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STATE OF HAWAII
PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
465 S. KING STREET, #103
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

Testimony of the Public Utilities Commission

To the
Senate Committees on
Public Safety & Military Affairs
and
Water, Land, & Culture and the Arts

February 4, 2026
3:01 p.m.

Chairs Fukunaga and Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committees:

Measure: S.B. No. 17

Title: RELATING TO WILDFIRE MITIGATION.

Position:

The Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”) supports this measure and offers the following comments for consideration.

Comments:

The Commission supports the intent of this measure to establish a wildfire mitigation working group to recommend strategies that reduce wildfire risk including through building hardening, ingress/egress planning, state-level funding for fuels/land management, workforce development, and holistic resilience.

The Commission observes that SB17 seeks to implement a multifaceted strategy that draws from a broad spectrum of government, technical, and community stakeholders. The membership structure appears to provide a comprehensive and collaborative approach to wildfire preparedness, reflecting the fact that addressing fires requires a whole-of-society response.

The Commission recently issued Decision and Order No. 42228, which approved the Hawaiian Electric Companies’ 2025-2027 wildfire mitigation plan. This plan represents a foundational effort to significantly reduce wildfire risk associated with utility infrastructure through grid hardening, situational awareness, and improved operational practices. The Commission is also an active member of the Wildfire Safety Working Group convened by Hawaiian Electric, which serves as a forum for stakeholder input on various aspects of

the Companies' wildfire mitigation plan, including issues such as ingress/egress and land management.

The Commission is willing to offer technical support and regulatory expertise in specific areas where the working group's proposed responsibilities intersect with our ongoing regulatory oversight of utility operations and public safety. We respectfully request an amendment to include a Commission representative as a member to ensure programmatic alignment in the following areas:

- **Ingress and Egress.** SB17 requires the working group to chart a plan for retrofitting subdivisions with adequate evacuation routes. The Commission evaluates utility grid hardening prioritization to ensure infrastructure does not block critical routes or ignite fast-moving fires that threaten evacuation safety.
- **Land Management.** Several policy initiatives intended to grant utilities the authority to enter private property to remove hazardous vegetation have failed to pass the legislature. The working group could help bridge this gap by developing the tax incentives and penalties necessary to encourage private landowners to manage fuels, which the Commission cannot mandate through utility regulation alone.
- **Workforce Development.** SB17 seeks to increase the workforce in land management and wildfire mitigation. The Commission already reviews the adequacy and training of the utility workforce and recognizes the impact of available skilled labor on utility wildfire mitigation costs.
- **Building Hardening.** The bill's focus on ignition-resistant building strategies aligns with energy efficiency measures, such as shell hardening and controlled ventilation, which can mitigate direct fire damage and health impacts from smoke. The Commission is aware that some utilities provide rebates aimed to assist residents in saving money on fire safety upgrades.¹

The Commission supports a whole-of-society approach to wildfire mitigation and stands ready to provide its technical and regulatory expertise on the issues listed above.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

¹ See for example Anaheim Public Utilities Fire Safety Rebates: <https://www.anaheim.net/5418/Fire-Safety>.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



DAWN N.S. CHANG
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LAND
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STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

P.O. BOX 621
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

**Testimony of
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
Acting Chairperson**

**Before the Senate Committees on
PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
and
WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

**Wednesday, February 4, 2026
3:01 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 016**

**In consideration of
SENATE BILL 17
RELATING TO WILDFIRE MITIGATION**

Senate Bill 17 establishes the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group and requires a report to the Legislature. It also mandates the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development to provide administrative support to the group and allocates funding. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) appreciates the intent of this measure and offers the following comments.**

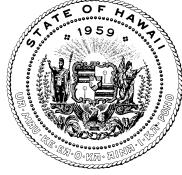
While the Department agrees with the bill's goal of enhancing wildfire prevention and mitigation, it has two recommendations.

