



Date of Hearing: 26 February, 2026

To: Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe and the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

Subject: **HB2047 HD1**, Relating to the Aha Moku Advisory Committee

Aloha,

Hawai'i Food+ Policy **supports HB2047 HD1** and is interested in the community response to this bill. We look forward to listening to committee deliberations as well as reviewing the testimony submitted by other state departments, organizations, and community members.

Currently, under HRS §171-4.5, the Aha Moku Advisory Committee (AMAC) is composed of eight members appointed by the governor and confirmed by the senate from a list of nominations. Each member is from a different island. The committee members are then responsible for selecting the committee chairperson from among the members. This committee may advise the chairperson of the board of land and natural resources (BLNR).

The AMAC holds responsibilities regarding the integration and identification of indigenous resource management, fostering the use and understanding of these practices, sustaining our island's resources, providing and fostering education and awareness around these practices, and developing an administrative structure.

As-is, the AMAC may hire an executive director (ED), however, HB2047 HD1 would amend bill language to allow the chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources as responsible for appointment, oversight, and administrative authority over the ED of the AMAC. This amendment transfers the power of the council in appointing their own director to the chairperson of the BLNR. We provide comments on this in order to raise the question as to whether or not this amendment impedes/infringes upon the AMAC's ability to self-govern in the process of advising the chairperson of the BLNR and what the impact in this transfer of power implies.

Beyond the transfer of power in selecting the ED, we do support the explicit and public eligibility requirements with current minimum qualifications not appearing to be listed for the position and we also do support the consideration of the current members suggestions – this consideration potentially alleviating concerns about the transference of power as the AMAC is still able to self-appoint their committee chairperson. We are also in support of the explicit term limits with ability to reinstate the incumbent ED; clauses justifying for-cause removal of the ED; and, the addition of annual reviews.

Given the above, we support HB2047 HD1 and look forward to committee deliberations.

Mahalo,
Brandon Kinard & the Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.



LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

IN SUPPORT TO HOUSE BILL 2047 HD1
RELATING TO THE AHA MOKU ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

HOUSE COMMITTEE on JUDICIARY AND HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS
Hawai'i State Capitol

February 26, 2026

2:00 p.m.

Room 325

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe and members of the committee,

Ho'āla Kealakekua Nui, Inc. (HKN) is in **SUPPORT for HB2047 HD1**, which amends the process for the hiring of the Executive Director of the Aha Moku Advisory Committee. Specifies that the Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources is responsible for the appointment, oversight, and administrative authority over the Executive Director of the Aha Moku Advisory Committee. Requires any formal position, recommendation, or advisory action of the Aha Moku Advisory Committee to be adopted at a duly noticed public meeting at which a quorum is present. Amends the reporting requirements of the Aha Moku Advisory Committee. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

HKN is a collaborating partner for the Hawai'i Island Aha Moku Advisory Committee (AMAC), organizing place-based generational Native Hawaiian traditional ecological knowledge holders, customary, and religious practitioners for the benefit of advising the Board of Land and Natural Resources. The foundation to this bill is to reaffirm the Chair's (State's) obligation to Native Hawaiians as stated in the Hawai'i's Admission Act of 1959¹. This bill outlines provisions reaffirming a trust relationship requiring the state to manage ceded and submerged lands for the benefit of Native Hawaiians, along with public education, home ownership, and public improvements.

This measure further implies accountability and transparency to include consistent annual reporting and compliance with open meeting laws. HKN is in strong support for the amendments outlined in this measure, and support the State's recognition to receive, analyze, and process Native Hawaiian voices appropriately.

Mahalo for hearing this measure and urge this committee to pass HB2047 and recommend the referral to be heard in the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs.

Mahalo Nui,

Shane Akoni Palacat-Nelsen, Executive Director

¹ Act of March 18, 1959, Pub. L. No. 86-3, 73 Stat. 4, §5(f), 86th Cong., 1st Sess. (1959); transferred management of over 1.2 million acres of former territorial "ceded and submerged lands" to the State of Hawai'i, establishing a public trust that mandated these lands be used for five purposes, specifically including the "betterment of the conditions of Native Hawaiians".

