



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**

KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI
A HO'OMĀKA'IKAI

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Statement of
Dennis T. Ling
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Business Development and Support Division
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism
before the

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**

Friday, March 27, 2026
9:30 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 423

In consideration of
HCR197

**ESTABLISHING A SISTER-STATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE OF
HAWAII, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE PREFECTURE OF
YAMAGATA, JAPAN.**

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Members of the Committee. The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports **HCR197**, which seeks to establish the Hawai'i–Yamagata Sister-State relationship.

Yamagata Prefecture and the State of Hawai'i share many similarities in agriculture, food production, manufacturing, sustainability, and rural revitalization. Our regions also share core economic development priorities, including sustainable tourism, workforce development, food security, clean energy and climate resilience, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

From an economic perspective, a formal sister-state relationship would create new opportunities for bilateral collaboration. Expanded engagement with Yamagata Prefecture can strengthen Hawai'i's economy through increased visitor travel, business and educational exchanges, and cultural tourism. Sister-state partnerships often support sector-specific trade and investment, including agricultural exports, food product

innovation, and joint research initiatives—areas where both Hawai'i and Yamagata have complementary strengths. Enhanced government-to-government and business-to-business cooperation can also facilitate workforce training partnerships, exchange programs, and innovation in sustainability and clean energy technologies.

The Hawai'i Yamagata Kenjin Kai has been instrumental in laying the foundation for this relationship, maintaining longstanding engagement through cultural exchanges, programs, and reciprocal visits that consistently generate community, cultural, and economic benefits.

DBEDT welcomes the opportunity to explore expanded collaborative activities with the Yamagata Prefectural Government and the local Kenjin Kai to advance shared economic goals and strengthen ties between our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

HCR-197

Submitted on: 3/24/2026 6:24:05 PM

Testimony for ECD on 3/27/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brian Taniguchi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chairman Ilagan, Vice Chairman Hussey and Committee members:

Aloha and thank you for allowing me to testify in strong support of HCR 197 and HR187. I am Brian Taniguchi, retired Hawaii State Senator. I apologize for not being there in person but I am currently in Japan.

Over the last 3 years, I have assisted Mr. Masashi Ando in establishing a Friendship City Relationship between Shonai Town in northwest Yamagata Prefecture and the City of Honolulu. Mr. Ando, a Shonai native, attended our St. Louis High School for 4 years to play baseball. He developed a great love and respect for Hawaii and has always wanted to establish a relationship between Shonai and Manoa Valley where he homestayed. Now an adult, he has worked with the Touchi family whom he stayed with and myself to connect our two communities.

Last year we were able to sign a Friendship City agreement between Shonai Town and the City and County of Honolulu through the work of Councilman Scott Nishimoto. We have also been able to establish a Sister School relationship between Stevenson Middle School and one or more Shonai Middle Schools.

Here in Hawaii, there is an active Yamagata Kenjin Kai (Prefecture Club) and promotion of Yamagata rice. These connections will insure a strong and lasting relationship.

I request your support of the establishment of a Sister State Relationship between Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture through these House Resolutions. I believe that it will be a mutually beneficial partnership and help to build stronger ties between Hawaii and Japan.

Thank you very much for your time.

Aloha,

Brian Taniguchi

Retired State Senator

Testimony in support of a Sister-State Relationship between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture (HCR 197/HR187)

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey and Members of the House Committee on Economic Development & Technology,

I am writing with great excitement to express my full support of HCR197/HR187 to establish a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture. Although our regions are separated by the Pacific and have contrasting climates, we share a profound bond through our breathtaking natural environments. I believe this partnership will bring unique and inspiring opportunities to Hawaii in the following areas:

1. Excellence in Livestock and Gastronomy

Yamagata is home to the world-renowned **Yonezawa Beef**, one of Japan's top three Wagyu brands. The prospect of sharing their advanced livestock techniques could bring innovative growth to Hawaii's own ranching industry. Furthermore, Yamagata's sake, such as the **IWC (International Wine Challenge) Champion "Dewazakura,"** and its federally protected **"Yamagata Wine"** are highly acclaimed globally. This level of culinary excellence will undoubtedly enrich Hawaii's tourism and hospitality sectors.

