



Testimony Before The
Senate Committee on Ways and Means (WAM)

IN SUPPORT OF SB2756

February 25, 2026, 10:57 a.m., Room 211 & Via Videoconference

We are Olan Leimomi Fisher and Kevin Chang, Kua'āina Advocate and Executive Director, respectively, testifying on behalf of [Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo \(or KUA\)](#). "Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo" stands for "grassroots growing through shared responsibility," and our acronym "KUA" means "backbone." **Our mission is to connect and empower communities to improve their quality of life through the collective care for their biocultural (natural and cultural) heritage, serving as a "backbone organization" that supports creative and community-driven solutions to problems stemming from environmental degradation.** Hawai'i's biocultural resources continue to be negatively impacted by political, economic, and social changes, and the increasing dangers of climate change make fostering and empowering resilient communities acutely critical.

Currently KUA supports three major networks of: (1) over 40 mālama 'āina (caring for our 'āina or "that which feeds") community groups collectively referred to as E Alu Pū (moving forward together); (2) over 60 loko i'a (fishpond aquaculture systems unique to Hawai'i) and wai 'ōpae (anchialine pool systems) sites in varying stages of restoration and development, with numerous caretakers, stakeholders, and volunteers known as the Hui Mālama Loko I'a ("caretakers of fishponds"); and (3) the Limu Hui made up of over 50 loea (traditional experts) and practitioners in all things "limu" or locally-grown "seaweed." **Our shared vision is to once again experience what our kūpuna (ancestors) referred to as 'ĀINA MOMONA – abundant and healthy ecological systems that sustain our community resilience and well-being.**

KUA strongly supports SB2756 as an incremental step towards 'āina momona.

This bill would appropriate funds to the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources, to supply needed equipment for the Hawai'i Island Branch to effectively carry out its mission to uphold the laws necessary to protect, conserve, and manage our unique and limited biocultural and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations.

A large number of our network members partner with DOCARE officers through growing community-based co-management initiatives from mauka to makai. These DOCARE officers are often the first representation community members face from DLNR. Some wahi pana (significant places) have become well-known for their absence of almost any DOCARE presence – largely due to inadequate training resources and capacity. A bill like this, which we urge you to support, and the growing DOCARE Academy we hope you continue to support, are already filling that gap. With the recent graduating classes, so far we have heard only praise and gratitude from our community members with DOCARE's increased presence and effectiveness throughout our state. **As DOCARE's officer pool continues to grow,**

likewise they need more equipment to carry out their enforcement duties, and particularly with a significant number of incoming officers assigned to Hawai'i Island.

The communities we work with are committed to ensuring the long-term health of our biocultural resources that they have cared for and depended on for generations since time immemorial. **We believe our environment, the foundation of our very existence and “that which feeds” us all, requires long-term investment through a shared vision of achieving ‘āina momona (abundance) once again.** To get there requires dedicating more resources for mālama ‘āina (caring for our environment), including through this measure to ensure that DOCARE officers on Hawai'i Island have the resources they need to protect our beloved ‘āina and all the lifeforms and practices that depend on it. Our decisions today will continue to shape the future that our keiki's keiki's keiki will one day inherit – we hope for a future of shared and harmonious abundance, and hope you do, too.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support. Please **PASS** SB2756.

Aloha ‘Āina Momona no Nā Kau ā Kau.

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy
Supporting SB2756, Relating to Conservation Enforcement
Committee on Ways and Means
February 25, 2026 at 10:57 am
Conference Room 211 and via Videoconference**

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify today. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Hawai'i and Palmyra supports SB2756, which appropriates funds for the purchase of equipment for the Hawaii Island Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

The natural environment in Hawai'i is the engine that drives our state's economy and a natural, recreational, and cultural treasure supporting our island lifestyle and livelihoods. Careful, thoughtful, and intentional conservation, management, and restoration is critical for the environment to withstand the increasing impacts of climate change while continuing to protect our islands' economic engine. TNC is proud of our decades of working in partnership with so many local organizations, agencies, and communities to care for this vital and fragile resources.

This bill would provide funding for DOCARE to purchase equipment vital to their ability to effectively carry out its mission to uphold the laws necessary to protect, conserve, and manage marine resources, such as responding to violations and enforcing rules and regulations. DOCARE's operations on Hawai'i are critical to the long-term management of the islands depleting marine resources which are impacted by increased, often illegal, fishing pressure. This legislation will ensure DOCARE has the equipment and resources its needs to more effectively enforce fishing regulations and provide the opportunity for herbivores and other reef fish populations to recover.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of SB2756.

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.