HB-2047-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 10:51:34 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaimi	Kalanihale	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Subject: STRONG SUPPORT FOR HB2047 – RELATING TO THE AHA MOKU ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Chair and Members of the Committee,

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Kaimi Kaupiko. I am a lifelong resident of Miloli‘i, Hawai‘i Island — one of Hawai‘i’s last traditional fishing villages — and I write in strong support of HB2047 on behalf of myself and Kalanihale, a community-based nonprofit organization serving rural South Kona.

For generations, our po‘e kūpuna practiced moku-based stewardship. Before there were agencies and departments, there were konohiki, kilo practitioners, and ‘ike holders who understood that caring for ‘āina and kai required both cultural knowledge and collective accountability. The Aha Moku system reflects that legacy — ensuring that community voices and traditional ‘ike Hawai‘i inform state decision-making.

HB2047 strengthens the administrative structure, transparency, and accountability of the Aha Moku Advisory Committee. These updates are not minor technical changes — they are essential safeguards that ensure this body functions with integrity, clarity, and public trust.

From our lived experience in Miloli‘i — particularly through efforts like community-based subsistence fishing areas and grassroots resource management — we know that structure and process matter. Cultural advisory bodies must operate with transparency, quorum, public notice, and clear leadership oversight so that their recommendations carry legitimacy and weight within state government.

By clarifying the appointment and evaluation process for the Executive Director and reinforcing proper public meeting procedures, HB2047 ensures that Aha Moku remains strong, credible, and aligned with both cultural foundations and modern governance standards.

In rural communities like ours, the integration of ‘ike Hawai‘i into policy is not symbolic — it is necessary. We face real pressures: declining fisheries, environmental change, limited infrastructure, and economic hardship. A functioning and accountable Aha Moku Advisory Committee helps bridge the gap between community ‘ike and state action.

HB2047 reinforces that bridge.

This bill supports transparency.

It supports cultural integrity.

It supports responsible governance.

And ultimately, it supports the people of Hawai‘i.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB2047.

Mahalo for your leadership and for honoring both our ancestral knowledge systems and the need for strong public accountability.

With respect,

Kaimi Kaupiko

Miloli‘i, Hawai‘i Island

On behalf of Kalanihale

HB-2047-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2026 10:54:00 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Makani Gregg	Pohaku Pelemaka	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

HB2047 HD1

Relating to the Aha Moku Advisory Committee — Executive Director Hiring & Transparency Requirements

Position: SUPPORT

On behalf of Pōhaku Pelemaka:

Pōhaku Pelemaka, 501(c)(3) Native Hawaiian Nonprofit, Puna, Hawai‘i Island

Pōhaku Pelemaka writes in support of HB2047 HD1, which amends the hiring process for the Aha Moku Advisory Committee's Executive Director and strengthens transparency and accountability requirements for the committee's formal actions. The Aha Moku Advisory Committee is a vital body — it exists to bring traditional Hawaiian ahupua‘a-based resource management knowledge into state decision-making, particularly through DLNR. Our organization's work is deeply rooted in the ahupua‘a framework along the coastal communities of Puna, and we rely on the Aha Moku system to represent community-based traditional ecological knowledge at the state level. Requiring that formal positions, recommendations, and advisory actions of the Aha Moku Advisory Committee be adopted at duly noticed public meetings with a quorum present is a straightforward and important accountability measure. It ensures that the committee's official voice reflects genuine deliberation — not informal or unrepresentative action. Clarifying the DLNR Chairperson's administrative authority over the Executive Director also provides necessary structural clarity. We support this bill as a step toward a stronger, more transparent Aha Moku system. Mahalo.

HB-2047-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:40:17 PM

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

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

Comments:

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

My name is Keali‘i Pang, Ph.D. I am a resident of Kaimukī, a lifetime member of the Hawaiian Civic Club of Honolulu, and have served as an environmentalist in Hawai‘i for the last 35 years. I am also a retired federal biologist and currently serve as a State Commissioner. I am writing today to express my strong support for HB 2047, HD1, which seeks to strengthen the ‘Aha Moku Advisory Committee (AMAC) through improved accountability, transparency, and administrative structure.

