



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
P.O. Box 3378  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

WRITTEN  
TESTIMONY ONLY

**Testimony COMMENTING on H.B. 1523, H.D. 1  
RELATING TO THE STATEWIDE TRAFFIC CODE**

SENATOR KARL RHOADS, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Hearing Date: March 31, 2026  
10:30 AM

Room Number: Conference Room 016  
and Videoconference

1 **Fiscal Implications:** None

2 **Department Position:** The Department of Health (DOH) provides comments on House Bill 1523,  
3 House Draft 1 (H.B. 1523, H.D. 1), which removes references to countdown timers as it relates  
4 to pedestrian-control signals including the requirement that pedestrians must begin crossing a  
5 roadway before a countdown timer begins.

6 **Department Testimony:** This measure represents a practical and essential modernization of  
7 Hawaii's traffic laws by removing unnecessarily burdensome regulations that prioritize technical  
8 compliance over actual public safety. Currently, HRS §291C-33 prohibits pedestrians from  
9 entering a crosswalk once a countdown timer has begun, a rule that accounts for approximately  
10 46 percent of pedestrian citations.<sup>1</sup> This allows for the issuance of \$130 "jaywalking" tickets to  
11 individuals who are behaving reasonably and have ample time to reach the other side of the  
12 street safely. Rather than promoting safety, these overly technical regulations criminalize  
13 ordinary behavior and turn informational safety tools into enforcement traps. By treating the

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<sup>1</sup> Seitz A. Freedom to walk: decriminalizing jaywalking and shifting investment towards safe, accessible pedestrian infrastructure. Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice. March 2024. Accessed February 10, 2026. <https://hiappleseed.org/publications/freedom-to-walk>

1 countdown as a strict "do not enter" signal, the current law fails to provide pedestrians with the  
2 data needed to make informed decisions based on their own walking speed and mobility needs.

3           Removing these barriers would increase safe access to physical activity and support  
4 public health. Despite Hawaii's favorable climate, geography, and reputation for active outdoor  
5 living, only 33% of adult and 18% of high school students in Hawaii met federal guidelines for  
6 physical activity.<sup>2,3</sup> A community's built environment can either promote or hinder this activity;  
7 by decriminalizing the act of entering a crosswalk during a countdown, we create a more  
8 accessible and walkable environment that supports those at risk for chronic diseases such as  
9 obesity and heart disease. Aligning our statutes with best practices such as in San Francisco<sup>4</sup>  
10 ensures that our infrastructure serves its intended purpose: to facilitate safe, efficient, and  
11 equitable movement for all residents, including seniors and those with disabilities, without the  
12 threat of avoidable and punitive citations.

13 **Offered Amendments:** None

14           Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

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<sup>2</sup> Hawaii Health Data Warehouse, Hawaii State Department of Health, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Hawaii Health Data Warehouse, Hawaii State Department of Health, Youth Risk Behavioral Survey, 2023;  
[https://hhdw.org/report/query/result/yrbs/PhysActMeetRec/PhysActMeetRec\\_HS\\_ST.html](https://hhdw.org/report/query/result/yrbs/PhysActMeetRec/PhysActMeetRec_HS_ST.html)

<sup>4</sup> City and County of San Francisco. Pedestrian signals. SF Better Streets. 2025. Accessed February 10, 2026. <https://sfbetterstreets.org/find-project-types/pedestrian-safety-and-traffic-calming/pedestrian-sig...>



**Testimony in Support for HB1523 - Relating to the Statewide Traffic Code**  
**Committee on Judiciary (JDC)**  
**Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 10:30AM**

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Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and members of the JDC committee,  
Mahalo for the opportunity to **testify in STRONG SUPPORT of HB1523**, which would amend Section 291C-33, Hawaii Revised Statutes, would remove reference to countdown timers, including the requirement that pedestrians must begin crossing a roadway before a countdown timer begins.

