

**Testimony of the Board of Barbering and Cosmetology
Before the
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
Wednesday, February 25, 2026
9:32 a.m.
Conference Room 229 and Videoconference**

**On the following measure:
S.B. 2876, RELATING TO NATURAL HAIR BRAIDING**

Chair Keohokalole and Members of the Committee:

My name is Alan Yim, and I am the Executive Officer of the Board of Barbering and Cosmetology (Board). The Board offers the following comments:

The purpose of this bill is to exempt natural hair braiders from licensing requirements under the Barbering and Cosmetology Licensing Act.

At its February 10, 2026 meeting, the Board reaffirmed its position that “hair braiding” falls within the scope of practice of cosmetologist, hairdressers, and barbers. However, because the training and examination requirements to natural hair braiding are minimal, the Board determined that individuals who engage solely in hair braiding are not required to be licensed. The Board also identified the following activities often associated with hair braiding as subject to licensure: waxing, cleansing, cutting, styling, coloring, relaxing, trimming, shampooing, and relaxing.

The Board is concerned that exempting natural hair braiders from licensure will create a gap for consumer protection, particularly with respect to sanitation training and enforcement. The use of braiding devices in the practice of natural hair braiding may present health and safety risks if proper sanitation standards are not followed. If natural hair braiders are exempted under this bill, the Board will have limited authority to enforce consumer safety requirements related to these services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

Feb. 25, 2026, 9:32 a.m.

Hawaii State Capitol

Conference Room 229 and Videoconference

To: Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection

Sen. Jarrett Keohokalole, Chair

Sen. Carol Fukunaga, Vice Chair

From: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

Ted Kefalas, Director of Strategic Campaigns

RE: COMMENTS IN SUPPORT OF SB2876 — RELATING TO NATURAL HAIR BRAIDING

Aloha chair, vice chair and other committee members,

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii **strongly supports** [SB2876](#), which would exempt natural hair braiders from state licensing requirements under certain conditions.

This bill would add much-needed clarity to current state licensing regulations, which place hair braiders in a difficult position.

Hair braiders currently fall under the oversight of the state Board of Barbering and Cosmetology. In response to [Cornwell v. Hamilton](#), a 1999 Ninth Circuit case holding that California's mandated cosmetology curriculum was largely irrelevant to braiders, the board determined that braiders in Hawaii require a better regulatory solution,¹ but one has never materialized.

Thus, hair braiders in Hawaii are technically required to have a cosmetology license in order to publicly practice their craft for money. Yet, that requirement is not being enforced because of questions about its legality.

In other words, the board looks the other way on braiding while still holding the position that it can — and eventually might — put forth licensing regulations for braiders.

¹ Email exchange between the Grassroot Institute and the Hawaii Board of Barbering and Cosmetology, Aug. 6, 2024.

Meanwhile, the state’s cosmetology license is — as recognized by the Board of Barbering and Cosmetology — completely unsuited to the practice of braiding.

In fact, the cosmetology license itself is onerous. At an average cost of \$21,829, cosmetology programs in Hawaii are among the most expensive in the nation.²

A Hawaii cosmetology license also requires 1,800 educational hours,³ but very little of that time covers braiding or the skills necessary to operate a braiding salon. Even obtaining only a hairdressing license — which requires 1,250 hours of beauty school training⁴ — would necessitate that hopeful braiders spend substantial amounts of time and money on an education that is largely irrelevant to them.

This bill takes a sensible approach to this issue by exempting hair braiders from cosmetology licensing requirements as long as their activities are limited to braiding.

It is clear that there is no real risk to public health involved in allowing braiders to operate freely in Hawaii. Many other states have safely deregulated the practice, yet Hawaii has declined to establish braiding regulations for years.

Currently, 37 states completely exempt braiders from licensure, and the vast majority of those states have done so within the past 10 years.⁵

An additional consideration is that hair braiders are often women serving minority communities, with natural hair braiding often observed as a traditional cultural practice.

The Committee should support greater opportunity and entrepreneurship in these communities by passing SB2876 to eliminate unnecessary regulations for hair braiders.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ted Kefalas
Director of Strategic Campaigns
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

² Mindy Menjou, Michael Bednarczuk and Amy Hunter, [“Beauty School Debt and Drop-outs: How State Cosmetology Licensing Fails Aspiring Beauty Workers,”](#) Institute for Justice, July 2021, p. 34.

³ [Ibid](#), p.24.

⁴ [“Beauty Operator Application,”](#) Hawaii Board of Barbering and Cosmetology, accessed Feb. 22, 2026.

⁵ [“Natural Hair Braiding Opportunity and Freedom Act,”](#) Institute for Justice, accessed Feb. 22, 2026.



INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE

February 23, 2026

Re: Support for Senate Bill 2876

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Courtney Fontaine, and I am with the Institute for Justice—a nonprofit, public interest law firm that works to protect civil liberties, including the right to pursue the occupation of one’s choosing. I write today in strong support of SB 2876, which would exempt natural hair braiders from unnecessary cosmetology licensing requirements in Hawaii. We commend the bill’s sponsors for recognizing the undue burden current regulations place on braiders and for working to expand economic opportunities for people who practice this culturally significant and time-honored skill.

