



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
February 26, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Bonnie Irwin

Chancellor

University of Hawai'i at Hilo

HB 2046 HD1 – RELATING TO THE 'ŌLELO HAWAII COMMISSION.

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

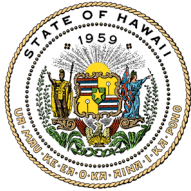
Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2046 HD1. The University of Hawai'i at Hilo supports HB 2046 HD1, which establishes the 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Commission to coordinate and promote initiatives that support the use of 'ōlelo Hawai'i across the State. The commission structure outlined in this bill brings together key stakeholders to coordinate efforts across state agencies, educational institutions, and community organization—an essential approach, as effective language revitalization requires sustained coordination across multiple sectors.

UH Hilo is proud to house Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani, the College of Hawaiian Language, which is dedicated to Hawaiian language education and has worked alongside our community in language revitalization efforts for over four decades. This measure recognizes Ka Haka 'Ula as a key institutional partner represented on the commission alongside the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, the Department of Education, and Kawaihuelani Center for Hawaiian Language at UH Mānoa.

The commission's proposed duties align with best practices in Indigenous language revitalization and advance Hawai'i's constitutional recognition of 'ōlelo Hawai'i as an official state language. Particularly valuable are the provisions for coordinating teaching and learning initiatives, conducting research to support revitalization, and ensuring 'ōlelo Hawai'i remains a living language through the development of contemporary terminology.

We wish to emphasize that adequate staffing and operational resources will be essential for the commission to effectively fulfill its mandate.

We respectfully support the passage of HB 2046 HD1. Mahalo nui loa for your consideration.



HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

KOMIKINA PONO KĪWILA O HAWAI‘I

830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 411, HONOLULU, HI 96813 · PHONE: (808) 586-8636 · FAX: (808) 586-8655 · TDD: (808) 586-8692

DATE:

Thursday, February 26, 2026

TIME:

2:00 p.m.

PLACE:

VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Conference Room 308

State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street

To:

[COMMITTEE ON FINANCE](#)

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

From: Alphonso Braggs, Chair

and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

Re: HB 2046 HD1 Relating to the ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Commission

Testimony in SUPPORT

The Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) carries out the Hawai‘i constitutional mandate that no person shall be discriminated against in the exercise of their civil rights.

Art. I, Sec. 5. HCRC has enforcement jurisdiction over Hawai‘i’s laws prohibiting discrimination in employment (Chapter 378, Part I, HRS), housing (Chapter 515, HRS), public accommodations (Chapter 489, HRS), and access to state and state-funded services (HRS § 368-1.5).

HB2046 establishes an ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Commission in the Office of the Governor to coordinate and promote use of the Hawaiian language across Hawai‘i. The Commission would bring state agencies, counties and partners together to support teaching and learning, public campaigns, organizational language plans, research and updated terminology so the language remains living and current.

This bill aligns with the mission of the Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission. Our mission is to eliminate discrimination by protecting civil rights and promoting diversity through enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and by education. We also work to ensure access to state and state-funded services. A statewide body that helps agencies use 'Ōlelo Hawai'i in everyday public service will reduce language barriers and help prevent unequal treatment.

Hawai'i's Constitution recognizes English and Hawaiian as the official languages of the State. Establishing the Commission is a practical way to carry that commitment into daily government operations and public life.

Hawai'i has made important progress in revitalizing 'Ōlelo Hawai'i through immersion education, university programs and community work. A Commission will connect these strengths to the work of state agencies and counties so residents see accurate language on forms and signs, receive clear public information and interact with trained staff who understand proper usage.

HB2046 HD1 is a civil rights measure as well as a language measure. It strengthens statewide coordination, reduces barriers to government services and honors our constitutional and cultural foundations. The Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission respectfully asks the Committee to pass HB2046 HD1.

HB-2046-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:43:49 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:

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs:

My name is Dr. Kealii Pang, a Hawaiian language speaker and resident of Kaimukī, O‘ahu. I am writing in **strong support of H.B. No. 2046, H.D. 1**, which would establish the ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Commission to coordinate efforts across the pae‘āina and cultivate further growth of our mother tongue.

As a speaker, I know that ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i is more than just words—it is the language of this ‘āina. It encodes our kuana‘ike Hawai‘i, a Hawaiian worldview that holds the knowledge of our kūpuna and guides us toward a balanced future. When we perpetuate the language, we perpetuate a way of knowing that has broad impacts in education, cultural preservation, and stewardship of our natural resources. As Article X, Section 4 of our State Constitution affirms, it is the kuleana of the state to "promote the study of Hawaiian culture, history, and language." Furthermore, Article XV, Section 4 establishes Hawaiian as an official language of the State. H.B. 2046 takes the necessary next step to operationalize that constitutional promise.