A Legacy of Vision and Purpose

The Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs has long held a vision for a system that bridges the gap between traditional Hawaiian ecological knowledge and modern resource management. The ‘Aha Moku system is the realization of that vision—a framework rooted in the ancestral wisdom of our *kupuna* that ensures our *‘āina* and *wai* are managed according to the specific needs of each *moku*.

For over two decades, I have supported the evolution of this work. We recognize that for indigenous management to be truly effective within a state government framework, it must be supported by a structure that is both resilient and transparent.

Why HB 2047, HD1 is Necessary

As a retired federal biologist and current State Commissioner, I understand that institutional stability is what allows cultural wisdom to be successfully integrated into state policy. I support the provisions in this bill for the following reasons:

- Clarified Leadership (Section 2, §171-b): Establishing clear procedures and minimum qualifications for the Executive Director—including knowledge of traditional practices, administrative leadership, and understanding of environmental laws—ensures that this position is held by individuals capable of navigating both traditional and bureaucratic worlds.
- Operational Excellence & Transparency (Section 3, §171-4.5e): By requiring that all formal recommendations be adopted at duly noticed public meetings and strengthening reporting requirements (including English and Hawaiian versions), this bill honors the

community. Transparency does not hinder our traditions; it protects the integrity of the *aha* process.

- Institutional Stability: Aligning the AMAC's administrative oversight with the Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources (BLNR) provides the structural support necessary to ensure the committee's recommendations are not just heard, but integrated effectively into state policy.

Conclusion

The 'Aha Moku system is a vital link to our past and a necessary tool for our future. To ensure this system thrives for the next twenty years and beyond, we must provide it with the legislative clarity found in HB 2047, HD1. As the bill indicates, this is about optimizing the benefit of the program for the Native Hawaiian community while ensuring alignment with resource management priorities.

This bill does not change the *mission* of the 'Aha Moku; it strengthens the *vessel* so that the mission can be successfully carried out.

I respectfully urge your committee to PASS HB 2047, HD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

Keali'i Pang, Ph.D. Member, Hawaiian Civic Club of Honolulu

HB-2047-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 5:59:10 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Malia Kipapa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 2047 HD1

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

My name is Malia Kipapa and I am from Kona, on the Island of Hawai'i and I respectfully support HB 2047 relating to the Aha Moku Advisory Committee.

This bill makes practical improvements by clarifying how the Executive Director is hired, assigning oversight to the Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources, requiring formal decisions to be made at properly noticed public meetings with a quorum present, and updating reporting requirements.

These changes promote transparency, accountability, and clear leadership while supporting the Committee's important advisory role in caring for Hawai'i's public lands and natural resources.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify. I urge that you pass with amendments.

Malia Kipapa

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

Mahalo nui for hearing this measure, HB2047 HD1. This measure is very important to address the oversight authority over the Executive Director, the hiring requirements, and the reporting duties, which have been delinquent for some time.

HB-2047-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 6:32:04 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenny Yagodich	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support for HB2047

Rather than dissolving Aha Moku because it is not functioning as intended, HB2047 takes the responsible approach of fixing what is not working so the system can succeed. The bill clarifies the role and oversight of the executive director and improves basic governance through clear leadership, transparency, and consistent procedures. This will help ensure Aha Moku can do the work it was created to do: advise DLNR using ‘ike kupuna and moku-based perspectives that support ecosystem health and resilience, with voices from every island’s ahupua‘a represented.

Mahalo

HB-2047-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2026 6:34:49 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
M. Coe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I offer my strong support for HB2047 because it strengthens and stabilizes Aha Moku at a critical time. The intent of Aha Moku has always been to provide the Department of Land and Natural Resources with guidance grounded in ‘ike kupuna and moku-based perspectives, ensuring that voices from each island’s ahupua‘a inform decisions that protect ecosystem health and long-term resilience.

When implementation challenges have limited its effectiveness, the solution should not be dissolution. Disbanding Aha Moku would abandon a valuable framework rather than improve it. HB2047 instead takes a thoughtful and responsible approach by addressing the structural weaknesses that have prevented the system from functioning as intended.

The bill clarifies the authority and oversight of the executive director and reinforces sound governance practices. By establishing clearer leadership roles, strengthening transparency, and creating consistent procedures, HB2047 provides the stability necessary for Aha Moku to fulfill its mission successfully.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge support for HB2047.

Mahalo.