1. Because SB17 assigns the working group a wide range of duties, including land management incentives, subdivision retrofits, workforce training, building standards, food security efforts, and grant program development, the Department recommends structuring the working group with clear subcommittees and phased deliverables to ensure meaningful progress and timely recommendations.
2. SB17 was drafted in the 2025 session with the intention for the working group to submit its report before the 2027 session. If the working group's duration remains two years, the report should be due before the 2028 session.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

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

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



KALI WATSON
CHAIRPERSON, HHC
Ka Luna Ho'okele

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

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS
Ka 'Oihana 'Āina Ho'opulapula Hawai'i
P. O. BOX 1879
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96805

TESTIMONY OF KALI WATSON, CHAIR
HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY
AND MILITARY AFFAIRS AND WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND
THE ARTS
ON FEBRUARY 4, 2026 AT 3:01PM IN CR 016

SB 17, RELATING TO WILDFIRE MITIGATION

February 4, 2026

Aloha Chairs Fukunaga and Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committees:

The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) **supports** this bill which 1) establishes the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group, 2) requires a report to the Legislature, 3) requires the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development to provide administrative support to the working group and 4) makes appropriations.

DHHL appreciates the inclusion of the Chairperson of the Hawaiian Homes Commission or the Chairperson's designee for the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group. DHHL stands ready to address the need for collaborative and multifaceted strategies to chart a plan for safe and adequate evacuation routes, increase workforce development in land management and wildfire mitigation, integrate food security and climate resilience initiatives with wildfire prevention, safety, and resilience, as well as the other objectives of this Working Group.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



SYLVIA LUKE
LT GOVERNOR
KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA

STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT
Ka 'Oihana Ho'okō Kānāwai
715 South King Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

MIKE LAMBERT
Director

ERNEST J. ROBELLO
Deputy Director
Administration

JARED K. REDULLA
Deputy Director
Law Enforcement

February 3, 2026

The Honorable Carol Fukunaga, Chair
Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs
State Senate
State Capitol, Room 216
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

The Honorable Chris Lee, Chair
Committee on Water, Land, Culture, and the Arts
State Senate
State Capitol, Room 219
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chairs Fukunaga and Lee:

Subject: Senate Bill (SB) 17 Relating to Wildfire Mitigation

I am Sheldon K. Hao, Chair of the State Fire Council (SFC) and Fire Chief of the Honolulu Fire Department. The SFC supports SB 17, which establishes the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group; requires a report to the Legislature; requires the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development to provide administrative support to the working group; and makes an appropriation. To ensure alignment with statewide wildfire planning in general, the SFC recommends the following amendments:

- (12) ~~The fire chief of each county~~ A representative from the membership of the State Fire Council;
- (d) The office of ~~planning and sustainable development~~ the state fire marshal shall provide administrative support as required by the working group.
- (18) A representative of the Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization to be invited by the ~~chairperson of~~ the state fire marshal;

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal

The Honorable Carol Fukunaga, Chair
The Honorable Chris Lee, Chair
Page 2
February 3, 2026

year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the administrative expenses of the wildfire mitigation working group established by section 2 of this Act.

The sums appropriated shall be expended by the office of ~~planning and sustainable development~~ *the state fire marshal* for the purposes of this Act.

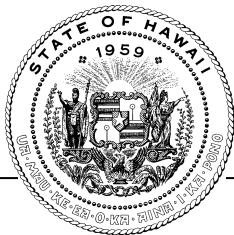
The SFC urges your committees' support of the passage of SB 17 as amended above.

Should you have questions, please contact SFC Administrative Specialist Gary Lum at 723-7169 or glum@honolulu.gov.

Sincerely,

SHELDON K. HAO
Chair

SKH/GL:cn



STATE OF HAWAI'I OFFICE OF PLANNING & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

235 South Beretania Street, 6th Floor, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
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JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

MARY ALICE EVANS
DIRECTOR

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Statement of
MARY ALICE EVANS, Director

before the

SENATE COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND WATER AND LAND

Wednesday, February 4, 2026, 3:01 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 016

in consideration of
SB 17

RELATING TO WILDFIRE MITIGATION.