This Commission is needed to bring coordination to the vital work already underway. While organizations like OHA, the Department of Education, the University of Hawai‘i, and community groups have long carried the weight of language revitalization, there is currently no central body to align these efforts. This bill creates that structure. It brings key stakeholders to the same table—including native speakers of the Ni‘ihau dialect—to ensure that ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i remains a living language for generations to come.

I am particularly encouraged by the Commission's mandate to develop new words that reflect contemporary life. Language must grow to live, and this work ensures that ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i can be used in every context, from the courthouse to the classroom to the capitol.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge this committee to pass H.B. 2046. Let us ‘auamo kuleana together and ensure that ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i lives.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify on this critical issue.

Kealii Pang, Ph.D.
Kaimukī, O‘ahu

HB-2046-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:03:22 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
William O'Grady	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I have lived in Oahu for approximately 35 years, during which time I have taken a strong interest in the efforts to revitalize and maintain 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. Because of my work in Asia and elsewhere, I have acquired significant experience and expertise in language revitalization -- a complex project that requires very careful planning and implementation

I therefore read with enthusiasm the proposal for an act to create an 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Commission devoted to the coordination of the many activities and undertakings that are involved in managing a world-class revitalization project. As I know from experience, there are literally hundreds of revitalization projects in different communities around the world. Unfortunately, the vast majority of those undertakings are not successful; put simply, they fail in their efforts to restore and maintain the community's language. In almost all these cases, the failure can be traced to the poor coordination of resources.

A revitalization program on the scale necessary in Hawaii calls for a high degree of organization. With its multiple islands, one of which (Niihau) is home to a unique variety of traditional Hawaiian, only a commission of the sort proposed can provide the planning and coordination on which to build a secure future for 'Ōlelo Hawai'i.

As a private citizen with a deep concern for the future of 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, I strongly recommend the creation of an 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Commission without delay.

Sincerely,

William O'Grady, PhD

HB-2046-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 3:32:58 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bo Breda	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Bo Breda and I strongly urge you to **PASS, WITH CRITICAL AMENDMENTS**, SB2046 SD1.

As originally drafted, this bill would have made clear that any jet fuel released from an underground storage tank system - such as the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility - must be completely cleaned up.

Unfortunately, Hawai‘i Department of Health testimony in the last hearing resulted in amendments that replaced its clear, enforceable, and common sense standard for jet fuel remediation with a vague and practically unenforceable “as much as practicable” standard. This change, combined with the removal of a rebuttable presumption regarding the source of jet fuel surrounding an underground storage tank facility after a confirmed release, all but assures that the Navy will evade true accountability for the Red Hill catastrophe.

After having ignored years of public outcry, whistleblower complaints, and basic common sense prior to the 2021 catastrophe, the Navy must not be allowed to ignore the harms it has inflicted on our ‘āina and wai. There should be NO jet fuel in our precious and once-pure drinking water or in our environment, especially when it has been released by the reckless operation of a decrepit underground storage tank facility after years of objections by Hawai‘i’s residents.

Please stand with the elected and agency officials of the Red Hill Water Alliance Initiative, the O‘ahu community, and all who care about our precious wai, and ensure that SB2046 SD1 moves forward with the clear and enforceable remediation standard and rebuttable presumption found in the original draft of this common sense measure. If overbreadth is a concern, I respectfully recommend including provisions that would limit this requirement to underground storage tank systems with a capacity of 1 million gallons or more.

Sincerely,
Bo Breda

HB-2046-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 3:36:29 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Peter Wilson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Peter Wilson and I strongly urge you to **PASS, WITH CRITICAL AMENDMENTS**, SB2046 SD1.

As originally drafted, this bill would have made clear that any jet fuel released from an underground storage tank system - such as the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility - must be completely cleaned up.

Unfortunately, Hawai‘i Department of Health testimony in the last hearing resulted in amendments that replaced its clear, enforceable, and common sense standard for jet fuel remediation with a vague and practically unenforceable “as much as practicable” standard. This change, combined with the removal of a rebuttable presumption regarding the source of jet fuel surrounding an underground storage tank facility after a confirmed release, all but assures that the Navy will evade true accountability for the Red Hill catastrophe.

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Please stand with the elected and agency officials of the Red Hill Water Alliance Initiative, the O‘ahu community, and all who care about our precious wai, and ensure that SB2046 SD1 moves forward with the clear and enforceable remediation standard and rebuttable presumption found in the original draft of this common sense measure. If overbreadth is a concern, I respectfully recommend including provisions that would limit this requirement to underground storage tank systems with a capacity of 1 million gallons or more.

Sincerely,
Peter Wilson

HB-2046-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 4:07:59 PM

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

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

Comments:

Aloha,

I am testifying in support of HB2046.

