

**Testimony of KAREN EWALD, Executive Director
State Foundation on Culture and the Arts**



HAWAII
STATE FOUNDATION on
CULTURE and the ARTS

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**Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS
MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2026 Conference Room 224 at 1:00 PM**

**HOUSE BILL 1815_HD1
RELATING TO
THE STATE FOUNDATION ON CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

Dear Chair Lee and members of the Committee,

The State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA), is dedicated to the promotion, perpetuation, and preservation of culture and the arts in Hawai'i.

SFCA **SUPPORTS** H.B. 1815_HD1 which explicitly applies existing grant standards to Performing Arts Grants Program grants under the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts.

Chapter 9 Hawaii Revised Statutes provides the statutory authority and structure for the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA) grants program. It establishes eligibility standards for applicants, sets conditions that grant recipients must follow, and requires that all grant proposals be formally reviewed based on factors such as community need, program quality, and the applicant's ability to carry out the project. The chapter also governs how grant funds are allocated, requires grants to be issued through written contracts, and mandates ongoing monitoring and annual evaluation of funded projects. Additionally, it requires recipients to maintain compliance with eligibility requirements in order to remain qualified for future funding. Together, these provisions ensure that SFCA grant funds are administered responsibly, transparently, and in alignment with the foundation's public purpose. In order to administer the funds appropriated for the Performing Arts Grants Program in a timely manner, it would be appropriate to ensure this program is written in Chapter 9, HRS.

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



Senator Chris Lee, Chair

Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair

Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts

Monday, March 16, 2026

1:00PM - Conference Room224

SB1815 HD1 - Relating to SFCA Grant Standards - Support

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye and Members of the Committee,

HULI PAC supports this measure because it helps ensure the Performing Arts Grants Program created under Act 131 can begin supporting Hawai'i's creative community without unnecessary delay.

HULI PAC is a grassroots, Hawai'i Island-based political action committee that empowers our local community to endorse and support candidates and officeholders of integrity who serve the 'āina and people of Hawai'i Island. We advocate for equitable, community-centered public policy.

When new programs are created, it often takes months—or even longer—for agencies to develop new administrative rules and procedures before funding can be distributed. This bill offers a practical solution by allowing the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts to apply existing grant standards to the new program.

That approach reflects smart governance. It reduces bureaucratic delay, uses systems that are already working, and ensures public funds reach artists and cultural organizations more quickly.

Performing artists and arts organizations are an important part of Hawai'i's cultural ecosystem and local economy. The performing arts strengthen community identity, support local livelihoods, and contribute to the vitality that makes Hawai'i unique.

For many artists, these programs can mean the difference between continuing their work in Hawai'i or being forced to leave due to economic pressures. Supporting the arts is therefore not only a cultural investment—it is an investment in community resilience, local creative economies, and the preservation of Hawai'i's living cultural traditions.

We respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB1815 HD1.

Mahalo.



**Hawai'i Alliance
for Arts
Education
dba Hawai'i Arts
Alliance**

**Hawai'i Arts Alliance
Testimony in Strong Support of HB1815 (HD1)
Relating to SFCA and the Performing Arts Grants Program**

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee:

As HB1815 continues to move forward this session, the Hawai'i Arts Alliance remains supportive of this measure.

This bill allows the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts to administer the Performing Arts Grants Program using existing grant standards rather than spending months developing new administrative rules.

By aligning the program with the Foundation's established grant framework, funding can reach performing artists and organizations more quickly—supporting the important cultural and community work they provide across our islands.

At the same time, applying these existing standards ensures consistency, transparency, and accountability in the administration of public arts funding. Clear guidelines help applicants understand eligibility requirements while reinforcing responsible stewardship of state resources.

Mahalo for your consideration and for your continued support of the arts in Hawai'i.

Sincerely,

**Gaye Humphrey
Executive Director
Hawai'i Arts Alliance**

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15 March 2026

Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture, & the Arts (WLA)
Senator Chris Lee, Chair
Senator Lorraine Inouye, Vice Chair
Senator Stanley Chang, Senator Rachele Lamosao, Senator Samantha DeCorte, Members

*Testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of
HB 1815 HD 1 – Relating to the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts*

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

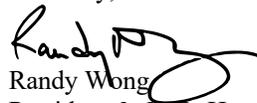
As an organization dedicated to fostering youth development and artistic appreciation through music, **Hawai'i Youth Symphony stands in strong support of HB1815 HD1** and the vital role that public arts funding plays in expanding access to high-quality arts education and experiences for young people across our islands. The Performing Arts Grants Program under the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts is an important resource for organizations like ours, supporting initiatives that nurture creativity, discipline, and lifelong engagement with the arts.

By explicitly applying existing grant standards to the Performing Arts Grants Program, this bill promotes consistency, transparency, and fairness in the administration of public arts funding. Clear and equitable grant processes help ensure that diverse organizations of all sizes, geographic coverage, and stakeholders, can compete on a level playing field. This is particularly important for youth-focused programs, which often operate with limited resources but have a profound impact on participants and communities.

