



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
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**Testimony in SUPPORT of (SCR56/SR54)
RECOGNIZING OPEN WATER LIFEGUARD AS FIRST RESPONDERS IN THE STATE OF HAWAII**

REPRESENTATIVE JACKSON SAYAMA, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR

REPRESENTATIVE DELLA AU BELATTI, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Thursday, April 16, 2026 at 9:00 AM | Room Number: 309

1 **Fiscal Implications:** None.

2 **Department Position:** The Department of Health (“Department”) is submitting testimony in
3 support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 56 and Senate Resolution 54, which recognize
4 Hawaii’s open water lifeguards as first responders, and provides comments.

5 **Department Testimony:** The Emergency Medical Services & Injury Prevention Systems Branch
6 (EMSIPSB), on behalf of the Department, respectfully submits this testimony in **support** of this
7 concurrent resolution, and provides **comments**.

8 It is important to understand that “First Responders” are defined at a local and state level.
9 “Emergency Medical Responders” (EMRs) are defined at a national level, and hold a national
10 certification through the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians.

11 Hawaii’s open water lifeguards are essential to the safety and wellbeing of residents and
12 visitors statewide. Every day, they provide rapid, skilled, and lifesaving interventions in
13 dynamic, high-risk environments prior to the arrival of emergency medical services personnel.

1 These responsibilities align with the modern statutory direction for defining first responder
2 personnel.

3 The EMS modernization legislation currently advancing through the Legislature (SB3134 and
4 HB2314) updates HRS §321-222 to define first responder personnel to “a person who provides
5 initial assistance until emergency medical services personnel arrive.” This modernized definition
6 reflects contemporary emergency response practice and aligns directly with the lifesaving role
7 Hawaii’s open water lifeguards perform every day.

8 It is important to note that “first responder personnel” is distinct from “emergency medical
9 responder” and “emergency medical services personnel,” which are also defined in SB3134 and
10 HB2314.

11 • **Emergency medical responders (EMRs)** are individuals who hold national certification
12 through the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians.

13 • **Emergency medical services personnel** include emergency medical technicians,
14 advanced emergency medical technicians, paramedics, and other health care workers
15 who are licensed or certified by the State of Hawaii.

16 These distinctions ensure clarity about training, certification pathways, and roles within the
17 statewide Emergency Medical Systems, while also supporting appropriate recognition of
18 Hawaii’s open water lifeguards as first responder personnel.

19 **Offered Amendments: None**

20 Mahalo for your consideration and for your commitment to public safety.

HONOLULU OCEAN SAFETY DEPARTMENT

KA 'OIHANA KIA'I OLA KAI O HONOLULU

CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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RICK BLANGIARDI
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MEIA



KURT S. LAGER
CHIEF
LUNA NUI

JIMMY BARROS
DEPUTY CHIEF
HOPE LUNA NUI

April 14, 2026

Testimony in Support of SCR56

Relating to Ocean Safety Recognized as First Responders

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in continued strong support of SCR56, recognizing open water lifeguards—including Ocean Safety Officers and Water Safety Officers—as first responders.

Since the initial hearing of this measure, there has been clear and unified support across counties, agencies, and the broader community. This continued momentum reflects a shared understanding of the critical role open water lifeguards serve in Hawai'i's public safety system.

Open water lifeguards operate daily in one of the most dynamic and unpredictable environments in the world. They are often the first to arrive at emergencies, providing immediate lifesaving care in situations ranging from near-drownings and cardiac events to traumatic injuries and hazardous ocean conditions. In many cases, their rapid intervention is the difference between life and death.

Beyond ocean rescues, lifeguards routinely respond to a wide range of incidents occurring along our shorelines, including medical emergencies, accidents, and public safety situations in adjacent beach parks and coastal areas. Their responsibilities require advanced training, sound judgment, and the ability to operate independently under high-risk conditions.

Importantly, this measure does not change what lifeguards do—it acknowledges what they already are. Open water lifeguards have long functioned as first responders, working alongside fire, police, and EMS to protect our communities and visitors.

Formal recognition through SCR56 will help ensure alignment across the State, support access to resources and training opportunities, and reinforce the importance of this workforce within Hawai'i's overall emergency response framework.