I appreciate a coordinated effort by the State to ensure that one of its official languages continues to grow and become more prevalent in the state.

I recommend an amendment to ensure that all members of the commission must be fluent in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. It is hard for someone to make decisions that guide the continued growth of the language if they aren’t fluent in the language and understand the true challenges of keeping this language alive today is. Thus, I recommend amending to insert the requirement that all members of the commission be fluent in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i.

Also, recommend clarifying the temporary nature of this commission, since it is stated to be temporary in nature in Section 1. What is the expected length of life of the commission, or when will it be evaluated and considered for permanence?

Mahalo for your consideration,
Keoni Shizuma



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT HOUSE BILL 2046 HD1
RELATING TO THE ‘ŌLELO HAWAI‘I COMMISSION

Ke Kōmike Hale o ka ‘Oihana ‘Imi Kālā
(House Committee on Finance)

Ke Kapitala ‘o Hawai‘i
(Hawai‘i State Capitol)

Pepeluali 26, 2026

2:00PM

Lumi 308

Aloha e Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS WITH AMENDMENTS** HB2046 HD1 which would create the ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Commission to coordinate efforts across the pae‘āina (state) and cultivate further growth of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i.

OHA’s Constitutional Mandate to Protect Native Hawaiian Rights & the State’s Kuleana to Promote the Study of Hawaiian Culture, History, and Language

Established pursuant to the terms of Section 5 of the Admissions Act and the Hawai‘i State Constitution, Article XII, sections 4, 5, and 6, OHA serves as a semi-autonomous agency and trust vehicle for the betterment of the conditions Native Hawaiians. Under Article X, section 4, it is the kuleana of the state to “promote the study of Hawaiian culture, history, and language.” Further, Article XV, section 4 of the constitution establishes Hawaiian as an official state language.

Consistent with these legal mandates, OHA actively engages with various state agencies, Native Hawaiian organizations, and Native Hawaiian and ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i educators to normalize and revitalize ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. OHA has a strong interest in ensuring that state agencies, offices, and counties are equipped with the expertise, cultural competency, foundational understandings of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i to perpetuate our mother tongue.

E Ola Mau Ka ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i: the Hawaiian Language Lives

This bill will create the ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Commission with the goal of perpetuating ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i as a living language. ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, the language of this ‘āina, encodes our kuana‘ike Hawai‘i (a Hawaiian worldview). When unveiled and brought to life, perpetuation of this kuana‘ike has broad ranging impacts in education, tourism and economic development, and in preservation of our most precious cultural and natural resources¹ that make Hawai‘i so unique and beloved by all. As an official state language, this Commission is needed to operationalize ways that the state can collectively ‘auamo kuleana (assume the responsibility) to ensure ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i lives for generations to come.

Building Upon OHA’s Investments in Furtherance of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i

Since time immemorial, and even more recently since the beginning of OHA’s existence, ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i has been acknowledged as foundational to our culture and identity as kānaka (Hawaiian people). Accordingly, OHA has invested its own resources into various Native Hawaiian organizations perpetuating ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i through grants and programs. With regards to Hawaiian medium education, OHA has invested \$6.88 million into Hawaiian-focused charter schools that has shored-up funding inequities.² OHA participates with other Native Hawaiian-serving organizations and institutions with the ‘Imi Pono Well Being survey³ that continues to collect and analyze data on ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i specifically and its impacts on well-being. The creation of this Commission is appropriately welcomed, and OHA humbly accepts the kuleana (responsibility) as the chair of this Commission.

OHA appreciates the addition of the native speaker of the Ni‘ihau dialect as a member of the Commission, and after further consultation with ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i language revitalization experts, also recommends the inclusion of a member from the Hawaiian

¹ The legislature adopted a resolution that speaks to the importance of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i and integrating indigenous knowledge into policy and decision-making for our just climate future. See Senate Concurrent Resolution 93 (2025 session).

² Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 2025 Annual Report, https://www.oha.org/wp-content/uploads/2025annualreport_WEB.pdf (last accessed on 2/10/2026).

³ ‘Imi Pono Hawai‘i Wellbeing Study, <https://www.ksbe.edu/research/imi-pono-hawaii-wellbeing-survey> (last accessed on 2/10/2026).

Language Lexicon Committee. To accomplish the proposed amendment OHA respectfully recommends:

Amending the language beginning at page 2 line 12 to read as follows:

(5) a native speaker of the Ni‘ihau dialect; ~~and~~

(6) a representative from the Hawaiian Language Lexicon
Committee; and

For the reasons stated above, OHA respectfully urges this committee incorporate our recommended amendment and to **PASS HB2046 HD1**.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify on this critical issue.