



**TESTIMONY OF  
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA  
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026**

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**ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:**

H.B. NO. 2046, RELATING TO THE 'ŌLELO HAWAI'I COMMISSION.

**BEFORE THE:**

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

**DATE:** Thursday, February 12, 2026      **TIME:** 2:00 p.m.

**LOCATION:** State Capitol, Room 325

**TESTIFIER(S):** Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or  
Alyssa M. Couchie, Deputy Attorney General

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Chair Tarnas and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney general provides the following comments.

This bill establishes the 'Ōlelo Hawai'i Commission within the Office of the Governor and appropriates an unspecified amount of general funds to support the establishment and operation of the commission.

Article V, section 6, of the Hawai'i State Constitution requires that all executive and administrative offices be placed within one of the principal departments of the Executive Branch, unless the offices are temporary or for special purposes. Although the bill on page 1, line 13, establishes the commission on a "temporary basis," it does not specify when the commission expires. As drafted, the bill therefore leaves the possibility that the commission could continue indefinitely. To address this issue, we recommend amending the bill to include a specific termination date for the commission.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.



# 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 Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs  
February 12, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Bonnie Irwin

Chancellor

University of Hawai'i at Hilo

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

Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2046. The University of Hawai'i at Hilo supports HB 2046, 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, legislative leadership, 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 fulfill its mandate effectively.

We respectfully urge passage of HB 2046. Mahalo nui loa for your consideration.



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

Ke Kōmike Hale o ka Ho‘okolokolo a me ke Kuleana Hawai‘i  
(House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs)

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

Pepeluali 12, 2026

2:00PM

Lumi 325

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

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS** HB2046 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 resources<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> OHA participates with other Native Hawaiian-serving organizations and institutions with the ‘Imi Pono Well Being survey<sup>3</sup> 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.

For the reasons stated above, OHA respectfully urges this committee to **PASS HB2046**.

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

<sup>2</sup> Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 2025 Annual Report, [https://www.oha.org/wp-content/uploads/2025annualreport\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.oha.org/wp-content/uploads/2025annualreport_WEB.pdf) (last accessed on 2/10/2026).

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



# **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 12, 2026  
TIME: 2:00 PM  
PLACE: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE  
Conference Room 325  
State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street

To:

[COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS](#)

Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair

Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

From: Alphonso Braggs, Chair

and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

**Re: HB 2046 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 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.

**HB-2046**

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 2:39:54 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/12/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Shelby Billionaire	Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands & Ohana Unity Party	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

HB2046 - Relating to the ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Commission STRONG SUPPORT

Aloha Chair and Members,

I strongly support HB2046, which establishes and funds the ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Commission to coordinate and promote initiatives supporting the use of our indigenous language. As a Native Hawaiian advocate, revitalizing ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i is essential to sovereignty, cultural identity, and education. This commission will empower immersion programs, community efforts, and statewide promotion—benefits that uplift beneficiaries and all Hawai‘i residents. Funding is critical amid ongoing language loss. This bill honors our lāhui's heritage. Pass it to advance pono for future generations.

Mahalo,  
Pikachu Shelby Billionaire

**HB-2046**

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 4:49:36 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/12/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
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.

One recommended recommendation is 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. If it is to be temporary as stated in Section 2, 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

Aloha, Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs,

Welina mai me ka mahalo, ‘o wau o Christian, a me he haumāna au ma ke kula ki‘eki‘e mai O‘ahu. My name is Christian, and I am a high school student from O‘ahu, **testifying in support of HB2046**, which establishes and appropriates funds for the ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Commission to coordinate and promote initiatives that support the use of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i.

For anyone who is educated about the history of Hawai‘i, they know the challenges our kūpuna faced, especially regarding their ability to speak ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. I believe our State should do everything in its power to invest in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i and promote the proliferation of our State’s language and culture.

Since I was in preschool, I’ve been in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i immersion programs or taken it as a language class. These opportunities have allowed me to connect with friends, ‘ohana, culture, and more. One thing I noticed in my family is that my generation is really the first to grow up with a strong presence of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i. When my dad went to school, ‘Ōlelo wasn’t offered as a language option. One day, I was talking to my Tutu, and she told me never learned how to speak ‘Ōlelo. Her mom, my great-grandma, could speak; however, she never taught my Tutu because of the stigma around the language. I hope this bill can ensure robust access to ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i for nā lāhui ‘o Hawai‘i.

For these reasons, I believe this bill, HB2046, should be passed. Thank you for your consideration.

Me ke aloha,

Christian K.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christian K." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "C" and a long, sweeping underline.

**HB-2046**

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 1:12:53 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/12/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
M. Leilani DeMello	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I KĀKO‘O PIHA au i kēia pila.

Na‘u me ka mahalo,

na M. Leilani DeMello

‘Ōla‘a, Puna, Hawai‘i