The Honolulu Ocean Safety Department respectfully urges your continued support and adoption of SCR56.

Mahalo for your consideration and for your commitment to public safety across our State.

Kurt S. Lager
Chief
Honolulu Ocean Safety Department

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/13/2026 6:17:07 PM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alissa Magrum	National Drowning Prevention Alliance	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

On behalf of the National Drowning Prevention Alliance, I respectfully urge your support for **SCR56**, which recognizes open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Although the Senate has adopted **SR54**, its Senate version, it is vital that the entire State Legislature supports this measure.

Open water lifeguards perform a critical public safety function, protecting residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments. In doing so, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—referred to as ocean safety officers or water safety officers depending on the county—are often among the **first on scene** at emergencies. They work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and maintain public safety until additional responders arrive. Their responsibilities extend beyond ocean rescues and include responding to **cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle collisions** on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo **rigorous and ongoing training**, including high-performance CPR, AED use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and—in many cases—cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely treat, stabilize, assist, and transport victims, clearly meeting the commonly accepted definition of a **first responder**.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform, ensure appropriate professional recognition, and support continued interagency collaboration to strengthen emergency response across Hawai‘i’s ocean and shoreline environments.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,
Alissa Magrum

National Drowning Prevention Alliance



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Mike Biechler
President
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Carol Philips
Vice-President
North Shore Surf Girls

Marcia Murphy
Treasurer
Pacific One Mortgage

Darrell Whitaker
Secretary
Camp Mokulē'ia

Lamont Brown
Director
Maya's Tapas and Wine

T.J. Cuaresma
Director
Tita Ei Nei Productions

Dave Fuga
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KT Protection Systems

Erica Lehmkuhl
Director
Seaside Realty

Michelle Maldonado
Director

Thomas Naylor
Director
Ke Nui Kitchen

Michael Sweetman
Director
Law Offices of
Einwechter & Hyatt

Robert Walker
Director
Integral Consulting

Bill Ward
Director
Corcoran Properties

Virginia Wallace
Administrator

Marsha Taylor
Community Outreach
Coordinator

**Hawaii State Legislature
House Committee on Labor**

Hearing Date: April 16, 2026

Time: 9:00 AM

Location: Conference Room 309

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SCR56

Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

Aloha Chair Sayama, and Members of the Committee on Labor,

On behalf of the North Shore Chamber of Commerce, I am writing in strong support of SCR56, which recognizes open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout the State of Hawai'i.

The North Shore of O'ahu is world-renowned for its extreme ocean conditions, drawing visitors from around the globe to experience iconic surf breaks and coastal environments. These same conditions, while central to our visitor industry and local culture, also present significant and often life-threatening risks. Open water lifeguards are the frontline professionals who make it possible for residents and visitors alike to safely enjoy Hawai'i's ocean resources. Their specialized training, constant vigilance, and rapid response capabilities are critical to sustaining both public safety and the economic vitality of our communities.

As outlined in SCR56, open water lifeguards routinely operate in dynamic and hazardous environments and are frequently among the first to arrive at emergency scenes, providing life-saving care and coordinating with other emergency personnel. Their role extends far beyond ocean rescues, encompassing medical emergencies, shoreline incidents, and public safety coordination in high-risk environments.

This designation is not only appropriate—it is necessary.

During the recent Kona Storm that devastated portions of the North Shore, including Waialua, our community witnessed firsthand the extraordinary courage and commitment of our lifeguards. In the absence of immediate formal response infrastructure in the earliest hours, North Shore lifeguards were among the very first responders who entered dangerous floodwaters to rescue trapped residents, helping to save lives under extreme and rapidly changing conditions. Their actions exemplify the very definition of a first responder.

*The North Shore Chamber of Commerce is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization,
Federal Tax ID# 99-0265444*



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Einwechter & Hyatt

Robert Walker
Director
Integral Consulting

Bill Ward
Director
Corcoran Properties

Virginia Wallace
Administrator

Marsha Taylor
Community Outreach
Coordinator

For the visitor industry, this recognition is especially important. Hawai'i's reputation as a safe and welcoming destination depends heavily on the presence of highly trained ocean safety professionals. Officially recognizing lifeguards as first responders reinforces the State's commitment to safety, supports workforce development and retention, and ensures these professionals receive the resources, protections, and respect commensurate with the responsibilities they carry.