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

Before the Senate Committee on
WAYS AND MEANS

Wednesday, February 25, 2026
10:57 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 211

In consideration of
SENATE BILL 2756
RELATING TO CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT

Senate Bill 2756 appropriates funds for the purchase of equipment for the Hawai'i Island Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Supplemental Budget request.**

The Department anticipates the hiring of fifty-three (53) individuals to fill vacant Conservation and Resources Enforcement Officer positions statewide. With the filling of these positions, there will be a need for more equipment. This additional funding for equipment, including vehicles and a marine vessel, will increase enforcement capacity for the Hawai'i Branch, including ability to respond to emergencies and calls for service with increased responsiveness and efficiency.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 3:23:47 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:57:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daisy Franco Rodriguez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As an officer for the DLNR-DOCARE, Hawaii Branch, I support this bill for providing the Hawaii Branch DOCARE with new operating vehicles. Having access to new and properly functioning vehicles is important in order for our officers to safely and efficiently respond to calls and perform our duties. In Hawaii, many of our vehicles are old and unserviceable, often requiring frequent repairs, which takes time away from performing our duties to patrol and protect.

Hawaii Island is fortunate enough to have the most land with important natural resources that the community cares for and has a deep responsibility for. The areas that we often monitor and maintain are only accessible via unpaved roads, which require vehicles that are properly suited for those conditions. These include game management areas, forest reserves, state parks, and unencumbered shorelines. Vehicles that are not suited for these conditions can hinder our ability to properly respond to calls.

Additionally, the Division is currently expanding, and it is vital that our officers are safely equipped to carry out their duties in order to continue protecting Hawaii's natural resources. I show my profound support and hope to shed light on this bill, which not only provides continued protection of Hawaii's unique and historic resources but also allows for the safety of Hawaii DOCARE Officers.

Mahalo for your time and efforts.

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:04:54 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:57:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Roxanne O’Neal	Testifying for DLNR/DOCARE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Roxanne O’Neal, and I respectfully submit testimony in strong support of SB2756. I am currently a Conservation and Resource Enforcement Officer with the Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement (DOCARE), assigned to Hawai‘i Island.

As a DOCARE officer, I operate a marked patrol vehicle from our existing fleet. Many of these vehicles are well beyond their intended service life and some lack standard emergency equipment such as audible sirens and visual emergency lights. This limitation directly affects our ability to operate safely and effectively while performing our duties on Hawai‘i County roadways.

DOCARE officers regularly travel throughout the island and are often required to assist as first responders at traffic collisions or other incidents until additional emergency personnel arrive. Without proper emergency lighting, responding or stopping safely on active roadways is challenging and increases risk to officers, motorists, and the public. Hazard lights alone are not sufficient in these situations.

In addition, the lack of fully equipped patrol vehicles restricts our ability to conduct traffic enforcement when necessary. There have been instances of reckless or unsafe driving observed while operating a marked DOCARE vehicle, where the only available option was to notify Hawai‘i Police Department dispatch rather than take immediate action. Properly equipped vehicles would allow DOCARE officers to better support public safety and interagency coordination.

The age and condition of the current fleet also result in frequent mechanical issues and extended repair times. When vehicles are out of service, officers are required to share patrol trucks, which presents logistical challenges, as these vehicles function as our mobile offices and carry essential equipment.

With new officers expected to join DOCARE following the upcoming academy, the existing shortage of patrol vehicles will become even more pronounced. Reliable, fully equipped patrol vehicles are essential to training, deployment, and the overall effectiveness of our enforcement mission on Hawai‘i Island.

For these reasons, I strongly support SB2756 and the proposed appropriation to modernize and expand the DOCARE fleet. This investment is critical to officer safety, operational readiness, and the continued protection of Hawai'i's natural and cultural resources.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Roxanne O'Neal
Conservation and Resource Enforcement Officer
Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement (DOCARE)

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 10:58:42 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:57:00 AM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L Perry, Support

2756 SB RELATING TO CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT.

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:44:33 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:57:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daniel Elvenia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this bill again. As an enforcement officer with the DLNR DOCARE, I fully support this bill. On Hawaii Island, as well as throughout the State, our Division sorely lacks the patrol vehicles and equipment needed to perform our duties. We currently have 26 vehicles shared amongst 31 sworn personnel, and project another 16 to join our ranks through our upcoming Academy recruitment with no vehicles expected to supplement our aging fleet. Our vehicles are outdated, the majority of which are over ten years old and in constant need of service and repair. These vehicles also lack proper enforcement identification and equipment for our personnel to effectively and efficiently respond to calls for service. The passage of this bill would allow us to nearly double our current fleet, helping to alleviate the wear and tear on these vehicles. Additionally, it would bolster our presence and visibility throughout our islands, and allow us to better provide the services and protection our communities expect and demand.

