



TESTIMONY OF DAVE ERDMAN, PRESIDENT & CEO
RETAIL MERCHANTS OF HAWAII
FEBRUARY 17, 2026
**IN SUPPORT OF SB 2603 SD1 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA**

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dave Erdman, and I serve as Interim President and CEO of Retail Merchants of Hawai'i (RMH), a statewide nonprofit trade association representing retailers, shopping centers, restaurants in shopping centers or retailers, and allied businesses across Hawai'i.

RMH supports SB 2603 SD1, which designates the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra as the Official State Symphony and provides structured state support with reporting and oversight provisions.

Symphony performances drive activity in nearby restaurants, retail stores, parking facilities, and hospitality venues. Patrons frequently dine and shop before and after performances, generating direct spending in our local economy for our RMH member business and community businesses.

As Hawai'i continues to strengthen and diversify its visitor economy, cultural programming plays an increasingly important role in attracting purpose-driven travelers who seek meaningful experiences and who tend to stay longer and spend more. A recognized state symphony enhances Hawai'i's competitive position as a world-class destination for arts and culture.

RMH supports the State to assist this cultural institution that supports arts education, community outreach, workforce attraction, and economic activity across our communities.

Retail Merchants of Hawai'i respectfully urges passage of SB 2603 SD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Erdman Interim President and CEO Retail Merchants of Hawai'i



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Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Moriwaki, Vice Chair
Committee on Ways and Means

RE: SB 2603 SD1 - Relating to the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra – **In Support**
Wednesday, February 25, 2026; 10:55 AM
Conference room 211

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and members of the committee:

As a Board of Director of the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra (HSO) and on-behalf of Servco Pacific, Inc., I am writing in strong support of SB 2603 SD1, which designates the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra as the State of Hawaii Symphony Orchestra.

Founded in 1900, the HSO has become an integral part of our community, not only by hosting diverse concerts and programs featuring international performing artists but also by promoting local talent within Hawaii through its outreach and educational opportunities such as the Hapa Concert Series and No Hoku Opio youth competition. HSO also provides free concerts in parks, public spaces, and live streams to ensure access to all of Hawaii's residents.

By designating Hawaii Symphony Orchestra as the "State of Hawaii Symphony Orchestra," SB 2603 SD1 will enable HSO to obtain state funds and continue to deliver accessible and meaningful programs that benefits Hawaii's families, students, and communities.

We respectfully urge the Committee to pass SB 2603 SD1. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this measure.

Peter Dames
President & CEO



The
Store
With
Aloha

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February 23, 2026

SB2603 SD1 – Relating to the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra

Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Committee Members,

My name is Paul Kosasa, and I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of ABC Stores, a locally owned business that has proudly served Hawai'i's communities for more than seven decades. I am currently serving as Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Honolulu Symphony and have held this role for fifteen years. I write to express my **strong support for SB2603 SD1**, relating to the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra.

SB2603 SD1 would designate the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra as the State of Hawaii Symphony Orchestra, formally recognizing its longstanding contributions to our community, culture, and education. The Hawaii Symphony Orchestra has been an integral part of Hawai'i's cultural fabric for over a century, providing world-class performances, extensive educational outreach, and meaningful opportunities that enrich both residents and visitors alike.

As reflected in the bill's findings, the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra serves an important public purpose through free and accessible performances, partnerships with public schools, support for youth musicians, and service to the broader community. These efforts exemplify the Orchestra's commitment to public service and align with the Legislature's intent to acknowledge and support institutions that provide lasting benefits to the State.