We strongly urge the Legislature to adopt SCR56 and formally recognize open water lifeguards as first responders. Doing so honors their service, strengthens our emergency response system, and supports the safety of both our residents and the millions of visitors who experience Hawai'i's shores each year.

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

Carol Philips,

**Vice President
North Shore Chamber of Commerce**

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 9:07:46 PM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Fairchild	Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We support SR54 recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai'i. Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. They are there for us; let's be there for them.



HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

RANDY PERREIRA, Executive Director • Tel: 808,543,0011 • Fax: 808,528,0922

The Thirty-Third Legislature, State of Hawaii
House of Representatives
Committee on Labor

Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association

April 16, 2026

S.C.R. 56 – RECOGNIZING OPEN WATER LIFEGUARDS
AS FIRST RESPONDERS IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THEIR
ESSENTIAL ROLE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE, PUBLIC
SAFETY, AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING THROUGHOUT THE
STATE

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO strongly supports S.C.R. 56, with the Senate with the House of Representatives concurring, to recognize open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgement of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout the State. Further, it is encouraged that all relevant State and County agencies, departments, and governing bodies adopt this recognition and ensure that open water lifeguards are afforded the rights, resources, training support, and professional respect accorded to first responders. Finally, it is encouraged that public safety agencies continue to collaborate amongst themselves to strengthen emergency response capabilities and enhance safety across the State's ocean, shoreline, and public environments.

Open water lifeguards, known as Ocean Safety Officers within the counties of Kauai and Maui and Water Safety Officers within the City and County of Honolulu and Hawaii County are considered the best in the world. They are trained above the standards of the United States Lifesaving Association and are the only "first responders" that must maintain certifications and pass demanding physical performance tests annually to ensure they can manage high-adrenaline and physically exhausting rescues. Many lifeguards are certified rescue watercraft (jet ski) operators, which allows them to reach victims much quicker in challenging surf. Many are also trained and certified as emergency medical technicians (EMT's) which allows them to deliver advanced life support (ALS) to victims before medical professionals arrive.

Similar to other first responders (such as law enforcement, fire fighters, paramedics, etc.), lifeguards receive specialized training and are first to arrive and provide care or resolution at the scene of emergency. A perfect example is the recent Kona-low storm; although responding to floods are not within their scope of duties, lifeguards responded to assist those who were trapped in devastating and life-threatening conditions.

This recognition of lifeguards is well deserved; it is appropriate they be recognized as first responders as they run towards dangerous situations to save others while risking their own lives in the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of S.C.R. 56.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Randy Perreira', written over the typed name below.

Randy Perreira
Executive Director



April 15, 2026

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SCR56
RELATING TO THE RECOGNITION OF OPEN WATER LIFEGUARDS AS FIRST RESPONDERS**

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Branch Lotspeich, and I am the Executive Director of The Rescue Tube Foundation. I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support** of SCR56.

Subject: Support for Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders (SCR56)

I respectfully urge your support for SCR56, which recognizes open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. While the Senate has adopted SR54, it is vital that the full Legislature support this measure.

Open water lifeguards perform a critical public safety function, protecting residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments—often at significant personal risk.

Across the state, lifeguards—referred to as ocean safety officers or water safety officers depending on the county—are frequently among the first on scene. They work alongside police and fire personnel to protect life, secure scenes, and maintain public safety. Their responsibilities extend beyond ocean rescues to include cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle incidents near beaches, parks, and roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo rigorous, ongoing training, including high-performance CPR, AED use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely treat, stabilize, assist, and transport victims—clearly meeting the accepted definition of a first responder.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders affirms the work they already perform, ensures appropriate professional recognition, and strengthens coordinated emergency response across Hawai‘i.

The Rescue Tube Foundation strongly supports SCR56 and the formal recognition of lifeguards as first responders.

I respectfully ask for your support of SCR56 and your leadership in advancing this important measure.