2. Cultural Connection through Traditional Crafts (Sashiko and Quilt)

There is a beautiful synergy between Hawaii's beloved **Hawaiian Quilts** and Yamagata's traditional stitching known as **"Sashiko."** Both crafts share a philosophy of weaving stories through handwork. Sashiko is currently gaining immense popularity worldwide, with numerous books published internationally. I envision future workshops where we can exchange skills, creating a warm and meaningful cultural bridge between our local communities.

3. Synergies in Global Tourism

While Hawaii is a world-leader in tropical tourism, Yamagata is also capturing global attention. The nostalgic atmosphere of **Ginzan Onsen** has become a viral sensation, and the ski resorts of **Zao** have been recognized by prestigious publications such as **"Condé Nast Traveler"** as among the best ski destinations in the world. The combination of Hawaii's tropical sun and Yamagata's pristine snow offers a rare and complementary exchange of experiences for the people of both regions.

I sincerely hope this partnership marks the beginning of a new chapter of friendship and mutual prosperity across the Pacific.

Sincerely,

Tomomi Satake
Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai
Auditor

March 25, 2026

Testimony: SCR 197/HR 187

Submitted By: Sarene Oda, Principal

I am writing in strong support of House Resolution 187, establishing a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawai‘i and Yamagata Prefecture, Japan.

My Middle School has experienced firsthand the powerful impact of building meaningful international partnerships, particularly through our strong and growing relationship with the Shonai region of Yamagata Prefecture. Through virtual exchanges, our students have had the opportunity to engage in authentic cultural dialogue, deepen their global awareness, and build connections which extend far beyond the classroom.

These experiences have fostered not only cultural understanding, but also empathy, communication skills, and a broader perspective of the world—outcomes which directly align with the goals of this resolution. Our students are learning to appreciate both the similarities and unique qualities of different cultures, strengthening the people-to-people ties this sister-state relationship seeks to promote.

We are especially excited to welcome six students and two teachers from Shonai to our Middle School on Friday, March 27. This visit represents the next step in transforming virtual connections into meaningful, in-person relationships. It will provide invaluable opportunities for collaboration, shared learning, and cultural exchange for both our students and staff.

Establishing a formal sister-state relationship between Hawai‘i and Yamagata Prefecture will further expand these types of opportunities, creating more pathways for educational exchange, cultural understanding, and long-term partnerships that benefit our communities. For our students, these experiences are not just enriching—they are transformative.

Mahalo for your consideration and for supporting efforts which strengthen global connections and educational opportunities for our students.

HCR-197

Submitted on: 3/26/2026 8:45:59 AM

Testimony for ECD on 3/27/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Akiko Baba	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a original member since 1968 and would support this bill to a sister state relationship.

As the President of the Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai I am pleased to support House Concurrent Resolution No. 197, establishing a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture. The Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai is one of the oldest community organizations in Hawaii with close ties to Yamagata Prefecture, it's people, culture, it's fresh and processed agricultural products and it's cuisine.

Our kenjinkai is proud to have hosted numerous government, educational and trade delegations from Yamagata and this concurrent resolution would help to strengthen and elevate the ties between Hawaii and Yamagata.

Eisuke Iwase

President, Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'E' followed by a long, horizontal stroke that tapers to the right.

State of Hawaii
House of Representatives
Committee on Economic Development & Technology

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and members of the House Committee on Economic Development & Technology.

As the current secretary and treasurer of the Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai I am pleased to support House Concurrent Resolution No. 197 and House Resolution No. 187, calling for the establishment of a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture.

The Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai began in 1967 when Yamagata Governor Abiko traveled to Hawaii to meet with Hawaii residents with family roots in Yamagata Prefecture. We are proud to be one of the oldest Japanese community organizations in Hawaii and our members are active in nurturing our close ties to the Yamagata Prefectural Government and Prefectural Assembly, culture including the upbeat Hanagasa dance, and a heritage that is deeply rooted in the prefecture's premium rice, complex and luscious sake, fresh and processed agricultural products and its rustic cuisine.

Our kenjinkai is proud to have hosted numerous government, educational and trade delegations from Yamagata and this concurrent resolution would help to strengthen and elevate the ties between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture. We urge this committee and its esteemed members to vote in favor of the establishment of a sister-state/sister-prefecture relationship between the State of Hawaii and the Yamagata Prefecture.

With warm regards and Aloha,

Milton Kwock

Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai

- Note: The same wording will be used in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 169.