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*Ke Kia'āina o ka Moku'āina 'o
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KALI WATSON
CHAIRPERSON, HHC
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STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS
Ka 'Oihana 'Āina Ho'opulapula Hawaii'i

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TESTIMONY OF KALI WATSON, CHAIR
HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS
ON FEBRUARY 3, 2026 AT 1:10PM IN CR 224

SB 2790, RELATING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS

February 3, 2026

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

The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) **supports** this bill which appropriates funds to the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands for contracted services for the assessment and inventory of the Molokai Irrigation System (MIS).

At the April 2025 regular meeting of the Hawaiian Homes Commission (HHC), Molokai beneficiaries urged the HHC and DHHL staff to assume control of the MIS and to make land-use changes that would let more families farm and live on homestead lands. The MIS supplies water used for homestead agriculture across the island of Molokai but many homesteads remain without agricultural water.

Funds appropriated through this measure could be used by DHHL to contract services for background investigation, water system acquisition and due diligence support, community engagement, and other deliverables.

Background Investigation

1. Request, review and analyze available records, mapping, reports and geospatial data for the MIS.
2. Identify service area, MIS customers and water service limits and pressures based on available field data.
3. Identify pretreatment infrastructure based on available field data.
4. Review and analyze existing plans and policies including; DHHL Molokai Island Plan, DHHL Regional Plans, State of Hawaii Water Projects Plan, the

Hawaii Water Plan, and recent orders and Interim Instream Flow Standard Amendments from the Commission on Water Resource Management.

5. Review and analyze available data on domestic and agricultural use of water in the service area.
6. Develop resource and geospatial mapping of existing conditions for the service area.
7. Coordinate with relevant government agencies regarding information on and condition of the MIS.
8. Identify and review available permitting and approvals in place for the MIS infrastructure, including but not limited to water use permits and dam safety permits.
9. Identify and review available land agreements with adjacent landowners for access to MIS infrastructure.
10. Conduct site visits to examine existing conditions at the project site and conduct visual observation of available infrastructure.
11. Conduct preliminary inquiries with community members, government officials, lessees and relevant government and private agencies and organizations.

Water System Acquisition and Due Diligence Support

1. Meetings and coordination with MIS leadership and staff
2. Review of Existing Agreements and Liabilities
3. Review of Proposed Agreements for Acquisition
4. Review of Operations and Maintenance Program
5. Review of Capital Improvement Program
6. Review of current Water System Master Plan
7. Financial Assessment and Rate Study Review
8. Assessment and Inventory of the MIS
9. Meetings and coordination with DHHL leadership and staff.
10. Meetings with Internal Divisions of the DHHL's Land Development Division to discuss logistical issues with acquisition and resources required to strategically prepare the Department for potential acquisition.

Community Engagement

1. Identify and meet with key DHHL and non-homestead users of the MIS, practitioners and kūpuna associated with the source areas, community leaders, agencies and elected and appointed officials to understand the range of issues and concerns. Identify and meet with DHHL homesteaders and homestead organizations and residents to understand potential land use including confirmation of water use and demand requirements.
2. Contact relevant government agencies and private owners to identify areas of jurisdiction, water use authority and rights, and required permitting and approvals.
3. Conduct two days of initial meetings and site visit for items 1 through 2 above. Anticipated meetings would include several 1 hour small group meetings and one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders to be scheduled as time permits during the two day visit.
4. Conduct a similar series of follow-up meetings with local community members and lessees once Preliminary Analysis is completed.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

HO`OMANA PONO, LLC
Mamua Kānaka

ATTENTION:

COMMITTEE ON HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Chair
Senator Rachele Lamosao, Vice Chair

January 31, 2026

Re: **SB2790 RELATING TO HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS**

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee on Hawaiian Affairs!

We STRONGLY SUPPORT this, Bill.

We need to support our `Ohana in the ***Independent Nation of Moloka`i***. This bill will allow for the assessment and inventory of the Molokai irrigation system.

Please pass this bill. Mahalo.

De Mont Kalai Manaole

De MONT Kalai Manaole, Co-Manager
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January 30, 2026

To: Chair Tim Richards III, Vice Chair Rachele Lamosao, and the Senate Committee on Hawaiian Affairs

Subject: **SB2790**, Relating to the Department of Hawaiian Homelands

Aloha,

I am writing in **support of SB2790** which appropriates funds to the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands for contracted services for the assessment and inventory of the Moloka'i Irrigation System.