Mahalo for your continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,

Branch Lotspeich

Executive Director
The Rescue Tube Foundation.

Rescue Tubes Save Lives!

Rescue Tube Foundation, Inc.
4350 Kahili Makai St., Kilauea, HI 96754
501 (c)(3) Federal Tax Identification #27-4350046

April 15, 2026

The Honorable Representative Sayama
Chair, Committee on Labor

RE: Support SCR56 Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders



Aloha Representative Sayama and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association a statewide nonprofit, I write in continued support of SCR56.

Open water lifeguards are sometimes referred to in public safety discussions as the “forgotten first responders”, not because their work is unseen, but because the recognition of that work has not kept pace with the reality of what they do every day.

At this stage in the process, much has already been said about what lifeguards do. What is less understood—and what this resolution seeks to address—is the gap between perception and policy.

Most people assume that open water lifeguards are already recognized as first responders. They see them responding to cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and life-threatening emergencies. They see them as the first on scene, providing care in critical moments. What they do not see is that, despite performing this role every day, that recognition does not formally exist at the State level.

That gap matters.

It affects how lifeguards are integrated into broader public safety systems. It influences access to training, resources, and support. It shapes how the profession is understood, valued, and sustained over time.

SCR56 does not create a new role—it acknowledges an existing one. It brings consistency between the work being performed and the way that work is recognized.

After multiple hearings and extensive testimony, there is clear and consistent support for this measure from lifeguards, public safety partners, and the community. This resolution represents an opportunity to align policy with reality in a way that strengthens public safety across Hawai'i.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge your continued support.

Mahalo for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kalani Vierra
President
Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

Board of Directors

Kalani Vierra
President

Ricky Alvarez
Vice President

Bridget Velasco
Secretary

Chantal Zarbaugh
Treasurer

Directors
Cary Kayama
Jon Kaneshina
Bradley Young
Kleve Zarbaugh
Kurt Lager
Clark Abbey
Kekaulike Kealoha
Luke Evslin

Kirsten Hermstad
Executive Director

Honorary Legends

Ralph Goto
Brian Keaulana
Archie Kalepa
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Hawaiian Lifeguard Association
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April 15, 2026

The Honorable Representative Sayama
House Committee on Labor

RE: Support for SCR56 Recognizing Lifeguards as First Responders

Aloha Chair Sayama and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition, I write in support of SCR56.

Across our coalition—which includes ocean safety professionals, public health partners, educators, and community organization, we share a common goal: reducing drowning and improving safety outcomes across Hawai'i. In that work, one reality is clear, open water lifeguards are a foundational part of our emergency response system.

Yet, there remains a disconnect between how lifeguards' function within that system and how they are formally recognized.

This distinction is not just semantic. Recognition influences how systems are built. It affects coordination between agencies, access to funding opportunities, training pathways, and the availability of mental health and wellness support. It shapes how a workforce is developed and sustained.

SCR56 addresses that gap in a practical way. It aligns recognition with function, creating a clearer and more consistent framework for how lifeguards are understood within Hawai'i's broader public safety landscape.

From a water safety and drowning prevention perspective, this alignment matters. Strong, well-supported lifeguard programs are one of the most effective interventions we have to reduce fatalities and improve outcomes in high-risk environments.

After extensive testimony across multiple hearings, there is clear support for this measure. We respectfully ask that the Committee continue to advance SCR56 and support this important step forward.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Hermstad
Coordinator, Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition
Executive Director, Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/13/2026 9:17:30 PM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louis Erteschik	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 7:51:07 AM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Clark	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I respectfully urge your support for SCR56, which recognizes open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. While the Senate has adopted SR54, it is critical that the full State Legislature also support this measure.