HB1523 represents a practical and important step toward reducing unnecessarily burdensome pedestrian regulations that do not improve safety and instead contribute to confusing rules and avoidable citations. As Hawai'i Appleseed's research demonstrates, Hawai'i relies heavily on pedestrian enforcement—issuing more than 30,000 jaywalking-related citations between 2018 and 2023—without evidence that this approach reduces pedestrian injuries or fatalities.<sup>1</sup>

Roughly 46 percent of these citations were given for violating HRS§291C-33,<sup>2</sup> which prohibits pedestrians from crossing on the Don't Walk Sign or against the Countdown Timer. Under these laws, **pedestrians can receive a \$130 jaywalking ticket for crossing the street after the countdown timer has started**, even if they have ample time to cross. Rather than promoting safety, these overly technical pedestrian regulations criminalize ordinary, reasonable behavior.

**Pedestrian countdown signals were not designed to prohibit people from entering a crosswalk once the countdown begins.** According to national best practices, including guidance used by cities like San Francisco, countdown timers exist to provide pedestrians with additional information—specifically, how much time remains to safely cross the street.<sup>3</sup> These signals help people make informed decisions based on their walking speed, mobility needs, and comfort level. Treating the countdown as a strict “do not enter” signal misinterprets its purpose and turns a safety tool into an enforcement trap.

This misinterpretation disproportionately impacts seniors, people with disabilities, parents with children, and others who may need more time to cross. It also increases the likelihood that pedestrians will rush into crossings or avoid signalized intersections altogether—outcomes that undermine, rather than enhance, safety.

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<sup>1</sup> Seitz, A, “Freedom to Walk: Decriminalizing Jaywalking and Shifting Investment Towards Safe, Accessible Pedestrian Infrastructure,” Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice, March, 2024.  
<https://hiappleseed.org/publications/freedom-to-walk>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> City and County of San Francisco, “Pedestrian Signals,” sbetterstreets, 2025.  
<https://sbetterstreets.org/find-project-types/pedestrian-safety-and-traffic-calming/pedestrian-signals/index.html>.

In summary, Hawai'i Appleseed urges the Legislature to support HB1523 as a commonsense reform that improves clarity, fairness, and safety for people walking in Hawai'i. Reducing unnecessary pedestrian regulations is a critical step toward streets that work for everyone.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.



**LATE**

**HIPHI Board**

May Okihiro, MD, MS  
Chair  
John A. Burns School of Medicine,  
Department of Pediatrics

Jennifer José Lo, MD  
Vice Chair  
Hawai'i Health Partners

Titimaea Ta'ase, JD  
Secretary  
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Jonathan Ching  
Kaiser Permanente

Tammy Ho  
The Queen's Medical Center

Carissa Holley, MEd  
Hale Makua Health Services

Joyce Lee-Ibarra, MS  
JLI Consulting

Misty Pacheco, DrPH  
University of Hawai'i at Hilo

Dina Shek, JD  
Medical-Legal Partnership  
For Children in Hawai'i

JoAnn Tsark, MPH  
John A. Burns School of Medicine, Native  
Hawaiian Research Office

Danette Wong Tomiyasu, MBA  
Retired, Hawai'i State Department of  
Health

**HIPHI Initiatives**

Coalition for a  
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &  
Evaluation

Community Health  
Worker Initiatives

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Climate Change and Health  
Working Group

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Immunization Coalition

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &  
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: March 30, 2026

To: Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

RE: Support for HB 1523 HD1, Relating to the Statewide Traffic Code

Hrg: March 31, 2026 at 10:30 AM in Conference Room 016

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)<sup>1</sup> and the Healthy Eating + Active Living<sup>2</sup> (HEAL) Statewide Coalition are in **support of HB 1523 HD1**, which indicates the permitted actions at crosswalks.

This bill takes an important step toward allowing pedestrians freedom to safely cross at designated crosswalks regardless of time remaining during the walk cycle.

**Allowing Crossing During Countdown Timers Increases Safety and Promotes Active Lifestyles**

Removing the language surrounding the use of the countdown timers at designated crosswalks allows pedestrians to utilize the entire walk cycle to cross the street safely and efficiently. This provides them with more time to cross the street, improving pedestrian accessibility. In turn, this decreases waittimes, which would make crossing the street illegally less attractive.

