

OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB146 HD1

RELATING TO THE JUDICIARY'S 'ŌLELO HAWAI'I
INITIATIVES

Ke Kōmike Hale o ka 'Oihana 'Imi Kālā
(House Committee on Finance)
Ke Kapitala 'o Hawai'i
(Hawai'i State Capitol)

February 26, 2026

2:00 pm

Room 308

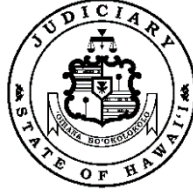
Aloha e Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi and Members of the Committee on Finance:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) strongly **supports HB146 HD1**, which appropriates funding to the Judiciary to expand 'Ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language) initiatives. These initiatives include providing fluent interpreters for court proceedings, translating legal documents into Hawaiian, and expanding language resources for public access. This measure ensures that Native Hawaiian speakers can fully participate in legal processes in their native language, upholding the co-official status of Hawaiian and English under the Hawai'i State Constitution.

Since 1978, Article XV, Section 4, of the Hawai'i State Constitution has affirmed Hawaiian and English as the state's official languages. Yet, access to government services in Hawaiian remains limited. OHA appreciates the leadership role that the Judiciary has taken in ensuring the co-equal use and access to 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. However, further investment is needed to expand interpretation services, website translation, and archival legal language research, ensuring meaningful access for Hawaiian language speakers. HB146 HD1 is thus critical to support the work of the Judiciary.

The growing demand for Hawaiian language services from Native Hawaiian and other speakers of 'Ōlelo Hawai'i is evident across the state. Hawaiian language immersion schools (Kaiapuni schools) have seen a 60% increase in enrollment over the past decade, even as overall public school enrollment has declined (Civil Beat, June 25, 2024). This resurgence highlights the Judiciary's responsibility to accommodate and support Hawaiian language speakers in legal settings.

Mahalo nui for considering this testimony in strong support. For the Committee to pass and fund **HB146 HD1** during Mahina 'Ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian Language Month) is especially fitting. This February marks the 13th anniversary of Act 28 (2012), which designated February as a time to honor and promote 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. Advancing this bill now reinforces Hawai'i's commitment to its indigenous language and cultural heritage.



The Judiciary, State of Hawai‘i
‘Oihana Ho‘okolokolo, Moku‘āina ‘o Hawai‘i

Testimony to the Thirty-Third State Legislature, 2026 Regular Session
Hō‘ike Mana‘o i ka ‘Aha‘ōlelo Kau Kānāwai Kanakolukūmākolu, 2026 Kau Ma‘amau

Committee on Finance
Kōmike no ka Waiwai

Representative Chris Todd, Chair • Luna Maka‘āinana Chris Todd, Luna Ho‘omalū
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair • Luna Maka‘āinana Jenna Takenouchi, Hope Luna Ho‘omalū

Thursday, February 26, 2026, 2:00 p.m. • Pō‘ahā, Pepeluali 26, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference • Lumi Kūkā Kama‘ilio 308 & Kūkā Kama‘ili Wikiō

by • na
Johanna K. Chock-Tam
‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Program Administrator • Kuhikuhina ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i

Bill Number and Title • Helu a me Inoa Pila: House Bill Number 146, House Draft 1,
Relating to the Judiciary's ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Initiatives

Purpose • Kumuhana: Appropriates funds to the Judiciary to support the Olelo Hawai‘i
Initiatives. Effective 7/1/3000.

Judiciary’s Position • Ka Mana‘o o ka ‘Oihana Ho‘okolokolo:

Mahalo ka ‘Oihana Ho‘okolokolo i ka Pila o ka Hale o nā Luna Maka‘āinana 146,
Kāmua Hale 1 no ka hā‘awi ‘ana i kekahi pu‘u kālā no kā ka ‘Oihana Ho‘okolokolo papa hana
‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i no nā makahiki kālā 2025 - 2026 a me 2026 - 2027 pākahi.