Open water lifeguards serve a vital public safety function, protecting both residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and often hazardous ocean and shoreline environments. In carrying out this responsibility, they routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—referred to as ocean safety officers or water safety officers depending on the county—are frequently among the first to arrive at emergency scenes. They work in coordination with police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and maintain public safety until additional responders arrive. Their duties extend well beyond ocean rescues and include responding to cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle incidents occurring on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo rigorous and ongoing training, including high-performance CPR, AED use, advanced rescue techniques, and emergency scene management. Many also receive cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. In practice, they regularly assess, treat, stabilize, assist, and transport victims—clearly fulfilling the widely accepted role of a first responder.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform, provide appropriate professional recognition, and strengthen interagency collaboration to enhance emergency response across Hawai‘i’s ocean and shoreline environments.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 8:58:36 AM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lorrin Duarte	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Lorrin Duarte and I am 13 years old. I attended Junior Lifeguards for the past two years and last year participated the entire summer learning from some of the best lifeguards in the State. Their leadership and example inspired me to one day want to be a lifeguard myself.

The entire program was dedicated to training us how to be a first responder when someone needs help. Our lifeguards are always the FIRST to respond in these situations and deserve to be recognized for the courage they have to be putting their own lives on the line and their expertise in saving lives daily- in and out of the water.

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 9:40:15 AM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Allison Schaefer	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Subject: Strong Support for SCR56 – Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

My name is **Allison Schaefer**, and I am writing in strong support for **SCR56**, the concurrent resolution recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i.

I write as a **bereaved parent**, a **volunteer with the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition**, and the **writer of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan**. While my child did **not** drown in the ocean, losing a child to a fatal drowning fundamentally changed my life. Through my subsequent volunteer work with the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition, now a program of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, and with the national drowning prevention advocacy group, Families United, I have come to know many families across Hawai‘i and the nation who have lost beloved ohana members to **ocean drownings**. Walking alongside these families has given me a deep and personal understanding of the life-and-death stakes of ocean safety, as well as the profound emotional toll these tragedies place not only on families, but also on the first responders who respond to them.

Through this work and lived experience, I have seen firsthand the indispensable role open water lifeguards play in protecting lives across our state’s shoreline and ocean environments. Open water lifeguards perform a critical public safety function, protecting residents and visitors alike in Hawai‘i’s uniquely dynamic and hazardous coastal conditions. In the course of their duties, they routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to rescue swimmers in distress, respond to serious medical emergencies, and prevent loss of life.

Across Hawai‘i, lifeguards—known as ocean safety officers or water safety officers depending on the county—are frequently among the first personnel on scene during emergencies. They work in close coordination with police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical services to secure scenes and protect life until additional responders arrive. Their responsibilities extend far beyond ocean rescues and regularly include responses to cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle collisions occurring on or near beaches, parks, and adjacent roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo rigorous and ongoing training in high-performance CPR, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, and emergency scene management. Many are also cross-trained in emergency medical response, marine fire safety,

law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. In practice, they routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—clearly meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder.

Formally recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the life-saving work they already perform every day. It would also acknowledge the emotional burden they carry when responding to fatalities—especially those involving children and families—and help ensure appropriate professional recognition, training support, and parity in pay and other benefits with other emergency response personnel. This recognition would further strengthen interagency collaboration across Hawai‘i’s public safety system.

The Senate already has adopted **SR54**, but it is critical for the House to also support this resolution. We see the resolution as the first step in seeking formal recognition designating open water lifeguards as first responders.

Mahalo for your continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of Hawai‘i’s communities.

Respectfully,

Allison Schaefer

Bereaved Family Volunteer, Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition
Writer, Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 9:46:48 AM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pamela Louise Ramsay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testifying in strong support of SCR56:

I lost my granddaughter Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer to a fatal drowning. Charlotte’s death was the result of a rescue attempt—what is often called a secondary or rescue drowning—and tragically, people who attempt rescues are often at even greater risk than the person they are trying to save. Our ohana’s loss has given us a deep understanding of how important water safety and emergency response truly are.

Through my daughter Allison Schaefer’s work on the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, and through meeting many families who have lost loved ones to ocean drownings, we have seen how often tragedy happens near the water—and how much depends on the people who respond first.

Lifeguards regularly put themselves in harm’s way to protect others. In Hawai‘i, ocean lifeguards are often the first on scene during emergencies. They make rescues, provide CPR, use AEDs, and give emergency medical care in rough surf, strong currents, and dangerous conditions, often before other responders can reach the water.

