



HAWAI'I COUNTY COUNCIL

County of Hawai'i
West Hawai'i Civic Center, Bldg. A
74-5044 Ane Keohokalole Hwy.
Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i 96740

February 2, 2026

COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Senator Chris Lee, Chair
Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair

RE: **Support for SB2756**, Relating to Conservation Enforcement. Appropriates funds for the purchase of equipment for the Hawai'i Island Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement of the Department of Land and Natural Resources

Hearing: **Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.**

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

On behalf of Council District 8 in North Kona, I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB2756 which appropriates funding for essential equipment for the **Hawai'i Island Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE)**.

Hawai'i Island encompasses vast coastlines, forest reserves, conservation districts, and culturally significant natural resources. Effective enforcement of conservation and natural resource laws is critical to protecting these areas, ensuring public safety, and preserving our 'āina for future generations. DOCARE officers play a vital role in this work, yet the Hawai'i Island branch continues to face significant equipment and vehicle shortages that limit their operational capacity.

SB2756 makes a necessary investment by funding a maritime enforcement patrol vessel and marked patrol vehicles equipped for law enforcement use. These resources will directly enhance DOCARE's ability to respond to violations, conduct proactive patrols, and support incoming officers assigned to Hawai'i Island.

Strengthening DOCARE's enforcement capacity aligns with both state and county priorities, including natural resource protection, sustainable use of public lands and waters, and the safety of residents and visitors alike.

I respectfully urge the Committee to **pass SB2756** and provide the funding needed to support effective conservation enforcement on Hawai'i Island.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Holeka Goro Inaba", written over a horizontal line.

HOLEKA GORO INABA, Ed.D.,
Council Chair, District 8, North Kona

HGI.wpb

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 2:42:11 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

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: 2/3/2026 10:36:06 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daphnee LP Fields	Testifying for DLNR/DOCARE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello,

My name is Daphnee Fields. I am a Conservation Resources Enforcement Officer with the Department of Land and Natural Resources. I am a CREO III of the Hawaii Branch, East Hawaii District. I support Bill SB2756. I currently patrol in a 2008 Chevy Silverado. When I arrived in my District after completing the Academy in March of 2023, there were not enough working/running patrol vehicles for all of the newly graduated officers. I was able to clean up and request maintenance and repair on the above mentioned vehicle so that I could adequately perform my duties. Since I have been patrolling with this vehicle, it has been in and out of the mechanic shop more than I have been patrolling in it. I have just recently had it in the shop for not starting. I have been stuck in the mountains of Mauna Kea GMA and Forest Reserve due to the vehicle not wanting to start. I was able to get it started because I purchased, with my own money, a portable jump starter in case I got into a situation like that.

I do believe that having a reliable vehicle, designed to take us in areas where four wheel drive is required, will not only allow us as Conservation Officers to adequately perform our duties, but to keep us safe as we travel from one side of the district to the other. We would not be worried about our vehicles breaking down on us or not starting when we need to patrol in areas that have little to no service or is a great distance from any highway where we would be able to request assistance. I do believe that the maintaining of our vehicle plays a big part in the vehicles that are still running. Although, majority of our fleet are old and breaking down just from what our duties entail and what we require from these vehicles.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Daphnee Fields, CREO III

DLNR/DOCARE

Hawaii Branch, East Hawaii District

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

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAI'I | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA
P.O. BOX 621
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

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

Before the Senate Committee on
WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Wednesday, February 4, 2026
1:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

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.

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy
Supporting SB2756, Relating to Conservation Enforcement
Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts
February 4, 2026 at 1:00 pm
Conference Room 224 and via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify today. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Hawai'i and Palmyra supports HB2756, 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).

Hawai'i's natural environment 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 Hawai'i's 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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LATE

Testimony Before The
Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture & the Arts (WLA)
IN SUPPORT OF SB2756
February 4, 2026, 1:00 p.m., Room 224 & 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.

HAWAI'I OCEAN LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE



LATE

February 4, 2026

Hawai'i State Legislature
Senate Committee on Water, Land & the Arts

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT for SB 2756, Relating to Conservation Enforcement

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and esteemed members of the committee,

The Ocean Legislative Task Force—a coalition of more than 150 individuals representing over 20 organizations statewide—strongly supports SB 2756, relating to conservation enforcement. Our members work across Hawai'i to protect marine and coastal resources, advance sustainable ocean management, and uphold laws designed to safeguard public trust resources for present and future generations. Effective enforcement is foundational to these efforts, and we appreciate the Legislature's attention to this critical need.

SB 2756 makes a targeted and necessary investment by appropriating funds for the purchase of equipment for the Hawai'i Island Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) within the Department of Land and Natural Resources. DOCARE officers are on the front lines of protecting Hawai'i's natural and cultural resources, often operating in challenging environments with limited staff and aging or insufficient equipment. Modern, reliable equipment directly enhances officer safety, response capacity, and the ability to deter and address illegal activities on land and in nearshore waters.