SB2603 SD1 establishes a thoughtful framework that allows the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra to better sustain its operations while maintaining its independence, transparency, and accountability. Designating the Orchestra as the State of Hawaii Symphony Orchestra is a prudent investment in Hawai'i's cultural legacy and future generations.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge your support of SB2603. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Mahalo,

Paul Kosasa

President & Chief Executive Officer
ABC Stores



Thirty-Third Legislature, State of Hawai'i
Regular Session of 2026
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Testimony by Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra
February 25, 2026

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB2603 SD1
– RELATING TO THE HAWAI'I SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee,

As Music and Artistic Director and President and CEO, respectively, of the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra, and we request your support of **SB2603 SD1**, which would designate the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra as the State of Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra. This designation would ensure **equal access to world-class symphonic music for all residents, regardless of where they live.**

Music is not only entertainment; it helps mental health, physical health, brain development, and socialization. It teaches concentration, perseverance, listening, and working together. Music brings people together and uplifts our communities, and HSO is a community service provider.

Providing State designation is important for both HSO and our state for a number of reasons:

1. HSO Provides Significant Public Service to the State

HSO delivers meaningful public service through cultural, educational, and artistic programming. It enhances access to high-quality music and promotes cultural engagement across Hawai'i. We are proud of all we offer at HSO, such as:

- More than 40 diverse concerts annually
- Free community concerts
- Free education concerts including Symphony of the Hawai'i Seas
- Our Na Hoku Opio - Young Stars competition that showcases the talented young Hawai'i students
- Side-by-side projects with Hawai'i Youth Symphony
- A Masterworks Series that brings the world's best music and greatest artists to Hawai'i

Our HapaSymphony concerts that combine the talents of Hawai'i's most revered musicians including Keola Beamer, Jake Shimabukuro, and Raiatea Helm with the power of a full symphony orchestra

- Commissioning new works by living composers from around our Pacific region, embracing our geography as a Pacific orchestra
- Uniting the state's most important arts organizations under one umbrella in our groundbreaking Beethoven Festival and this year's Sounds of Shakespeare Festival
- The musicians are our greatest asset: We employ some of the United States' finest musicians to play in the HSO. They don't only play in the orchestra, though; they also play the vital role of educating our children
- Sharing live symphonic music that has been linked in numerous studies with vastly improved academic performance, better outcomes for young people, and increased social cohesion

2. HSO Has Deep Historical Roots in Hawai'i

HSO (formerly the Honolulu Symphony) was founded in **1902**, making it one of the oldest orchestras in the United States west of the Rockies. Its longevity reflects a century-long bond with Hawai'i's communities and cultural heritage. This long history includes surviving world wars, the Great Depression, and major financial crises — demonstrating resilience that mirrors the perseverance of Hawai'i itself.

3. HSO is a Vital Cultural Institution Delivering Essential Public Service

The orchestra's educational initiatives support thousands of children, addressing unequal distribution of arts education and improving academic and social outcomes through exposure to music.

4. It Reflects and Elevates Hawai'i's Cultural Identity

HSO works with both world-renowned guest artists and local musicians, promoting Hawai'i-based talent and fostering cultural collaborations that reflect Hawai'i's unique heritage. Our programming includes classical masterworks, film concerts, pops performances, Hawaiian collaborations, and more, showcasing the cultural diversity of the islands and enriching local artistic life – for residents and visitors alike.

5. It Supports Local Musicians and Strengthens Hawai'i's Creative Economy

HSO employs **85 professional musicians** and regularly commissions or collaborates with top-tier artists. This contributes to Hawai'i's creative economy and provides stable professional opportunities within the arts sector.

In Summary

Designating the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra as the official State Orchestra of Hawai'i is supported by strong evidence that HSO:

- Serves the public good statewide
- Preserves and elevates Hawai'i's cultural identity
- Expands arts access and education
- Supports local professionals and the arts economy
- Has a 125-year historical legacy worth honoring

A **designated State Orchestra** would be a **cultural and economic asset**, supporting local jobs, driving tourism, and strengthening our communities through music.

Thank you for your support of **SB2603 SD1** to make symphonic music a lasting and meaningful part of life for all Hawai'i residents.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.



Dane Lam
Music and Artistic Director



Amy Iwano
President and CEO

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 11:23:11 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lynn Murakami Akatsuka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB 2603, SD 1 passage this legislative session. Its outreach to the community and its commitment to sustain this statewide has been impressive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of SB 2603, SD 1.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 2:13:42 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Winston R Welch	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Senators,

I'll keep it short -- this is a worthwhile bill that has great community support and is in the interest of the betterment of our society.