For these reasons, ocean lifeguards should be recognized as first responders. They are trained emergency professionals who make critical, life-saving decisions in some of the most challenging environments we have. Their work clearly reflects the responsibility, risk, and skill we associate with first responders.

What happened to my granddaughter shows how quickly a rescue situation can become dangerous. Lifeguards are trained to assess these risks and intervene safely, but strong systems, clear planning, and proper recognition are essential to support the work they do.

Water safety planning, prevention, and coordination save lives. They help prevent emergencies and protect both the public and the responders who step in when something goes wrong.

I support efforts that improve water safety, recognize the vital role lifeguards play, and work to prevent avoidable tragedies. My hope is that fewer families will experience a loss like ours.

The Senate already has adopted SR54, the single chamber version of this resolution. But I believe it is also important for the House to endorse it through SCR56.

Mahalo for your time and for considering the importance of water safety in our communities.

Sincerely,

Pamela Ramsay

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 9:54:36 AM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
joshua schaefers	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Support for SCR56 – Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

My name is Joshua Schaefer, and I am writing to support **SCR56**, which recognizes open water lifeguards as first responders.

I lost my sister to a fatal drowning. This loss has shaped my understanding of how important water safety and emergency response truly are. My mother, Allison Schaefer, is the lead writer of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, and through her work—and through meeting many families who have lost loved ones to ocean drownings—I have learned how vital open water lifeguards are to keeping people safe.

Across Hawai‘i, open water lifeguards are often the first people to respond during emergencies. They rescue swimmers, give CPR, use AEDs, and help people suffering from serious injuries or medical emergencies. They regularly work alongside police, firefighters, and paramedics to save lives.

Lifeguards train extensively and put themselves at risk to protect both residents and visitors. The work they do clearly matches what we expect from first responders.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders reflects the reality of the life-saving work they already do every day. It is an important step in honoring their role and supporting public safety in Hawai‘i.

The Senate already has supported SR54, the single chamber version of this resolution. But it is critical for the House to also support it to through SCR56. Mahalo for your consideration and for your commitment to protecting our communities.

Respectfully,

Joshua Schaefer

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 12:36:01 PM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelle Murphy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I respectfully urge your support for **SCR56**, which recognizes open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Although the Senate has adopted **SR54**, its Senate version, it is vital that the entire State Legislature supports this measure.

Open water lifeguards perform a critical public safety function, protecting residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments. In doing so, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—referred to as ocean safety officers or water safety officers depending on the county—are often among the **first on scene** at emergencies. They work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and maintain public safety until additional responders arrive. Their responsibilities extend beyond ocean rescues and include responding to **cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle collisions** on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo **rigorous and ongoing training**, including high-performance CPR, AED use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and—in many cases—cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely treat, stabilize, assist, and transport victims, clearly meeting the commonly accepted definition of a **first responder**.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform, ensure appropriate professional recognition, and support continued interagency collaboration to strengthen emergency response across Hawai‘i’s ocean and shoreline environments.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,

Kelle Murphy, Swim Safe: ASD Director, Honoulu, Oahu

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 4:29:16 PM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sovereign Duarte	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

After participating in Jr. Lifeguards and meeting all of these lifeguards who put their lives on the line everyday, it really taught me how much respect we should be giving them. Even though it may seem like a small issue and just a matter of words or how we address people, it actually means a lot and we should be respecting them.

Subject: Urgent: Please Schedule SCR 56 for Hearing (April 17 Deadline)

Aloha Chair Sayama and Vice Chair Lee,

I am writing to respectfully urge you to schedule a hearing for SCR 56, the concurrent resolution recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders.

The Senate has already adopted the Senate-only version, SR54. Unfortunately, the House-only version did not advance earlier this session. SCR 56 is now the only remaining opportunity for bicameral support.

Open water lifeguards are often among the first on scene and respond to cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and vehicle accidents in addition to ocean rescues. They work alongside police officers and firefighters and receive rigorous, ongoing emergency training.

Because SCR 56 is double-referred, it must be heard in LAB by Friday, April 17, 2026, to continue moving forward. I respectfully ask that you schedule a timely hearing.

Mahalo for your leadership and commitment to public safety.

