



HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL
KE KANIHELA O KE KALANA O HONOLULU
530 S. KING ST. STE. 202, HONOLULU, HI 96813

TYLER DOS SANTOS-TAM
HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL
DISTRICT 6
TELEPHONE: (808) 768-5006
FAX: (808) 768-1176
EMAIL: tdossantos-tam@honolulu.gov

Friday, April 17, 2026

Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture, and the Arts
Friday, April 17, 2026 at 1:15 p.m.
HCR36 Testimony in Support

Chair Lee, Vice-Chair Inouye & Members of the Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture, and the Arts:

I write in support of HCR36, which establishes a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawai'i and the prefecture of Okayama, Japan.

The bond between Hawai'i and Okayama is not a new one, it is rooted in history dating back to 1868 with the arrival of the Gannenmono, the first group of Japanese immigrants to Hawai'i, among whom a significant contingent from Okayama settled on Maui. That shared heritage has grown over generations into lasting cultural ties that continue to this day.

Formalizing this relationship through a sister-state designation is a natural and meaningful next step. The Hawai'i Sister-State and International Partnerships Commissions has already reviewed and recommended this partnership, and I agree that it holds great potential in expanding tourism, strengthening cultural bonds, and advancing our shared values of international peace and cooperation.

Hawai'i has maintained sister-state relationships since 1981 as a reflection of our State's deep commitment to international engagement. A partnership with Okayama is a worthy addition to that tradition.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HCR36.

Aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tyler Dos Santos-Tam".

Tyler Dos Santos-Tam
Honolulu City Councilmember, District 6



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

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

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT DIVISION

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
DIRECTOR

DANE K. WICKER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

DENNIS T. LING
ADMINISTRATOR

No. 1 Capitol District Building, 250 South Hotel Street, 5th Floor, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2359, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96804
Web site: dbedt.Hawaii.gov

Telephone: (808) 586-2355
Fax: (808) 586-2377

Statement of
Dennis T. Ling
Administrator

Business Development and Support Division
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism
before the

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON
WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

Friday, April 17, 2026
1:15 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

In consideration of
HCR36

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

Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and members of the Committee, the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports **HCR36**, which seeks to establish a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

A formal Sister-State partnership will strengthen the long-standing Spirit of Aloha shared between Hawai'i and Okayama and create opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration, particularly in the area of educational exchanges for our youth. These experiences build cross-cultural understanding, expand global perspectives, and forge relationships that endure for generations.

Okayama, known as the "Land of Sunshine" for its mild and dry climate, is a leading agricultural region. Hawai'i's tropical environment and multicultural society support a vibrant tourism industry that is vital to our economy. Both regions share economic similarities, with agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism contributing

significantly to their respective industries. Hawai'i and Okayama also share a commitment to sustainable agriculture, clean energy innovation, and climate resilience—areas where collaborative learning and partnership can bring meaningful benefits.

The Okayama Kenjin Kai in Hawai'i has nurtured cultural ties between our communities for many years. Hawai'i and Okayama share coastal geographies, mild climates favorable to farming, and deep historical and cultural connections through Japanese immigration. Most recently, Okayama Prefecture has expressed interest in expanding educational engagement with Hawai'i, including student exchanges, joint activities, and cross-cultural learning initiatives.

For these reasons—and for the potential to strengthen cultural understanding, foster youth development, and support economic and educational opportunities—DBEDT is pleased to support the establishment of a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts
Senator Chris Lee, Chair
Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair**

**Friday, April 17, 2026, at 1:15PM
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference**

RE: HCR36 ESTABLISHING A SISTER-STATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE OF HAWAII, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE PREFECTURE OF OKAYAMA, JAPAN.

Aloha e Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports HCR36, which establishes a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii and the Okayama Prefecture in Japan.

HCR36 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Economic Action. This resolution offers an encouraging opportunity to deepen Hawaii's trade relationships and support diplomatic progress at a time when international economic engagement in the Asia-Pacific is increasingly important. Sister-state partnerships provide a structured pathway to facilitate business-to-business connections, expand export opportunities for local producers, and support the development of long-term trade relationships. With Hawaii's small businesses and value-added producers facing significant economic pressure, these partnerships can serve as an important mechanism to access overseas markets and build consistent export channels for the State. In all, these benefits improve Hawaii's economic security.

Decreasing Hawaii's import reliance is one of the states most important priorities. Institutionalizing international trade relations through sister-state declarations supports Hawaii's stimulates small businesses activity and generates crucial tax revenue while improving Hawaii's trade deficit. Furthermore, expanding market access for small businesses helps these businesses more easily achieve economies of scale, making their products are more affordable for residents and further improving Hawaii's trade deficit.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is the state's leading business advocacy organization, dedicated to improving Hawaii's economy and securing Hawaii's future for growth and opportunity. Our mission is to foster a vibrant economic climate. As such, we support initiatives and policies that align with the 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii that create opportunities to strengthen overall competitiveness, improve the quantity and skills of available workforce, diversify the economy, and build greater local wealth.