I fully support SB2603 SD1.

Thank you, Winston Welch, Honolulu

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 2:13:48 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karen Turner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please designate the HSO as official state Orchestra. They are a joy to attend and deserve every support possible

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 2:14:12 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patricia LaForce	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 2:32:07 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
jean tsou tsukamoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a parent whose son was fortunate to be mentored by three musicians from the Hawaii Symphony from age 5 to 18. His passion for music was evident from a very young age, and his violin teachers not only honed his musical skills but enriched his life by instilling strong work ethics, tenacity, patience, and respect for his mentors and fellow students.

The importance of a strong, sustainable symphony in our community simply cannot be overlooked. The arts, particularly music, is sorely insufficient in our public schools. Homeschoolers depend on professional musicians to provide music lessons. Private school students also benefit from the teachings of these professional musicians beyond the instructors at their respective schools.

Professional orchestras around the country / world are struggling financially. In Hawaii, our isolated and small community simply cannot support a professional orchestra without consistent funding from the State. The Arts are so critical to both our youth and the adult population in Hawaii.

I fully support the bill to create a State supported and sponsored professional symphony orchestra.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 2:35:02 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
lynne matusow	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is great. To finally have an official state orchestra. Since its formation several years ago the Hawai'i Symphony has travelled statewide and in addition to performing paid concerts also provides free concerts in the community. Please move this bill forward.

lynne matusow

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 2:43:12 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brenner Danielson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and esteemed members of the Ways and Means Committee,

The Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra is a respected and beloved organization.

Having said that, I respectfully urge you not to use public funds to support the HSO at this time. Hawai'i is facing significant financial pressures and difficult budget choices.

Public funding should focus first on mandatory and essential services that directly impact the health, safety, and well-being of our people and our future. While arts and culture are important to our quality of life, they are not the same as fundamental public services that keep our communities safe, our children educated, and our healthcare system strong.

The HSO has demonstrated that there is strong private support for its work. People already choose to support the orchestra out of their own pockets because they value the experience it offers. I believe that allowing families to continue to make that choice voluntarily respects both individual financial priorities and the vital work this committee is charged with in managing public resources responsibly.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to allow taxpayers to decide how they want to support the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra rather than allocating limited public dollars toward this purpose.

Thank you very much for your time and thoughtful consideration.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 2:52:05 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Martha Nakajima	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I love the Hawaii Symphony and strongly support this bill Thank you Martha Nakajima Honolulu

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:10:56 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eileen Y Uchima	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear WAM committee,

Please designate the Hawaii Symphony as the official state symphony.

As a music educator. I believe it is vital for children and adults to have access to live classical music performed by professionals in order to perpetuate and cultivate appreciation for Western art music.

Eileen Uchima

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:19:58 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ted Meehan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB 2603.

The Hawaii Sym[hony Orchestra is a fantastic orchestral group providing outstanding classical musical experiences for everyone. It is, therefore, an honor for it to be named the official state symphony.

Please support SB 2603. Thank you.

Ted Meehan

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:20:37 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Clark	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Our family supports this bill. We cherish HSO and the work they do.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:29:01 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Diann Karin Lynn	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill to designate the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra as the State of Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra and to provide sustaining funding.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:33:10 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle K.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee Members,

I strongly support passing this bill because recognizing the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra will show that we prioritize the arts in the state and give the public another outlet from the daily stressors of life. The HSO is a joy and gem in our community that we must value and share with future generations. Everyone who has a chance to witness HSO perform is experiencing magic in real life. HSO deserve state support NOW. Thank you for your time and kind consideration.

Mahalo,
Michelle

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:37:27 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
elizabeth rice grossman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Let's make the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra official! Mahalo for your consideration.

Elizabeth Rice Grossman,

Honolulu, HI 96815

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:37:52 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jill White	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

The Symphony is one of the only things my adult son with autism enjoys in public. Please protect access to the arts for the public.