**Crossing During Countdown Timers was Allowed Before 2019**

Pedestrians in Hawai'i were able to cross during countdown timers before 2019. This recent shift in the law has created a lack of understanding around what is and isn't legal. This change in 2019 has not led to improved safety, and we can safely return to our previous practice.

Crossing during countdown timers is also the norm nationwide. Given our large tourist population, this lack of consistency can create situations where pedestrians are unaware they might be breaking the law.

<sup>1</sup> Hawai'i Public Health Institute's mission is to advance health and wellness for the people and islands of Hawai'i. We do this through expanding our understanding of what creates health of people and place, fostering partnerships, and cultivating programs to improve policies, systems, and the environments where people live, learn, work, age, and play.  
<sup>2</sup>The Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, formerly known as the Obesity Prevention Task Force, was created by the legislature in 2012 and is comprised of over 60 statewide organizations. The HEAL Coalition works to make recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and health care environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents.



This change to the statewide traffic code will allow pedestrians to move freely and safely across the street at any time during the walk cycle to access vital services, employment, and recreational opportunities.

HIPHI and the HEAL coalition support HB 1523 HD1 and respectfully ask the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patti Hatzistavrakis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patti Hatzistavrakis  
Active Transportation Specialist



**March 27, 2026**

**COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY**  
**Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair**  
**Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair**

**Testimony in Strong Opposition to HB1523 HD1 Pedestrian-Control Signals; Countdown Timers**

**Submitted by:** Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

The **Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition** strongly opposes HB1523 HD1.

This bill removes references to countdown timers on pedestrian signals, including the critical rule that pedestrians must begin crossing **before** the countdown starts.

Hawaii's keiki and kupuna already face a high risk on our roads. Pedestrian crashes are a leading cause of injury and death for keiki and kupuna. Countdown timers give families, stroller-pushing parents, and slower-moving children and adults the real-time information needed to cross safely and avoid being stranded mid-intersection.

Weakening this standard will encourage late starts, increase confusion with drivers, and put our most vulnerable keiki and kupuna in greater danger.

We urge you to **defer or kill HB1523 HD1**. Instead, Hawaii should strengthen pedestrian protections and promote clear, evidence-based safety rules that protect our children (and kupuna).

Mahalo for prioritizing keiki (and kupuna) safety.

**Lisa Dau, RN, Injury Prevention Coordinator**  
**Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition**  
[lisa.dau@kapiolani.org](mailto:lisa.dau@kapiolani.org)  
<https://kipchawaii.org/>



## Testimony of the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization

### Committee on Judiciary

March 31, 2026 at 10:30AM

Conference Room 016

HB 1523 HD 1

Relating to Transportation

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Committee Members,

The Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OahuMPO) **supports HB 1523 HD 1**, which removes references to countdown timers as it relates to pedestrian-control signals, including the requirement that pedestrians must begin crossing a roadway before a countdown timer begins.

This bill is consistent with several goals of the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan including support for active and public transportation, promoting an equitable transportation system, and improving air quality and protecting environmental and cultural assets.<sup>1</sup> Removing the requirement that pedestrians must begin crossing a roadway before a countdown timer begins, makes walking a less hostile form of transportation and encourages more people to walk or roll to their destination.

Although the law that makes it illegal for pedestrians to step into the street once the timer starts counting down was passed to improve pedestrian safety, pedestrian deaths have increased since the law's passing. In 2025, Hawai'i road deaths hit an 18-year peak, with a spike in pedestrian and motorcycle deaths contributing to the more than 20% increase in deaths compared to 2024.<sup>2</sup>

The Federal Highway Administration lists proven safety countermeasures that have shown to reduce pedestrian crashes, hospitalizations, and deaths.<sup>3</sup> Some examples include pedestrian medians or refuges, road diets, leading pedestrian intervals, and rectangular rapid flashing beacons. In addition to passing this law, proven safety countermeasures can be implemented systemically to truly improve pedestrian safety.