Strengthening conservation enforcement capacity will benefit not only ecosystems, but also law-abiding community members, subsistence practitioners, and responsible ocean users who depend on healthy, well-managed resources. For these reasons, the Ocean Legislative Task Force urges your support for Senate Bill 2756.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this important measure.

The Hawai'i Ocean Legislative Task Force advocates for measures that advance cesspool conversion and wastewater management, protect Hawai'i's coral reefs and reef fish, ensure transparent and sustainable implementation of the Green Fee program and long-term environmental staffing, and support other measures that strengthen Hawai'i's coastal and marine ecosystems.

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 6:53:06 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I SUPPORT this bill. In addition, I recommend that the Legislature find a faster but efficient way to provide the needed funding for said law enforcement agency to obtain the best equipment on the market that allow these officers to fulfill their Oath of Office.

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 2:08:28 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I support this bill 100%. DOCARE is very under funded and lacks the necessary resources to do its job effectively. They do not have enough vehicles to distribute amongst its officers and many vehicles are old, high mileage, and expensive trying to maintain/repair. The State needs to understand and realize that Hawaii's resources are what attract people to the islands and it is critical that they invest in protecting our most valuable asset, the resources. This is where having the right tools like a working vehicle will help get officers out in the field to do their job!

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 11:05:32 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

As an officer for DLNR-DOCARE, Hawaii branch, I support this bill for providing the 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 take 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 and has deep responsibility for. The areas that we often monitor and maintain are only accessible through unpaved roads, which require vehicles that are properly suited for those conditions. These include game management areas, forrest 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 the duties in order to continue protecting Hawaii's natural resources. I show 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.

Aloha Committees,

Hawai‘i Island DOCARE needs resources to serve our communities.

Our communities are stepping up to do our part in stewarding our ‘āina, we’ve worked hard to pass rules, and now we need DOCARE to assist with compliance and enforcement. They need tools to be able to do so.

Please pass this measure.

- U‘ilani Naipo

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:25:38 AM

Testimony for WLA on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Submitted by:
Micah STEVENS

Position: Support

To: Chair and Members of the Committee

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

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

As a field officer with DOCARE assigned to Hawai‘i Island, I directly experience the operational challenges caused by an aging and insufficient patrol fleet. The majority of our current vehicles are over ten years old, with some units dating back to 2013. These vehicles are well beyond their intended service life and are increasingly unreliable due to frequent mechanical issues.

As a result, vehicles are routinely taken out of service, and there are times when there are not enough operable patrol vehicles available for the number of officers working. This directly impacts patrol capability, response times, and officer safety. With an upcoming DOCARE academy class that will add additional officers to the Hawai‘i Island Branch, the shortage of patrol vehicles will be further exacerbated unless this issue is addressed.

Additional patrol vehicles would significantly enhance operational effectiveness by allowing officers to deploy independently rather than being consolidated into a single vehicle. This would result in greater coverage across large and remote areas, faster response to calls for service, and more proactive enforcement efforts to protect Hawai‘i’s natural, cultural, and marine resources.

SB 2756 also appropriately recognizes the growing demand for maritime enforcement by providing funding for an additional marine patrol vessel for West Hawai‘i. This vessel is critical for maintaining officer safety and ensuring effective enforcement in Hawai‘i’s coastal waters.

This measure addresses a critical and longstanding operational need. SB 2756 will directly improve officer safety, enforcement capability, and public service throughout Hawai'i Island. I respectfully urge the committee to support and pass this measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for your continued support of conservation law enforcement in the State of Hawai'i.

Respectfully submitted,
Micah STEVENS

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 12:39:01 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lawrence Terlep Jr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Written Testimony in Support of SB2756

Relating to DOCARE Equipment and Operational Capacity

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

My name is Lawrence L. Terlep Jr., and I serve as the Assistant Chief of the Hawai‘i Island Branch of the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE). I am submitting this testimony **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.

LATE

SB-2756

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:09:48 PM

Testimony for WLA on 2/4/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I fully support this bill as it directly impacts our (DOCARE) ability to perform our duties. Over the past 12 years, we've had to make due with old and unreliable vehicles that constantly broke down and in need of maintenance and repair. During that time period, we've received 15 vehicles shared amongst 30 senior officers and none to supplement the 24 new officers we've hired through our academy recruitments. With another recruitment push this year, where we anticipate taking on an additional 16 officers, we will not be able to properly outfit our staff so they can effectively and efficiently carry out the duties and responsibilities of a Conservation Resource Enforcement Officer on the Big Island, let alone throughout the State.