Mahalo

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:38:04 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Monk	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Hawaii Symphony Orchestra benefits the state and its residents far beyond subscribers and classical music fans. Its members, who rely on the HSO as a primary source of their livelihood, are the instructors for hundreds of keiki who are learning to play instruments. Without the HSO, many of them could not live here as professional musicians.

They provide the music for the Hawaii Opera Theatre and performances by the Hawaii Ballet Theatre. The HSO offers free community concerts at venues outside its homes at the Blaisdell and the Hawaii Theatre, and invites students into the concert halls for programs that enrich their lives through exposure to live orchestra music, in many cases for the first time.

Programs featuring top Hawaiian music performers and live music accompanying popular films extend the HSO's appeal to audiences not habitually drawn to orchestra concerts.

The high-quality programs of the HSO attract internationally known guest performers and inspire audiences consisting of both residents and visitors.

My wife and I are long-time subscribers and donors, and we know that the HSO relies heavily on community financial support and volunteers to supplement the income from ticket sales. Not long ago, the former Honolulu Symphony Orchestra faced a financial crisis and was forced to disband. It took a herculean effort by supporters and volunteers, both local and from the mainland, to revive the organization in its present form. Establishing official state support with this bill would help stabilize the HSO for future generations. Please pass it.

Mahalo and aloha,

David Monk

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:38:32 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angie Knight	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Hawaii Symphony Orchestra not only supports music and cultural enrichment but also serves as a showcase of musicians and Hawaii's art to residents and visitors alike. Over the years, I've brought friends and family to their Symphony Film Concerts, sitting beside families visiting our home from theirs. Moreover, I've witnessed my friend's son have his love for the violin reignited after attending a film concert where he saw his own violin teacher performing. I support this measure to ensure the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra is both designated and made eligible for dedicated funding to keep these artistic endeavors and more available and thriving in our community.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:41:30 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

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

Comments:

There is a strong, well-documented correlation between students who take music lessons—particularly instrumental/classical training—and higher academic achievement, including better grades in math, science, and English. Studies suggest these students are often academically ahead of their peers, with benefits stemming from improved cognitive skills and self-discipline .

Key details regarding the relationship:

- **Performance Gap:** Students involved in music education can be up to an academic year ahead of their non-musical peers in core subjects.
- **Instrumental Advantage:** The strongest correlation exists for students playing musical instruments, rather than just singing.
- **Brain Benefits:** *Learning an instrument develops skills in processing, organizing, and prioritizing information. It is also linked to neurological changes that improve cognitive functions.*
- **Transferable Skills:** *The dedication required to master an instrument translates into better academic discipline and study habits.*

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:05:02 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Colin Moore	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 2603 SD1.

The Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra functions, in practice, as a public institution. For more than a century, it has contributed to the cultural life of Hawai'i while expanding access to arts education for students and families. Through free and educational programming, partnerships with public schools, and opportunities for young musicians to perform alongside professionals, it delivers tangible statewide benefits.

A world-class symphony is part of a state's civic infrastructure. It strengthens public education, supports local musicians and educators, and enhances quality of life across the islands. It also contributes to Hawai'i's ability to retain talent and remain an attractive place to live and work. These are long-term public returns that exceed the cost of stable support.

Designating and supporting the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra affirms that the arts are a public good and that cultural vitality is central to Hawai'i's future.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support S.B. 2603 SD1.

Thank you for your consideration.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:09:05 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Natasha Flaherty	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Designating the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra as the official state symphony is a meaningful recognition that supports the mission to bring music, education, and cultural enrichment to every corner of Hawai'i. Supporting the arts is important for providing intellectual and emotional enrichment and direction.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:32:33 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
carol bodnar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill that will make Honolulu Symphony Orchestra the official State Symphony. Our wonderful Symphony well deserves this recognition. This bill also supports the peoples of Hawaii's mission to bring music, education, and cultural enrichment to every corner of Hawai'i. Thank you for your vote in favor of this bill.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:41:46 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
SARAH MCCARTHY	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I recently attended an HSO performance at the Hawaii Theater. It was one of the most extraordinary performances I've attended. The creativity of the program and the excellent execution by the orchestra not only brought joy to the audience but an experience that reflected the diversity of the people and culture of the state of Hawai'i. The designation of HSO as the state symphony will elevate this creative community to the level of recognition it deserves. Supporting this orchestra will allow it to continue to curate and perform innovative and exceptional performances.