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:00:04 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:57:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Micah Stevens	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TO: Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee

FROM: Micah STEVENS

Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE)

Hawai‘i Island Branch

RE: SB 2756 – Relating to Conservation Enforcement

POSITION: Strong Support

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of SB 2756, which appropriates funds for the purchase of vehicles and a maritime enforcement vessel for the Hawai‘i Island Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE).

The Hawai‘i Island DOCARE branch is responsible for enforcing conservation, natural resource, boating, wildlife, and criminal laws across the largest island in the State of Hawai‘i. Our area of responsibility includes vast shoreline, remote coastal areas, upland forests, state parks, and boating facilities. Effective enforcement across these diverse environments requires reliable transportation assets.

Currently, much of our vehicle fleet is over ten years old, with several units dating back to 2013. These aging vehicles frequently experience mechanical issues, downtime, and reliability concerns. At times, there are not enough operational vehicles available for the number of officers assigned to duty. This directly impacts our response capability, coverage area, and overall public safety mission.

With an upcoming recruit class adding additional officers to our ranks, the shortage of functional patrol vehicles will become even more significant. Without adequate vehicles, officers may be forced to double up in units when separate coverage would be more effective. Additional patrol vehicles would allow for expanded island-wide coverage, improved response times, and enhanced officer safety by ensuring officers are not unnecessarily concentrated in one location.

In addition to land-based enforcement needs, a dedicated maritime patrol vessel is critical for effective coastal and offshore enforcement. Hawai‘i Island has extensive coastline and boating activity that requires consistent patrol presence. A properly equipped enforcement vessel will

significantly enhance our ability to address illegal fishing, resource violations, boating safety issues, and emergency response situations on the water.

SB 2756 is an investment in public safety, natural resource protection, and responsible stewardship of Hawai'i's lands and waters. Reliable equipment is essential for officers to perform their duties safely and effectively.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to pass SB 2756.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,
Micah STEVENS

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lawrence L. Terlep Jr., and I serve as an Assistant Chief for the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) serving as the Hawaii Island Branch Chief. I am submitting this testimony again in strong support of SB2756.

SB2756 is critically important to maintaining and strengthening DOCARE's enforcement capacity on Hawai'i Island, particularly as the division prepares to onboard a new class of officers through the upcoming DOCARE Academy. Hawai'i Island is expected to receive a significant share of the approximately fifty-three (53) incoming Conservation and Resources Enforcement Officer I (CREO I) positions, which will place immediate and substantial demands on our already strained operational resources.

At present, the Hawai'i Island Branch faces a severe shortage of vehicles. The majority of our existing fleet has exceeded its intended service life, with most vehicles over ten years old and at least two vehicles exceeding twenty years of use. These aging vehicles present growing safety, reliability, and maintenance challenges that directly affect our ability to respond to calls for service, conduct enforcement operations, and support officer safety.

SB2756 would help address these deficiencies by supporting the acquisition of essential equipment, including vehicles and marine assets. Specifically, the Hawai'i Island Branch has an urgent need for twenty (20) replacement and additional vehicles in Fiscal Year 2027, with an additional twenty (20) vehicles in Fiscal Year 2028. While fleet replacement will remain an ongoing need, this phased approach would significantly mitigate what is becoming an operational crisis and ensure that both current and newly assigned officers have safe and reliable transportation.

In addition to land-based resources, SB2756 is also vital to strengthening DOCARE's marine enforcement capabilities. The West Hawai'i District Marine Unit is expected to receive additional marine officers from the upcoming academy. However, without an additional patrol vessel, our ability to effectively deploy those officers will remain limited. An additional vessel would allow us to increase patrol hours, expand coverage range, and more effectively protect nearshore waters and marine resources.

These investments represent practical, near-term solutions to critical equipment shortages that directly impact DOCARE's mission to protect Hawai'i's natural, cultural, and historic resources. Without adequate vehicles and vessels, staffing increases alone cannot translate into meaningful enforcement capacity.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support SB2756 and help ensure that DOCARE officers have the tools necessary to safely and effectively carry out their duties on Hawai'i Island.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued support of resource protection and public safety.

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:58:43 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:57:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dale VILORIA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this Bill as DOCARE needs equipment to function. As expressed the lack of vehicles restricts officers ability to fulfill their jobs and needs. Our resources are hawaii's most valuable resource and the state should be fully funding its proection resurces. In this case enforcement is limited to funding and resources depriving the protection and management of those resources. With this bill passed it will move DOCARE one step closer to better protecting the resources which is what attracts tourism and promotes culture.