We respectfully ask to pass HCR36. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



LATE

Stephanie Ohgashi, Hawaii State Director
2119 Main Street
Wailuku, Hawai'i 96793

April 16, 2026

Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts
RE:SCR47:Establishing a Sister-State Relationship Between the State of Hawai'i
and the Prefecture of Okayama, Japan
Testimony in Support of SCR47

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice-Chair Inouye and members of the Senate Committee on Water,
Land, Culture and the Arts,

Sister Cities International supports this legislative initiative to create a partnership
between Okayama Prefecture and the State of Hawai'i.

Maui County is proud that Gannenmono Sentaro Ishii is included in the resolution,
which holds special significance for his Kanakaole family in East Maui.

Maui Mayor Richard T. Bissen, Jr. visited Okayama Governor Ryuta Ibaragi in 2023 to
discuss a possible Friendship City relationship with the city of Bizen, hometown of
Sentaro Ishii. During that visit, Mayor Bissen presented Governor Ibaragi a poi pounder
made by the students of Ma Ka Hana Ka'ike from East Maui.

UH Maui College has participated in three college fairs hosted by Governor Ibaragi and,
was successful in creating an MOU relationship with Notre Dame Seishin University, a
Catholic women's university in Okayama City last month.

Governor Ibaragi studied at Stanford University and also at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris. He
believes that global tourism and global educational opportunities should be made
available for the next generation of leaders.

Sister Cities International is invested in this new Sister State relationship between the
State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture and will assist with the objectives of this
resolution.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Stephanie Ohgashi

**DRAFT TESTIMONY
HCR 36**

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and members of the Committee, my name is Roberta Yorita and I am currently serving as president of Hawaii's Okayama Kenjin Kai. The Hawaii Okayama Kenjin Kai supports HCR 36, which seeks to establish a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture. A formal Sister-State partnership will strengthen the long-standing Spirit of Aloha shared between Hawai'i and Okayama and create opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration. As a sister state, the student exchange program may also be available. Here, students from Japan live and attend school with their host family. I am currently employed as a substitute teacher (retired teacher) in the DOE school setting, and have had the pleasure of having exchange students from Japan as students this semester. I have witnessed the interaction amongst the "locals" and Japan students working in groups to solve the assignments given. Even though there are language and cultural differences, the task gets completed working as a team. These students are our future leaders of tomorrow. Even with barriers and language differences, they have the opportunity to collaborate and work together effectively. We need this to give our keiki's a chance to expand their learning and experiences to have a better tomorrow.

The Okayama Kenjin Kai in Hawai'i has nurtured cultural ties between our communities for many years. Okayama Prefecture has expressed interest in expanding engagements with Hawai'i, including educational, economic and cultural exchanges.

The Okayama Kenjin Kai is pleased to support the establishment of a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Testimony
Okayama Kenjin Kai
HCR36

I am writing in strong support of Bill SCR 47 to establish a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawaii and Okayama Prefecture, Japan.

My support for this measure is rooted in both ancestral history and a personal commitment to the future of our international relations. As a Sansei whose maternal great-grandparents emigrated from Okayama to Hawaii, I have always been moved by their determination to build a new life here while maintaining the values of their homeland.

In 2015, I had the distinct honor of journeying to Okayama Prefecture, where I met with Governor Ibaraki. During our meeting, we discussed the profound cultural threads that connect Hawaii to Okayama. It was a revelation to the Governor and his staff to hear firsthand accounts of how Okayama's heritage has evolved and thrived in Hawaii over the generations.

Establishing this formal sister-state bond is more than a symbolic gesture; it is a vital step in: Cultural Preservation by honoring the stories of the original emigrants and ensuring their history is not lost to time. Identity Discovery by providing a pathway for younger generations in both Hawaii and Japan to explore their roots and forge new identities. Finally, Economic and Educational exchange by fostering a modern environment where ideas, tourism, and innovation can flow freely between our two regions.

By approving Bill SCR 47, the legislature will help close the gap between past and future generations, ensuring that the courage of our ancestors continues to inspire cultural sharing and mutual growth.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Sincerely,
Diane Sueda Nako

HCR-36

Submitted on: 4/16/2026 10:08:20 AM

Testimony for WLA on 4/17/2026 1:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Conner Birdsall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a 17-year-old, high school senior, who is Okinawan, Japanese, and white. I believe that having more sister-states around the world is important. It gains connections between the places. With a sense of community and shared connections between the two locations. Exploring culture between each other, and the people, which Japanese is the second highest ethnic population here in Hawai'i. I would also love to see a Sister-State with Palau, Puerto Rico (even if it's legally part of the US, maybe something cultural or historical), New Zealand (specifically an area with a high Maori population, and more with ethnicities in Austonesia, since this is where Native Hawaiians/Kanaka came from. Thank you