I strongly support this measure.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:01:52 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christine Feldmann	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in strong support of the Hawaii Symphony being designated as the Official State Symphony. They have been a part of my life and my community for 30 years. I have attended through many different conductors and volunteered with them. The music they give to the State through travel to outer islands, keeping music alive during Covid and supporting Hawaii musicians young and old is indispensable. They are a State Symphony!

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:22:31 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JINYOUNG WON	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As an independent filmmaker and artist based in Hawai‘i, I have seen firsthand how deeply the arts shape a community’s identity.

The Hawai‘i Symphony Orchestra is more than a concert on a stage. It is a living archive of who we are — a space where cultures meet, where keiki hear live music for the first time, and where kūpuna sit with memories carried by sound.

Designating HSO as the official state symphony through SB2603 is not just symbolic. It is a statement that Hawai‘i values the arts as essential, not optional to our collective future.

World-class music should not feel distant from our islands. It should belong here. It already does.

I stand in support of SB2603. Mahalo for helping ensure that the next generation grows up with access to the transformative power of live orchestral music.

Jinyoung Lee

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 6:26:08 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
carole richelieu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

legislation to designate the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra as the **official state symphony** - a meaningful recognition

Hawaii Kai voter

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 6:57:39 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marcia M. Nagao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support SB2603, designating the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra as the State of Hawaii Symphony Orchestra. Founded in 1900, the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra (formerly known as the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra), is one of the oldest orchestras in the U.S. west of the Rocky Mountains. The Hawaii Symphony Orchestra is a vital part of our community, bringing people together through performances at the Hawaii Theatre and Neil S. Blaisdell Concert Hall, as well as through educational outreach programs. The Hawaii Symphony Orchestra provides music education programs in schools and mentors young orchestra students. Symphonic music is a universal language, transcending barriers of age, race, and background, connecting us on an emotional level. Symphonic music has the ability to enrich and enhance our lives, and inspire future generations of artists. The Hawaii Symphony Orchestra is a cultural treasure, worth investing in and protecting. Please support this institution to ensure symphonic music continues to be available for future generations.

Thank you,

Marcia M. Nagao

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:36:28 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emma Votapek	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in support of SB 2603, which would designate the Hawai‘i Symphony Orchestra as the State of Hawai‘i Symphony Orchestra. I joined the HSO in 2004, and some of my favorite experiences have been during outreach efforts that really underscored that we were serving the whole state of Hawai‘i: making weekly trips to Nānākuli to work with elementary school students, and then welcoming them to Blaisdell Concert Hall to make music with us; playing for a packed house in a Hilo community concert led by Aaron Mahi; playing school shows on neighbor islands for students who had never seen a violin up close.

The HSO has strong artistic and executive leadership in place who are committed to expanding our reach in the community through free concerts, collaborations with other arts organizations, and concert series that showcase local talent, but my colleagues and I would like to do even more. Now called the Hawai‘i Symphony, we have both the desire and the kuleana to live up to that name, to demonstrate that we are Hawai‘i’s orchestra. SB 2603 would help make that possible, and so I ask for your support of this bill.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:34:24 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Oppose

2603 SB RELATING TO THE HAWAII SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA.

IT NEVER CAME TO WAI'ANAE AND KAPOLEI, BUT WENT TO KAILUA

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:44:47 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gretchen Gould	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

If we want to really BE a big city in the U.S., not just a little backwater island in the ocean, we need to have a symphony of our own. Where else can we hear live symphony music out here in the middle of an ocean? This music is an important cultural must for everyone from kids to every adult on the different islands and this will help make it so. Please make it so!!