Aligning grant standards also supports best practices in grantmaking, such as accountability, accessibility, and community responsiveness. Research and experience show that well-structured grant programs can expand opportunities for underserved populations and foster a more vibrant, inclusive arts ecosystem. For youth in Hawai'i, equitable access to music, theatre, and other performing arts is not only a matter of cultural enrichment but also contributes to educational achievement, social-emotional growth, and a strong sense of belonging.

We respectfully recommend that, as this measure advances, the Legislature and the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts continue to engage with youth-serving and culturally diverse organizations to ensure that grant standards remain accessible and responsive to the unique needs of Hawai'i's communities. Maintaining open communication and technical assistance will help maximize the positive impact of these grants and further the shared vision of making the arts accessible to all.

Sincerely,



Randy Wong
President & CEO, Hawai'i Youth Symphony

HB-1815-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/12/2026 5:09:22 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/16/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ezgi Green	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Senator Chris Lee, Chair

Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair

I am writing in strong support of HB1815 HD1, which would explicitly apply existing grant standards to the Performing Arts Grants Program under the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts (SFCA). This is a commonsense measure that strengthens accountability, ensures consistency across grant programs, and protects the integrity of public arts funding in Hawai‘i.

BACKGROUND: THE SFCA AND ITS GRANT PROGRAMS

The SFCA's mission is to promote, perpetuate, and preserve culture and the arts in Hawai‘i. For decades, the SFCA has administered grants and fellowships that provide critical funding to nonprofit organizations, individuals, and schools that offer training and services in the arts, culture, and humanities across the state. These programs have been a lifeline for Hawai‘i's arts community, and the standards governing them exist to ensure that public funds are spent responsibly and equitably.

The Performing Arts Grants Program, established through Act 131, SLH 2025, allocates state general funds to support the coordination, planning, promotion, marketing, and execution of performing arts events. Under Hawai‘i Revised Statutes, "performing arts" includes dance, singing, musical, and theater performances — a broad and vital category of artistic expression that is central to Hawai‘i's cultural identity.

WHY THIS BILL MATTERS

The Performing Arts Grants Program is a newer program, and as such, there may be ambiguity about whether the existing grant standards that apply across other SFCA programs also govern it. HB1815 HD1 removes that ambiguity by explicitly applying those established standards to Performing Arts Grants Program awards.

This matters for several important reasons:

1. Consistency and Fairness: Arts organizations applying for performing arts grants deserve the same clear, transparent standards that apply to other SFCA grant programs. Explicitly codifying this ensures a level playing field for all applicants.
2. Accountability for Public Funds: The SFCA's grant budget is contingent on state appropriations from the Hawai'i State Legislature. Applying uniform grant standards ensures that legislators and the public can trust that these funds are being administered with the same rigor and oversight as other state arts grants.
3. Protecting the Arts Ecosystem: Hawai'i's performing arts community — encompassing dance, theater, music, and more — depends on reliable, fairly administered public support. Clear standards help ensure grants reach the organizations and artists that need them most, and that the process is free from inconsistency or favoritism.
4. Building on Existing Infrastructure: Rather than creating a new or duplicative regulatory framework, this bill simply extends well-established, proven standards to a new program. It is an efficient and practical solution that adds no new bureaucratic burden.

CONCLUSION

HB1815 HD1 is a straightforward but important measure that strengthens the integrity of Hawai'i's public arts funding. By ensuring that the Performing Arts Grants Program is governed by the same standards as other SFCA grants, this bill protects taxpayers, supports arts organizations, and upholds the SFCA's longstanding mission to promote, perpetuate, and preserve culture and the arts in Hawai'i.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Ezgi Green

Waiialua/ Hawai'i

HB-1815-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 9:53:04 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/16/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Ball	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this legislation and its ability to facilitate funding of performing artists throughout the state.

With aloha,

David Ball

Waiālae-Kahala

HB-1815-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 11:10:02 AM

Testimony for WLA on 3/16/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Browne	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Thank you for moving this bill to a hearing. In order for the SFCA to distribute the \$600,000 Performing Arts Grant that was granted last year under Act 131, we need to apply existing grant standards to this program. A technical change needs to happen through a measure in order for the SFCA to be able to distribute the funds responsibly, transparently, and in alignment with the SFCA’s public purpose. It establishes eligibility standards for applicants, sets conditions that grant recipients must follow, and requires that all grant proposals be formally reviewed based on factors such as community need, program quality, and the applicant’s ability to carry out the project.

Thank you for moving this forward.

Susan Browne

HB-1815-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 2:09:23 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/16/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leo Nahe Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill! We need to support our local artists by whatever means necessary!

HB-1815-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 2:23:36 PM

Testimony for WLA on 3/16/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angelique Axelrode	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support the arts ! Art infrastructure and community necessary for local artists to support themselves and get deserved recognition