Chairs Fukunaga and Lee, Vice Chairs Lee and Inouye, and Members of the Committees:

The Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD) supports the intent and **offers comments** on SB 17, establishing the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group to develop recommendations and report to the Legislature. OPSD offers the following comments regarding the structure and administrative placement of the working group.

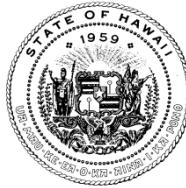
While the intent of SB 17 is important and timely, attaching the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group to OPSD may not be the best fit. The responsibilities assigned to the working group—fuel reduction, wildfire mitigation incentives and penalties, evacuation and building resilience strategies, and workforce development—are primarily operational public safety and land-management functions. These duties align more closely with agencies that lead wildfire response, land fuels management, fire code enforcement, and fire operations, rather than with OPSD's statutory role in statewide planning, policy coordination, and long-range sustainability and climate planning.

OPSD would be pleased to continue serving on the working group as a collaborative partner, contributing statewide planning and coordination expertise to help align wildfire mitigation efforts with broader land-use, sustainability, and climate goals, while allowing implementation and administrative leadership to remain with the appropriate lead agencies.

Finally, the scope of work envisioned for the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group will require dedicated staff capacity, technical expertise, and reliable funding to be effective. Providing clear resources to support this effort will help ensure the working group can develop practical, actionable recommendations without placing additional strain on existing staff or diverting attention from other statutory responsibilities. Aligning staffing and funding with an agency that already leads wildfire response, land management, or fire safety functions will strengthen statewide coordination and implementation.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify on SB 17.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



EDWIN H. SNIFFEN
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELA

Deputy Directors
Nā Hope Luna Ho'okele
DREANALEE K. KALILI
TAMMY L. LEE
CURT T. OTAGURO
ROBIN K. SHISHIDO

**STATE OF HAWAI'I | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION | KA 'OIHANA ALAKAU**
869 PUNCHBOWL STREET
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-5097

Wednesday, February 4, 2026
3:01 PM
State Capitol, 016

**SB17
RELATING TO WILDFIRE MITIGATION**

Senate Committees on Public Safety and Military Affairs
and Water, Land, Culture and the Arts

The Department of Transportation (DOT) supports Senate Bill 17, which establishes the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group, requires a report to the Legislature, and makes appropriations.

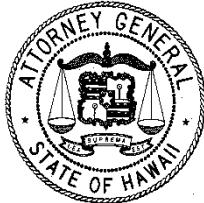
This bill addresses a critical need for coordinated efforts in wildfire mitigation across the state of Hawaii. The establishment of a Wildfire Mitigation Working Group will bring together key stakeholders to develop comprehensive strategies for reducing wildfire risks, which is of paramount importance to public safety and the protection of our natural resources and critical infrastructure.

DOT's mission is to provide a safe, efficient, accessible, and sustainable inter-modal transportation system that ensures the mobility of people and goods, and enhances and/or preserves economic prosperity and the quality of life. To fulfill that goal, DOT has actively pursued wildfire resilience in its existing activities, in the creation of new access routes, and in supporting wildfire threat assessment and firefighting. The creation of this working group will enhance our ability to coordinate with other agencies and stakeholders, ensuring a more efficient and effective approach to wildfire mitigation.

We believe that the requirement for the working group to report to the Legislature will provide valuable insights and recommendations for future policy decisions and resource allocations. This will ensure that the activities already funded by the Legislature transition towards a long-term approach to wildfire prevention and management across the state.

The DOT is prepared to actively participate in and contribute to the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group, sharing our expertise and collaborating with the other members to develop comprehensive strategies.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.



