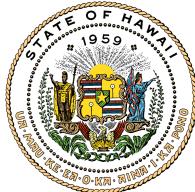


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



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DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
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**Testimony of
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
Acting Chairperson**

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

**Monday, February 9, 2026
1:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 224**

**In consideration of
SENATE BILL 2937
RELATING TO SEARCH AND RESCUE**

Senate Bill 2937 creates the Search and Rescue Card Program and the Search and Rescue Special Fund to reimburse State and county agencies and volunteer organizations for search and rescue operations. It establishes reimbursement procedures for these operations. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) provides the following comments.**

The Department believes that the requirement to reimburse search and rescue expenses may discourage or delay notification to first responder agencies by individuals in need of rescue assistance.

As currently written, the benefit of purchasing the rescue card is unclear.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

SB-2937

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 6:03:29 PM
Testimony for WLA on 2/9/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Col Dana McLaughlin	Testifying for Civil Air Patrol Hawaii Wing	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This proposed Senate bill, which fines victims of Search and Rescue emergencies and their 'ohana, is misguided and counterproductive. It undermines the core values of compassion and public service that our Emergency Response Departments embody. Tourists, residents, and their 'ohana rely on life-saving services in times of need, and penalizing them only deters individuals in distress from seeking help when every second counts. We must prioritize the safety and well-being of our communities, not punish them in times of crisis.



COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Senator Chris Lee, Chair

Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair

Friday, February 13, 2026

1:00PM

RE: SB2937

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments and testimony.

Hawai‘i SAR Alliance is a collaborative effort of multiple agencies, teams, and organizations that conduct Search and Rescue (SAR) operations across the State of Hawai‘i. It consists of subject matter experts within the state and nationally who meet to determine best practices and support SAR system development. Local experts representing all relevant state agencies have been in attendance.

On behalf of the Alliance, I would like to share the following for consideration.

Each year, legislation related to SAR is introduced, with significant energy and resources invested in both the development of and opposition to these measures. One of the reasons for the repetitive opposition is the **lack of a foundational framework to support effective administrative implementation and enforcement** of proposed bills, including SB2937.

As it stands, there are existing structural and administrative gaps within Hawai‘i’s fragmented SAR system, which **spans over a dozen different agencies and jurisdictions**. The Department of Land and Natural Resources is one of these agencies.

To be successful SB2937 would need to include necessary operational details, such as:

- Billing methodology
- Fund collection and distribution
- Financial oversight and administration
- Identification of responsible agencies or personnel



States referenced as models who have implemented SAR Cards successfully have key structural elements already in place, including:

- Emergency Support Function (ESF) #9 – Search and Rescue (SAR) Plan
- State SAR Coordinator (SSARC)
 - Coordinate SAR policy
 - Manage administrative responsibilities
 - Daily oversight and coordination
 - Ensure consistent implementation across agencies
 - Provide the foundational infrastructure needed for:
 - Statewide SAR system
 - State SAR card program
 - Dedicated State SAR fund
 - Governing board to administer funds appropriately

For SAR policies such as a SAR card to be effective and sustainable, they should be implemented under the authority of a State SAR Coordinator, as **proposed in SB2938**, prior to any reimbursement legislation.

I am available for any questions.

Mahalo
Rosemarie Johnson
BSE, MBA, MBB, TICC, Strategist
Director, Hawai'i SAR Alliance
Director@Hawai'iSARalliance.org

SB-2937

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 4:30:28 PM
Testimony for WLA on 2/9/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keoni Shizuma	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I stand in opposition to this bill.

Having previously worked for the Division of Forestry and Wildlife on Oahu, within the Department of Land and Natural Resources, I've traversed most, if not all, of our Na Ala Hele trails that are cared for by DLNR. There is sufficient trails for the avid hiker to fulfill their adventure seeking needs. I believe that if someone gets hurt or lost on a Na Ala Hele trail, then they should be rescued. If they are not on a Na Ala Hele trail (meaning all state maintained trails), then they should not be rescued. I do believe that rescues can occur, for a price, for those who are on private land performing operations for a business or organization. In those cases, the costs shall be handled by the business or organization.

We can't keep jumping to help ignorant people who aren't planning their adventures well.

Yes we should do an education program letting them know the following:

1. Where our state maintained trails are
2. If you are going somewhere other than a state maintained trail, then you should be accompanied by a guide who is familiar with the areas
3. If you are jumping into the ocean in an area you are unfamiliar with, speak to the lifeguard, and if there is none present, do not go in.

We need to get rid of the culture of entitlement, where people think they have the right and ability to go anywhere they want. Let's stop enabling them by rescuing them. Let's create and make known areas that adventure seekers can go – knowing they may be rescued – these areas will be well maintained and managed, while others can go at their own risk, but will not be rescued.

Mahalo for your consideration,
Keoni Shizuma

SB-2937

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 7:23:53 PM
Testimony for WLA on 2/13/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Godfrey Akaka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a retired fire Captain from the County of Maui Fire Department. I support this bill. There are many instances when individuals disregard their physical limits and disregard common dangers in the mountain and ocean. The issue is when these individuals call fire rescue for a free ride off a trail and then refuse medical attention when they potentially were too lazy or flagrantly disregarded their own physical limitations. This measure needs to really protect the integrity of those really needing rescue assistance and mitigate a reliable system to determine those who are abusing our resources. A suggestion is to rely on first responders Intel on scene of the incident. Both police and fire need to submit reports. There could be a simple check box in the report, or, the police officer could issue a citation after determining abuse of resources was warranted. Both police and fire reports should have detailed info of the incident to justify a citation if needed. The individual receiving the citation will have their due process to appeal if they choose and the reports and testimonies of all involved will serve as evidence for a potential court proceeding. Anyone sincerely needing rescue assistance due to unforeseen circumstances that may be accused of violation, Or to prevent first responders to over reach their authority , there needs to be an opportunity for a defense and appeal procedure that is not costly on the defense forcing them to have to pay the fine. Mahalo.

SB-2937

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 9:21:18 AM
Testimony for WLA on 2/13/2026 1:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karen Ono	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo for allowing me the opportunity to provide comments. On Kauai, so far we have had 5 rescues in two month that were made in our State Parks. In these recent cases the person being rescued did seek further medical attention.

However, in 2025, a majority of the rescues refused medical attention after being flown out. I see the issuance of a search and rescue card may cause people who are capable of hiking out to take advantage of being flown out.

It is the responsibility of the person hiking, walking, etc. to understand what their mind and body can tolerate.