<sup>1</sup> [https://oahumpo.org/?wpfb\\_dl=2215](https://oahumpo.org/?wpfb_dl=2215)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.civilbeat.org/2026/01/2025-hawaii-road-deaths-hit-18-year-peak/#:~:text=The%20state's%202025%20road%20fatalities%20included%3A&text=38%20pedestrians,5%20other%20non%20occupant%20fatalities>

<sup>3</sup> [Proven Safety Countermeasures | FHWA \(dot.gov\)](#)

The OahuMPO is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) on the island of Oahu responsible for carrying out a multimodal transportation planning process, including the development of a long-range (25-year horizon) metropolitan transportation plan, referred to as the Oahu Regional Transportation Plan (ORTP), which encourages and promotes a safe and efficient transportation system to serve the mobility needs of people and freight (including walkways, bicycles, and transit), fosters economic growth and development, and takes into consideration resiliency needs, while minimizing fuel consumption and air pollution ([23 CFR 450.300](#)).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



ADDRESS  
3442 Wai'ala'e Ave., Suite 1  
Honolulu, HI 96816

PHONE  
808-735-5756

EMAIL  
bicycle@hbl.org

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
Tuesday - March, 31, 2026 - 10:30AM

**Hawai'i Bicycling League Strongly Supports HB 1523, HD1, Relating to Statewide Traffic Code**

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Eduardo Hernandez and I am the Advocacy Director of the Hawai'i Bicycling League (HBL). We are a non-profit organization founded in 1975 with the mission of enabling more people to ride bicycles for health, recreation, and transportation. We strive to create communities across our islands that have safe, accessible, and inclusive environments for people to bike, walk, and roll.

**HBL strongly supports HB 1523, HD1 which would amend Section 291C-33, HRS and remove reference to countdown timers, including the requirement that pedestrians must begin crossing a roadway before a countdown timer begins.**

Given that 2025 was one of the deadliest years in decades on Hawai'i roads, it is imperative to take bold action to influence public behavior change and raise awareness about road safety for all road users, especially vulnerable users, including pedestrians. This is aligned with Vision Zero principles which have been adopted by the State and the Counties. It also supports creating walkable communities and Honolulu's 2026 Charter Amendment for a more bike- and pedestrian-friendly city.

**HB1523, HD1 represents a practical and important step toward reducing unnecessarily burdensome pedestrian regulations that do not improve safety and instead contribute to confusing rules and avoidable citations.** Pedestrian countdown signals were not designed to prohibit people from entering a crosswalk once the countdown begins. According to national best practices, including guidance used by cities like San Francisco, countdown timers exist to provide pedestrians with additional information – specifically, how much time remains to cross the street.<sup>1</sup>

HBL urges you to support this bill as a common sense reform that improves clarity, fairness, and safety for pedestrians. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

S/Eduardo Hernandez

**Eduardo Hernandez**  
Advocacy Director  
Hawai'i Bicycling League

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<sup>1</sup> City and County of San Francisco, "Pedestrian Signals," sfbetterstreets, 2025.

<https://sfbetterstreets.org/find-project-types/pedestrian-safety-and-traffic-calming/pedestrian-signals/index.html>

**HB-1523-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/25/2026 9:22:32 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 10:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Michael A. Cobb Jr	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill. Stop changing the law, this needs to be enforced. Prohibiting people from entering the crosswalk on the timer provides time for driver's to make legal turns, while the light is still green. DOT has increased the amount of no right turn on reds, that almost no one follows, on Vineyard Blvd. We need enforcement and deterrence at the time of infraction on both sides.

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

My name is Kiana Otsuka, and I am a Transportation Planner whose expertise is in walk, roll, bike, and transit. I am writing testimony in **strong support of HB1523 HD1**, which removes references to countdown timers as it relates to pedestrian-control signals, including the requirement that pedestrians must begin crossing a roadway before a countdown timer begins.

I am excited to see the legislature consider this bill because current statutes relating to pedestrians are needlessly restrictive and disproportionately impact people who do not drive and those who primarily rely upon walking as a means of transportation. These people are often low-income and walk out of necessity, as owning and operating a vehicle is prohibitively expensive.