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

**ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:
S.B. NO. 17, RELATING TO WILDFIRE MITIGATION.**

BEFORE THE:

SENATE COMMITTEES ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS AND ON
WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

DATE: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 **TIME:** 3:01 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 016

TESTIFER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Alison S. Kato or Christopher J.I. Leong, Deputy Attorneys General

Chairs Fukunaga and Lee and Members of the Committees:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

The purpose of this bill is to establish a Wildfire Mitigation Working Group to be administratively supported by the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development. This bill, however, does not establish the working group within a principal department, nor does the working group appear to be temporary.

Article V, section 6, of the State Constitution requires that all executive and administrative offices, departments, and instrumentalities of the State be allocated by law among and within its principal departments unless they are established for temporary and special purposes.

To address this issue, we recommend amending the bill to insert the following wording (underlined) in section 1 of this bill on page 1, lines 15-16: "(a) There is established within the department of business, economic development, and tourism, to be administered by the office of planning and sustainable development, a wildfire mitigation working group to:"

Additionally, the bill refers to "the chairperson of the state fire marshal" on page 4, lines 16-17. As there is no chairperson of the State Fire Marshal, we recommend deleting the phrase "chairperson of the" from page 4, line 16.

Testimony of the Department of the Attorney General

Thirty-Third Legislature, 2026

Page 2 of 3

We note the contents of the bill may be duplicative of Acts 302 and 303, Session Laws of Hawaii (SLH) 2025.

Act 302 established a community risk reduction program within the Office of the State Fire Marshal. The purposes of this program are to emphasize public education and methods for wildfire prevention; encourage cost-effective hardening and retrofitting of structures that creates fire-resistant homes, businesses, and public buildings; facilitate vegetation management, the creation and maintenance of defensible space, and other fuel activities that provide neighborhood or community-wide benefits against wildfire; and provide opportunities for collaboration with the counties, educational entities, and nonprofit organizations. Act 302, SLH 2025, section 3, at §132-L. This program appears to provide state-level funding support for managing land to adequately reduce fire risk on both public and private properties, as contemplated in sections 2(a)(1) and (6) of the bill.

Act 302 also directed the State Fire Marshal to establish minimum defensible space requirements and financing to counties (through the Office of the State Fire Marshal) to give financial assistance to certain communities to assist with the creation and maintenance of defensible space and the costs of hardening and retrofitting structures. Act 302, SLH 2025, section 3, at §132-O. Defensible space means a natural or human-made area in which material capable of supporting the spread of fire has been treated, cleared, or modified to slow the rate and intensity of advancing wildfires and allowing space for fire suppression activities to occur. Act 302, SLH 2025, section 3, at §132-A. This program appears to satisfy the intent of section 2(a)(6) of the bill.

Act 302 also directed the Office of the State Fire Marshal to increase the State's wildfire readiness capacity by increasing the number of fire prevention personnel and administrative support to address planning, communications, training, deployment, and safety; implementing technologies and modernizing systems to expedite fire resource deployment; contracting with other agents and the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency. Act 302, SLH 2025, section 3, at §132-F. This appears to be the intent of section 2(a)(3) of the bill.

Testimony of the Department of the Attorney General

Thirty-Third Legislature, 2026

Page 3 of 3

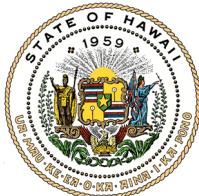
Act 303, SLH 2025 established a community fuels reduction project within the Department of Land and Natural Resources. The purposes of this project are to reduce hazardous wildfire fuels, create and maintain effective firebreaks including the use of grazing, reduce flammable grasses, and provide water infrastructure for grazing and fire suppression. Act 303, SLH 2025, section 4. This project focuses on wildfire prevention, safety, and resilience that is inclusive of cattle grazing, which is supportive of the intent of section 2(a)(5) of the bill.