Sincerely,
Margaret Wright
Princeville Kauai

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 9:35:33 PM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dan Worden	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice Chair Lee, and members of the Committee,

I am writing to voice my support of SCR56. Ocean Safety Officers (or Water Safety Officers depending on the county) are the first individuals on the scene of emergency situations in, on, and around aquatic environments. I believe it is both appropriate and necessary to recognize them as first responders.

Mahalo,

Dan Worden

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/15/2026 1:56:01 AM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nick Dubovsky	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan, as proposed in **SCR56** before your committee. While the Senate has already adopted **SR53**, the Senate version, it is critical that the entire State Legislature supports the findings and recommendations of the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan.

Hawai'i is currently amid a **drowning crisis**. Our state has the **second-highest drowning rate in the nation**, and drowning is the **leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15** in Hawai'i. It is also the **number one cause of injury-related death among Hawai'i's visitors**, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated, statewide prevention efforts.

Recent storms across the islands highlight Hawai'i's increasing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, including flooding and drowning, which must be addressed as a **disaster risk reduction priority**.

This crisis is also a matter of **equity**. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at approximately **1.5 times the rate** of the general population, and NHPI children drown at **three times the rate**. These disparities demonstrate that water safety is both a public safety and public health issue.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan was developed by the **Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition**, a statewide partnership of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. The plan has received national recognition, including a **Safe Kids Champion for Children Award** from Safe Kids Worldwide.

Adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan will provide a comprehensive, data-driven framework to reduce drownings, improve coordination, strengthen education and prevention, and ultimately save lives across our islands.

Mahalo for your time, leadership, and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai'i.

Sincerely,

Nick Dubovsky

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/15/2026 4:58:22 AM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leslie Leibbrandt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support for Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders (SCR56)

I respectfully urge your support for SCR56, which recognizes open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Although the Senate has adopted SR54, its companion resolution, it is vital that the entire State Legislature supports this measure.

Open water lifeguards perform a critical public safety function, protecting residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and often hazardous ocean and shoreline environments. In fulfilling these duties, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—known as ocean safety officers or water safety officers depending on the county—are frequently among the first on scene at emergencies. They work side-by-side with police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and maintain public safety until additional responders arrive. Beyond ocean rescues, their responsibilities include responding to cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle collisions in and around beaches, parks, and public roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo rigorous and ongoing training, including high-performance CPR, AED use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and often cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They consistently treat, assist, stabilize, and transport victims—clearly meeting the commonly accepted definition of first responders.

Formally recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the scope and importance of the work they already perform, ensure proper professional recognition, and strengthen interagency collaboration to improve emergency response across Hawai‘i’s ocean and shoreline environments.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,
Leslie Leibbrandt
Kauai

SCR-56

Submitted on: 4/15/2026 10:00:48 AM

Testimony for LAB on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessamy Town Hornor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. I am writing in strong support of HCR46 RECOGNIZING OPEN WATER LIFEGUARDS AS FIRST RESPONDERS IN THE STATE OF HAWAII.

I submit this testimony as an individual, noting my experience as Co-Founder of the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition, and as an Executive Editor of the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan. Last year I also worked to initiate drowning prevention initiatives within DOH's EMS & Injury Prevention Systems Branch, and in that role I led and attended meetings with the county ocean safety leadership on many issues.

Lifeguards not only assess risk, perform preventative actions, and make rescues every day, they also perform life-saving interventions when every second counts well before EMS or others are on the scene. Especially in a drowning incident, seconds and minutes can be the difference between life, death, or a debilitating lifetime brain injury from lack of oxygen.

I am also testifying as a bereaved family member who has lost loved ones to the ocean. In the case of my family members, the lifeguards shared that they were deeply affected by their loss and hoped for a different outcome. In many cases a lifeguard's intervention allows someone to live another another day. And in others a lifeguard is the one to bear witness to someone's final moments, and that is a lot to carry, especially cumulatively over the years. In that light I want to make a special note that Hawai'i's lifeguards should have the same protections, supports, and resources as other first responders in Hawai'i, including those that address both physical and mental health impacts.

This Resolution is a critical step in supporting those who support us.

Thank you for your time,
Jessamy Town Hornor