SB 2876 is a critical step toward removing excessive and irrelevant licensing mandates that hinder people—predominantly women of color—from legally pursuing their livelihoods. In fact, . Other states have recognized this and acted accordingly—35 states have already exempted natural hair braiding from licensing laws. It is time for Hawaii to do the same.

As the bill acknowledges, natural hair braiding is a safe practice that does not involve cutting, dyeing, or the use of harsh chemicals. Yet, under Hawaii’s current licensing structure, braiders are forced to complete an arduous, costly, and unrelated training process in order to work legally.

Hawaii’s requirements for braiders are among the most burdensome in the nation. As it stands, braiders must complete 1,250 hours in a state-approved hairdressing program, which can cost upwards of \$17,000 in tuition. In Maui, for example, the only available program treats braiding as an afterthought, focusing instead on skills like cutting, coloring, bleaching, and chemical relaxing—none of which are relevant to natural hair braiding. Even worse, an alternative route requires obtaining a full cosmetology license, which demands even more time and money while forcing braiders to learn completely unrelated subjects, such as makeup application, nail care, and facials.

This excessive regulation disproportionately impacts low-income individuals and aspiring entrepreneurs. By exempting braiders from these unnecessary requirements, SB1620 will help remove artificial barriers to entry, allowing more people to legally earn a living doing what they already know how to do.

Importantly, SB 2876 does not compromise consumer safety. Natural hair braiding is a manual skill that has been practiced for generations without the need for government regulation. In fact, complaints about braiders filed with state cosmetology boards are extremely rare. The bill also includes reasonable safeguards, ensuring that salons offering only braiding services remain responsible for sanitation and proper workplace conditions.

To conclude, Hawaii's current laws require braiders to spend excessive time and money on unnecessary training while stifling entrepreneurship and economic mobility. SB 2876 is a common-sense reform that will open doors for hardworking people seeking to provide for themselves and their families through an entirely safe and legitimate cultural practice. We urge you to support SB 2876 and give natural hair braiders the ability to work without unnecessary government interference. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Courtney Fontaine
Legislative Policy Associate
Institute for Justice
cfontaine@ij.org

February 25, 2026

Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection

Chair Keohokalole , Vice Chair Fukunaga , and all distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on hairbraiders in Hawaii. My name is Conor Norris, PhD, I am an assistant professor and the Director of Labor Policy at the Knee Regulatory Research Center at West Virginia University. I am also a Regulatory Policy Fellow with the Archbridge Institute. My comments are not submitted on behalf of any party or interest group.

My research focuses on the effects of occupational licensing laws on the supply of professionals, wages and prices, and quality. We use licensing laws to protect consumers from harm and ensure high quality services. Protecting the public from harm from low quality professionals is an important goal; however, licensing requirements are not always necessary.

Licensing can be costly. They create barriers to entry that make it more difficult for individuals to enter a profession. The out-of-pocket expenses necessary to complete the mandatory minimum levels of education are too onerous for many aspiring workers to overcome, especially in the beauty industry.¹ Research estimates that licensing reduces the supply of professionals,² and increases the prices that consumers pay for services.³

Unfortunately, we do not have good evidence that licensing improves the quality of services for beauty professions.⁴ Hair braiding, which does not rely on chemicals like cosmetology, is a safe service that consumers can rely on reviews instead of costly licensing laws.

Hawaii has some of the most onerous licensing requirements for natural hair braiders, who need a hairdresser license. In order to obtain a license, aspiring professionals must complete a 1,250-hour long training program in hairstyling, covering services like giving manicures or bleaching hair. In fact, only a small portion of the curriculum actually includes hair braiding, making most of the education a waste of time and money for a hair braider. It is unlikely that this education will improve safety or quality.

¹ Menjou, Mindy, Michael Bednarczuk, and Amy Hunter. "Beauty School Debt and Drop-Outs: How State Cosmetology Licensing Fails Aspiring Beauty Workers." *Institute for Justice* (2021).

² Peter Blair and Bobby Chung, "How Much of Barrier to Entry is Occupational Licensing?," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 57, no. 4 (2019): 919–43; Timmons, Edward, and Robert Thornton. "The Licensing of Barbers in the USA." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 48, no. 4 (2010).

³ Kleiner, Morris, and Evan Soltas. "A welfare analysis of occupational licensing in US states." *Review of Economic Studies* 90, no. 5 (2023): 2481-2516.

⁴ Deyo, Darwyn. *Testing Licensing and Consumer Satisfaction for Beauty Services in the United States*. SJSU ScholarWorks (2022).

A similar reform in Virginia led to an increase in new hair braiders, especially more opportunities for smaller owner-operated beauty salons.⁵ Removing unnecessary barriers to entry worked to help increase employment without sacrificing consumer safety.

Hawaii has the opportunity to join 35 other states that have removed licensing requirements for hairbraiding. Rather than going out on a limb, this legislation will bring Hawaii in line with the majority of other states.

Conor Morris

⁵ Timmons, Edward and Catherine Konieczny. "Untangling Hair Braider Deregulation in Virginia: A Case Study Approach." Mercatus Working Paper, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, Arlington, VA, (2017).