to local corruption) threatens our future, this bill is a moral and practical necessity. **\*\*Conclusion and Urgent Call to Action\*\*** HB9 is not optional—it is essential. It will restore trust, protect the vulnerable, save taxpayer dollars, and ensure our government serves the people, not the powerful. I urge the Committees to pass this bill swiftly and without dilution. Let us lead with aloha—establish an independent Ombudsman and show the world that Hawaii values transparency, fairness, and justice above all.

Mahalo nui loa for your service and for considering this testimony. I am available for questions or oral testimony if needed. In solidarity for truth, accountability, and ohana,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire, HRM Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I. Ohana Unity Party, Chairman [www.Ohanaunityparty.com](http://www.Ohanaunityparty.com) [Presidentbillionaire@gmail.com](mailto:Presidentbillionaire@gmail.com)