Gretchen Gould, Kaneohe

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:57:06 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Steve Flanter	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I think it's critically important for SB 2603 to pass. The Hawaii Symphony is one of the leading performing arts organizations in our state. Let's make sure that it can serve our whole state for many generations to come. Please pass this bill. Thank you.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:41:27 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Berta Narbonne	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support the HSO mission to bring world-class orchestral music to our community, and this is a meaningful state recognition.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 11:10:01 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marcia Kemble	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Greetings Committee Members,

I am writing to support SB2603. This recognition would help ensure that world-class symphonic music continues to thrive in our islands, enriching our community for generations to come. It will be particularly helpful for those who live on neighbor islands.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Marcia Kemble

Makiki

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:17:15 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
mikel mesh	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Culture is more important than ever in these troubled times. Please do the right thing ad make the Hawaii Symphony a state symphony.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 6:23:54 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Shattuck	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, James Shattuck fully support to designate the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra as the **official state symphony** - a meaningful recognition that will support their mission to bring music, education, and cultural enrichment to every corner of Hawai'i. and helping secure a vibrant future for orchestral music in Hawai'i. This will ensure the magic of symphony reaches generations to come.

Sincerely,

James Shattuck

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:26:04 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lisa Lee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I fully support Bill SB2603.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 7:49:36 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Greg F. Wickstrom	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The **Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra** has been enriching our community for years, bringing world-class orchestral music to keiki and kūpuna alike. Now, we have an opportunity to ensure its legacy continues for generations to come.

SB2603 is legislation to designate the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra as the **official state symphony** - a meaningful recognition that supports our mission to bring music, education, and cultural enrichment to every corner of Hawai'i.

I fully support this bill.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:28:55 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joseph A. Bobich	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:24:18 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rijumon Sarkar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a frequent visitor turned into new Hawai'i resident I wholeheartedly support this bill to make Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra the state symphony of Hawai'i. I've attended many concerts and it's clear to me this important part of the arts scene in Hawai'i brings together residents from all walks of life, all ages, all cultures, and the programming is diverse and relevant to lovers of traditional classical music and to those who appreciate contemporary instrumental music. The recent US premiere of a geomungo concerto transcribed by a local UH professor, followed by Brahms 4th Symphony is a perfect example of the unique flavor and diversity of arts that Hawai'i symphony can bring. This bill will unlock funding that should allow more than 1 performance of these intricate pieces and spread more joy to the masses.

Thank you.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:25:38 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Autumn Woods	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I write in strong support of SB2603, which would designate the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra (HSO) as the official State Symphon. As both a longtime patron and a proud member of the HSO staff, I've seen the extraordinary reach of this orchestra, from the concert hall to classrooms, neighborhood parks, and public spaces across O'ahu.

My family first connected with the HSO during the pandemic, streaming concerts from home. That experience moved us to become subscribers and has deeply shaped my daughter's journey as a young musician. Thanks to HSO, she's conducted the orchestra at the Waikiki Shell, interned with staff, and volunteered after graduation. Today, she's pursuing music in college, proof of the orchestra's lasting impact.

Since joining the HSO team a year ago, I've seen just how embedded this organization is in our community. Our musicians are not only world-class performers, but educators and mentors who inspire students, support teachers, and bring music to places where it's often least expected and most needed.

The HSO is a vital part of Hawai'i's cultural and educational landscape. I respectfully urge your support for SB2603 to ensure this beloved institution continues to uplift, educate, and unite our community for generations to come.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Autumn Woods
Director of Advancement
Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:33:38 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marion Lyman-Mersereau	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The **Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra** has been enriching our community for years, bringing world-class orchestral music to keiki and kūpuna alike. It would be more than a worthwhile to continue that enrichment by helping to support this brilliant musical artistry for Hawai'i for many years to come.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:42:44 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kirk Shitaoka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for allowing me to submit my written testimony. I, Kirk Shitaoka, fully support SB2603, designating the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra as the official state symphony. It is critical that the arts thrive in Hawai'i, at all levels and for all ages. The Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra is a world-class symphonic ensemble that we should support and cherish. Mahalo.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:03:39 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hannah Watanabe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