Regarding section 2(a)(2) of the bill, we note that the governor and various mayors have jurisdiction over the direction and control of the evacuation of the civilian population of the State during an emergency. See section 127A-12(b)(15)-(c)(12), Hawaii Revised Statutes. There does not appear to be any State department with the authority to create and maintain evacuation routes for fire. County agencies may have the authority to do so, but none of the County emergency department websites have any fire evacuation maps readily available. It may be more prudent to direct a state department or the counties to create and maintain evacuation routes for communities, so that if there are unsafely designed subdivisions without safe evacuation routes, there is an entity that can implement necessary changes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

LATE



SYLVIA LUKE
LT GOVERNOR
KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA

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MIKE LAMBERT
Director

ERNEST J. ROBELLO
Deputy Director
Administration

JARED K. REDULLA
Deputy Director
Law Enforcement

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 17
RELATING TO WILDFIRE MITIGATION
Before the Senate Committee on
PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS and
WATER, LAND, CULTURE, AND THE ARTS
Wednesday, February 4, 2026, 3:01 PM
State Capitol Conference Room 016
WRITTEN TESTIMONY By Dorothy Booth

Chairs Fukunaga and Lee, Vice Chairs Lee and Inouye, and members of the Committees:

The Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM), within the Department of Law Enforcement (DLE), supports Senate Bill 17, which establishes the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group, requires a report to the Legislature, provides administrative support through the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development, and makes necessary appropriations. To ensure alignment with Statewide Wildfire planning in general, the OSFM recommends the following amendments:

- (12) ~~The fire chief of each county~~ *A representative from the membership of the State Fire Council;*
- (d) ~~The office of planning and sustainable development, the state fire marshal~~ shall provide administrative support as required by the working group.
- (18) A representative of the Hawaii wildfire management organization, to be invited by the ~~chairperson of the~~ state fire marshal;

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for

Department of Law Enforcement Testimony on
SB17 Relating to WILDFIRE MITIGATION
Page 2

the administrative expenses of the wildfire mitigation working group established by section 2 of this Act.

The sums appropriated shall be expended by the office of ~~planning and sustainable development~~, the state fire marshal, for the purposes of this Act.

Wildfire threats in Hawai'i have increased in both frequency and severity, presenting growing risks to life safety, property, critical infrastructure, and natural and cultural resources. Senate Bill 17 advances a coordinated, statewide approach to wildfire mitigation that aligns with the intent of Act 302, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2025, which strengthened and clarified the statutory responsibilities of the Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Under Act 302, the OSFM is charged with statewide leadership in fire prevention, fire code administration, inspections, investigations, data-informed risk reduction, and coordination across state and county jurisdictions. These responsibilities include advancing community risk-reduction strategies, supporting fire investigations, and promoting compliance with fire and life-safety laws, all of which are directly relevant to wildfire mitigation and resilience.

The OSFM recognizes that effective wildfire mitigation requires sustained interagency coordination. With the support of the Department of Law Enforcement, the OSFM works closely with county fire departments, land management agencies, emergency management, law enforcement partners, and community stakeholders. The proposed Wildfire Mitigation Working Group provides an essential forum to integrate these efforts, align policies, and develop actionable, statewide recommendations grounded in risk assessment and best practices.

Of particular importance is the working group's potential focus on wildfire prevention, investigation, and enforcement. Consistent with the OSFM's statutory role under Act 302—and in coordination with DLE's investigative and enforcement capabilities—

Department of Law Enforcement Testimony on
SB17 Relating to WILDFIRE MITIGATION
Page 3

wildfire mitigation must include both proactive prevention measures and post-incident analysis to reduce recurrence and improve accountability. Similar to the collaborative models used for arson investigations and the Illegal Fireworks Task Force, a structured, multi-agency approach is critical to comprehensively addressing wildfire risk.