Maopopo nō mākou i ka mana‘o o ka ho‘opiha ‘ana i ka waihona kālā o ka Papa Hana
‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. Ho‘omana‘o aku ha‘aha‘a mākou, ma o kā ka ‘Aha‘ōlelo kāko‘o ‘ana i ke
makahiki 2024 i ko ka ‘Oihana Ho‘okolokolo mo‘ohelu kālā, he waihona kālā mau loa a lawa
pono ko ka Papa Hana ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i no ka ho‘okō ‘ana i kona kuleana kānāwai. He mea
ko‘iko‘i iā mākou ke kāko‘o mau ‘ana o ka ‘Aha‘ōlelo i kā ka ‘Oihana Ho‘okolokolo Papa Hana
‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i a me nā hana ho‘ōla hou i kēia ‘ōlelo kūhelu o ka moku‘āina.

Mahalo no ka manawa no ka ha‘i mana‘o ‘ana i ka Pila o ka Hale o nā Luna Maka‘āinana
146, Kāmua Hale 1.

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House Bill Number 146, House Draft 1, Relating to the Judiciary's 'Ōlelo Hawai'i
Initiatives
House Committee on Finance
Thursday, February 26, 2026
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The Judiciary expresses its gratitude for House Bill Number 146, House Draft 1, which appropriates funds for the Judiciary's 'Ōlelo Hawai'i projects for each of the fiscal years 2025 - 2026 and 2026 - 2027.

We greatly appreciate the intent of the funding for the 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Program. We would respectfully note that, through the Legislature's support in 2024 of the Judiciary's budget package, the 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Program has a permanent operating budget that will allow the 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Program to fulfill its statutory responsibilities. We value the Legislature's strong support of the Judiciary's 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Program and the efforts to revive the state's co-official language.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill Number 146, House Draft 1.

HB-146-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:35:47 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kealii Pang, Ph.D.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: The Honorable Representatives of the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Dr. Kealii Pang, a Hawaiian language speaker and a resident of Kaimukī, O‘ahu. I am writing today in **strong support** of H.B. No. 146, which provides critical funding for the Judiciary's ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Initiatives.

As a speaker, I experience daily the living reality of our language. It is the language of my family, of my academic work, and of my connection to this land. However, when I step into certain official spaces, particularly the halls of our justice system, our language often disappears. This bill is a vital step toward changing that.

As the bill rightly notes, Article XV, Section 4 of our Hawai‘i State Constitution is clear: **‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i is an official language of the State**. This is not merely a symbolic designation; it is a binding constitutional promise to the people of Hawai‘i. For too long, that promise has gone unfulfilled. We have official languages, but we do not yet have equal access to government services in those languages. H.B. 146 moves us from symbolism to substance.

I want to emphasize a key finding from the 2015 task force mentioned in this bill: ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i has the "appropriate specificity, sophistication, and technical breadth of terminology to accurately translate legal terminology." This is a crucial point. Our language is not a relic of the past, incapable of discussing modern concepts. It is a dynamic, living language fully capable of articulating the complexities of the law. With proper support, we can ensure that legal terminology is accurately and respectfully translated, allowing our Lāhui to fully understand and participate in proceedings that affect their lives.

Furthermore, this is an issue of access and equity. With ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i being the fifth most spoken language other than English in our homes, it is imperative that our courts are prepared to serve our community. Imagine a kūpuna who is most comfortable in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i having to navigate a legal proceeding in a language they do not fully understand. This bill helps ensure that our ‘ohana can interact with the judiciary with dignity and clarity.

The legislature’s analogy to other multilingual nations is apt. Just as a citizen of Canada can expect federal services in French or English, the people of Hawai‘i should be able to expect

access to their government in both of our state's official languages. The Judiciary, as an independent branch, is the perfect place to create a focused and effective model for how this can be done right.

I understand that this appropriation is intended to support and expand, not supplant, the Judiciary's ongoing efforts. Mahalo for that clarity. This funding is an investment in justice, in cultural preservation, and in the simple act of keeping the promise made in our state constitution.

Please pass H.B. No. 146. E ola ka 'ōlelo Hawai'i i loko o nā 'aha ho'okolokolo. (May the Hawaiian language live within the courts.)

Mahalo nui loa no kou manawa a me kāu kāko'o.

Kealii Pang, Ph.D.
Kaimukī, O'ahu