***I SUPPORT SB2603** and the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra (HSO) because of how much HSO contributes to the community. They truly represent Hawaii doing free community concerts, school educational concerts and helping to coach students for free at various schools throughout Hawaii. HSO consistently provides local musicians and composers the opportunity to have their works premired or performed and to perpetuate Hawaiian music in our state.*

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:17:19 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephen A. Tajima	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB2603 to designate the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra as the state's official state orchestra. HSO truly represents the state in providing quality symphonic music and education to our residents. HSO brings a diverse program of music representing the diverse make-up of our state and is deserving of recognition as Hawaii's symphony orchestra. Mahalo.



24 February 2026

Testimony in Strong Support of SB2603 SD1 – Relating to the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the WAM Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of **SB2603 SD1**, which would designate the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra as the State of Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra. I am writing to you in **STRONG SUPPORT** for these efforts, notably for the **public value** that professional symphony orchestras bring to the community, from keiki to kupuna and all in between.

As stated in the opening paragraph of SD1, **the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra contributes greatly to the growth and inspiration of our young people, particularly through its Side-by-Side concerts with Hawai'i Youth Symphony**. The ripple effects of projects like these are huge. They immediately transfer tacit knowledge, both tangible (e.g. tone production, technical skills) and psychological (how musicians lead, how to problem solve, how to work nonverbally). They help youth to form their own identities, understand belonging, and think about college/career pipelines. Similarly, I believe that the adult professionals also benefit from the organization's undertaking of educational programs, as they reflect on their own journeys in relation to mentorship and pedagogy; building intergenerational and therefore community relationships.

Beyond these direct projects, State investment in the HSO sends a meaningful message to all in our islands who believe in the power of music to connect, transform, and heal. State funding for the HSO helps to establish a cultural norm, in which we collectively recognize artistic excellence as a public good, not a luxury commodity or privilege for a few. Supporting HSO financially also takes care of its corps of musicians, whom educate and take part in community activities in immense and numerous ways.

I wrote in previous testimony, which I stand behind, that **the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra exemplifies the balance between artistic integrity and civic purpose**.

We respectfully encourage the continued prioritization of the HSO's **FREE educational programs for youth and families**, which are the lifeblood of its community connectivity and a natural extension of its artistic mission.

Thank you WAM for strengthening the stature and impact of the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra, and recognizing the important of symphony orchestras across all communities statewide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randy Wong". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Randy Wong
President & CEO, Hawai'i Youth Symphony
Musician, Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:33:24 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marilynn S. Cullison	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB2603, making HSO our symphony for our state, making certain it's magic reaches generations to come. With outreach to schools and visits to all the islands, everyone will be able to experience the beauty and wonder of our Hawaii Symphoney Orchestra.

Growing up in Indiana, I was influenced by the Indianapolis Symphony when it would travel to my hometown ,and I became a musician, playing the bassoon in middle and high school, an experience of a lifetime.

We recently moved from North Carolina where the NC Symphony traveled from the State Capitol to multiple smaller metropolitan areas around the state, including our town, to share music and to hold school workshops. I believe it is a model tto follow, promoting music throughout the state.

I believe that supporting the future for orchestral music in Hawai'i will bring music, education and enrichment to all of our state. Hawaii Symphony Orchestra is for everyone in Hawaii.

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:48:24 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Chiwa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Senator Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Senator Moriwaki and Members of the Committee on Ways and Means.

Please support SB 2603 SD 1 to provide the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra with the designation of State of Hawaii Symphony Orchestra. I think this would be immensely beneficial to the people of Hawaii by enabling the Orchestra to reach more people and thereby, spread their uplifting, enriching, healing music.

Mahalo.

Jennifer Chiwa

Makiki and life long resident of Oahu

SB-2603-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:03:16 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carol Hirai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Essential organization to support the arts and culture of this community