The appropriations included in this measure will ensure the working group has the capacity to fulfill its mandate and deliver meaningful recommendations to the Legislature. Strategic investment in wildfire mitigation planning supports public safety, enhances statewide readiness, and may reduce long-term costs associated with wildfire response and recovery.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy
Supporting SB17, Relating to Wildfire Mitigation
Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs
Committee on Water, Land, Culture, and the Arts**
February 4, 2026 at 3:01 pm
Conference Room 016 and via Videoconference

Dear Chairs Fukunaga and Lee, Vice Chairs Lee and Inouye, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify today. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Hawai'i and Palmyra supports SB17, which establishes the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group and requires the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development to provide administrative support to the working group.

Wildfires pose an escalating threat to our communities, natural resources, cultural landscapes, and economy. The 2023 Maui fires underscored the devastating consequences of unmanaged fuels, climate-driven drought, limited evacuation pathways, and gaps in land-use planning. As climate change intensifies, wildfire risk will continue to grow.

TNC has long recognized wildfires as a growing threat to Hawai'i's native forest ecosystems. These ecosystems are vital to watershed function and support much of the state's native biodiversity. As fire-adapted invasive grasses continue to spread and drought conditions intensify, wildfires are becoming more frequent and severe, placing increasing pressure on forests that are not naturally adapted to fire and are often replaced by invasive species after burning.

This bill takes an urgently needed, holistic approach by convening a diverse set of agencies, scientists, fire experts, land managers, economists, and community representatives. This type of cross-sector collaboration is essential to address the interconnected challenges of wildfire prevention, land stewardship, and community resilience. This bill develops incentives and funding tools for proactive land management, plans for safe communities, and strengthens the green-jobs workforce.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of SB17.

Guided by science, TNC is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the lands and waters upon which all life depends. The Conservancy has helped protect more than 200,000 acres of natural lands in Hawai'i and Palmyra Atoll. We manage 84,000 acres in 13 nature preserves and 18 managed areas and have supported over 50 coastal communities to help protect and restore the nearshore reefs and fisheries of the main Hawaiian Islands.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Kamehameha Schools®

Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs
Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts

Time: 3:01 p.m.
Date: February 4, 2026
Where: Conference Room 016
& Videoconference

TESTIMONY

Kā‘eo Duarte

Vice President, ‘Āina Pauahi, Kamehameha Schools

RE: **SB17, Relating to Wildfire Mitigation**

Aloha e nā Luna Ho‘omalu Fukunaga and Lee, nā Hope Luna Ho‘omalu Inouye, a me nā Lālā o nā Kōmike.

Kamehameha Schools appreciates this opportunity to **support** SB17 with the following proposed amendments. This measure aligns with our broader commitment to community resilience, rooted in Native Hawaiian values and grounded in the shared kuleana to care for both people and ‘āina. We believe that wildfire mitigation is a collective responsibility that requires collaboration among communities, landowners, cultural practitioners, public agencies, and emergency responders, all working together toward common goals.

SB17 appropriately advances this collaborative approach by establishing a Wildfire Mitigation Working Group to coordinate statewide planning and best practices. To strengthen the effectiveness of this effort, we respectfully recommend modest amendments:

- Request the Department of Land and Natural Resources to invite a Native Hawaiian cultural practitioner to incorporate traditional land stewardship practices and ‘ike kupuna that support landscape-scale risk reduction, ecological resilience, and long-term community safety;
- Request the state fire marshal to invite a large landowner to reflect the perspectives of major land stewards whose properties interface with multiple communities, infrastructure systems, and emergency response corridors; and
- Add that the working group’s responsibilities will include integrating cultural stewardship and the development of certified wildfire resilience and stewardship standards that encourage good-faith compliance and responsible land management, and provide clear, legally defensible guidance for our communities.

These additions will help ensure that place-based knowledge, community experience, and on-the-ground land management perspectives inform practical and culturally grounded solutions for wildfire mitigation. They will also help to ensure that both public and private sector stakeholders who bear responsibility and risk are meaningfully engaged in the process.