I wanted to share with the committee an experience I had while living in Los Angeles to go to college. I was trying to cross the street at a traffic signal to go to an internship interview, however, the cars turning right, who were supposed to make a complete stop on red before turning, did not stop. The fourth vehicle finally stopped for me to cross, but that means I entered the crosswalk when the countdown timer had already begun. I had to cross 8 lanes of traffic, and when I finally got to the last lane (the countdown timer indicated I still had time to cross), I was almost hit by a police vehicle who also ignored the right turn on red, after a complete stop. The police officer then wrote me a ticket for \$150, money that I did not have at the time because I was still looking for a paid internship. This severely impacted my finances at the time, and also made me afraid to walk (I did not have a car in Los Angeles and relied on walking, biking, and using the bus).

Pedestrian enforcement and our current transportation system are not effective at improving pedestrian safety. Hawai'i road deaths hit an 18-year peak, with a spike in pedestrian and motorcycle deaths contributing to the more than 20% increase in deaths compared to 2024<sup>1</sup>. If we truly care about improving pedestrian safety, we need to change the way we allocate our budgets to fund projects that improve pedestrian safety and design our transportation facilities to reduce vehicle speed. The Federal Highway Administration has a great resource that includes proven safety countermeasures that Hawai'i could implement to see a substantial decrease in pedestrian crashes, hospitalizations, and deaths.<sup>2</sup> Some examples include implementing pedestrian medians or refuges, road diets, leading pedestrian intervals, and rectangular rapid flashing beacons.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important measure that will help to improve mobility justice and reduce the unnecessary pretextual stops, potential for escalation, and therefore incarceration and burden on the justice system. The State of Hawai'i must remove

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<https://www.civilbeat.org/2026/01/2025-hawaii-road-deaths-hit-18-year-peak/#:~:text=The%20state's%202025%20road%20fatalities%20included%3A&text=38%20pedestrians,5%20other%20non%20occupant%20fatalities>

<sup>2</sup> [Proven Safety Countermeasures | FHWA \(dot.gov\)](#)

restrictive pedestrian laws from its criminal code and shift the responsibility of safety from people walking and rolling to systems, policies, planning and design. This will reduce traffic violence which has seen a dramatic recent increase, and prevent the disparate policing of people walking. There are proven safety countermeasures to improve pedestrian safety that the State and Counties may better spend our time, resources, and budget, including tax payer dollars, that will help to save lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Mahalo,  
Kiana Otsuka

**LATE**

**HB-1523-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 4:54:30 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 10:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Steven Loretero	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in opposition to HB1523, which proposes to remove the prohibition against pedestrians entering a crosswalk once the countdown timer has begun.

While I understand that the intent of this measure may be to align the law with common pedestrian behavior, I respectfully believe this change would reduce safety and create unintended risks for both pedestrians and drivers.

The current law serves an important purpose. The pedestrian countdown timer is not just informational—it is a **critical safety tool** that clearly communicates when it is no longer safe to begin crossing. By prohibiting entry once the countdown starts, the law establishes a predictable and consistent standard that drivers and pedestrians alike can rely on.

Removing this restriction sends the wrong message: that it is acceptable to begin crossing even when there may be only a few seconds remaining. This could result in pedestrians stepping into the roadway with insufficient time to safely reach the other side, especially for kupuna, keiki, or individuals with mobility challenges. Entering a crosswalk with only one or two seconds left significantly increases the risk of being caught in traffic when the signal changes.

Additionally, allowing pedestrians to enter late in the countdown disrupts traffic flow and increases the likelihood of conflicts between turning vehicles and pedestrians still in the roadway. The current rule helps create a natural pause in pedestrian entry, allowing intersections to clear safely and efficiently.

Rather than removing the rule, efforts should focus on **education and enforcement** to improve compliance. Laws should guide safe behavior, not be weakened simply because they are sometimes ignored.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to **defer or reject HB1523** in the interest of public safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.