The Moloka'i Irrigation System (MIS) pumps water through a five-mile tunnel to deposit in the Kualapu'u Reservoir, and then feeds over 25 miles of irrigation systems. MIS was originally created with an intended purpose to supply the Ho'olehua Homesteads, which contain a large portion of Moloka'i's farms for local food production (Kiyonaga 2023). The farmers and residents of Ho'olehua rely on this water for maintaining productive farmlands. It is essential that the MIS be assessed, inventoried, and maintained to prevent future disruptions in water supply that could have severe negative impacts on those who rely on MIS for water, and on the greater community and food system of Moloka'i.

As a matter of Moloka'i's and greater Hawaiian Islands' food security, **I urge this committee to pass SB2790** to appropriate funds for the assessment and inventory of the Moloka'i Irrigation System. The functioning of this infrastructure is vital to the community of Ho'olehua, and all residents of Moloka'i.

Mahalo,
Sydney Haas & the Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

References cited:

Kiyonaga, J. (August 30, 2023). *122% Rate increase proposed for MIS*.
<https://themolokaidispatch.com/122-rate-increased-proposed-for-mis/>

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.



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SB-2790

Submitted on: 1/30/2026 6:42:56 PM

Testimony for HWN on 2/3/2026 1:10:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry Support

2790 SB RELATING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS.	HWN	CR 224 & Videoconference	Feb 3, 2026 1:10 PM
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Cindy Freitas

makainanqi@gmail.com

OPPOSE UNLESS AMENDED – S.B. 2790

RELATING TO THE MOLOKAI IRRIGATION SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

He Mele komo a he mele aloha no na kupuna o ke au i hala Aloha mai kakou.

Aloha,

My name is Cindy Freitas and I'm a Native Hawaiian descended of the native inhabitants of Hawai'i prior to 1778 and born and raised in Hawai'i.

I am also a practitioner who still practice the cultural traditional customary practices that was instill in me by my grandparents at a young age from mauka (MOUNTAIN TO SEA) to makai in many areas.

I respectfully submit testimony **OPPOSING S.B. 2790 UNLESS AMENDED.**

S.B. 2790 appropriates funds for contracted services to conduct an assessment and inventory of the Molokai Irrigation System. While an assessment may be appropriate, the bill **authorizes spending without basic fiscal, governance, and accountability safeguards.**

WHAT IS MISSING FROM S.B. 2790

- **A defined appropriation amount or funding cap.** The bill provides no dollar amount, leaving costs open-ended and unbounded.
- **A clear scope of work.** The bill does not specify required deliverables, technical standards, or whether the assessment must address system condition, capacity, losses, safety risks, or climate resilience.
- **Timelines and milestones.** There are no start dates, completion deadlines, or interim benchmarks to ensure timely completion.
- **Reporting and transparency.** The bill does not require a written report to the Legislature, public access to findings, or progress updates.
- **Procurement and oversight standards.** “Contracted services” are authorized without competitive procurement requirements, contractor qualification standards, or performance oversight.
- **Connection to implementation.** The bill does not direct how results will be used or linked to repairs, modernization, safety improvements, or water-management actions.
- **Environmental, cultural, and water-rights context.** The assessment is not required to consider environmental impacts, cultural resources, or coordination with water-management frameworks.

- **Reversion or sunset provisions.** There is no deadline for spending or reversion of unexpended funds if the assessment is not completed.

REQUIRED AMENDMENTS (OPPOSE UNLESS ADOPTED)

S.B. 2790 should not advance unless amended to:

1. Specify a **clear appropriation amount or funding cap**;
2. Define a **detailed scope of work and deliverables**;
3. Set **firm timelines and milestones**;
4. Require **reporting to the Legislature and public transparency**;
5. Establish **competitive procurement and oversight standards**;
6. Link findings to **implementation or next-step actions**;
7. Include **environmental, cultural, and water-rights considerations**;
8. Add **reversion or sunset provisions**.

CONCLUSION

Public funds should be appropriated with **clear limits, defined outcomes, and accountability**. Without the safeguards above, S.B. 2790 risks producing an open-ended study with no assurance of value or follow-through.

For these reasons, I **OPPOSE S.B. 2790 UNLESS AMENDED**.

Mahalo

Cindy Freitas