We appreciate that the Legislature has thoughtfully considered the composition of the Working Group and the need to balance diverse perspectives. At the same time, we respectfully suggest that the Legislature consider whether additional perspectives, such as utilities, conservation organizations, or other private-sector and nonprofit partners with direct wildfire risk and response responsibilities, may further strengthen the group’s work. These entities play critical roles in risk management, infrastructure protection, and post-

disaster recovery, and their insights may be valuable as the Working Group develops statewide guidance and standards.

Wildfire resilience in Hawai‘i cannot be achieved through individual action alone. It requires shared commitment, consistent standards, public education, and sustained partnerships across sectors. By fostering collaboration and advancing defensible standards and stewardship practices that reflect local conditions and cultural values, SB17 can help strengthen community safety, protect cultural landscapes, and promote long-term resilience statewide.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your leadership on this critical issue. Kamehameha Schools looks forward to continuing to work with the Legislature and community partners to advance these shared priorities.

Founded in 1887 through the Will of Ke Ali‘i Bernice Pauahi Pākī Bishop, Ke Kula ‘o Kamehameha is a private, educational, charitable trust committed to empowering Native Hawaiians in perpetuity by improving the well-being of our people through education. We envision our haumāna, strong in E Ola!, grounded in Hawaiian and Christian values, succeeding in post-secondary education and contributing through ‘ōiwi leadership to a thriving and self-determined lāhui.

‘A‘ohe hana nui ke alu ‘ia. No task is too great when we work together.



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON
PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS &
WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

**SB 17
Relating to Wildfire Mitigation**

Wednesday, February 4, 2026
3:01 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 016 & Videoconference

Dear Chair Fukunaga, Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committees,

Hawaiian Electric is providing written testimony in **support** of SB 17, Relating to Wildfire Mitigation, which establishes the Wildfire Mitigation Working Group with the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development to providing administrative support to the working group.

Hawaiian Electric believes that the formation of a Wildfire Management Working Group ("Working Group"), consisting of representatives of the State, the Counties, large private landowners and other stakeholders is a critical step in addressing the risk of future wildfires in the State. We encourage the committees to consider adding electric utilities to sit on the Working Group. The Working Group should also consider needed wildfire mitigation measures such as regulations identifying the vegetation management obligations of public and private landowners as well as a practical vegetation management program for landowners and public utilities.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony in **support** of SB 17.

SB-17

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 2:47:24 PM
Testimony for PSM on 2/4/2026 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jordan Roth	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a citizen of the state of Hawai‘i and I am in support of Bill SB17 Relating to Wildfire Mitigation. Wildfires are a natural part of many ecosystems but without proper management can be very deadly and destructive to people's way of life. Being prepared and having successfully prepared an area for wildfires can greatly reduce the losses experienced by those fires. If we properly ignition-proof buildings and populated areas it will bring down the amount of losses from wildfires exponentially. I have personally been affected by multiple wildfires in my lifetime and I have seen the destruction that they can bring, I have also seen the effectiveness of fire mitigation techniques. In the summer of 2024 a wildfire burnt down 6 structures in my area. There were two houses about 500 feet from each other, one burnt to the ground and one still standing. The differences between these houses were one used wildfire mitigation techniques and the other did not. The one still standing cleared any ignitable fuels 50ft from the structure, they had used building materials that were less flammable and had a sprinkler system around the house. The other house did not have any of these measures in place. Fire is unpredictable but we can do our best to learn its patterns and how to best minimize its damages to human interest. It is also important that we do this in a way that does not harm the environment. Fire plays a very important role within an ecosystem and if we manage fire in the wrong way it can make the problem worse. That is why wildfire mitigation is so important, it is a preventative measure that can save lives. It is so important that we look into the best ways we can protect our communities. This is why i am in support of this bill, thank you for the opportunity to testify.