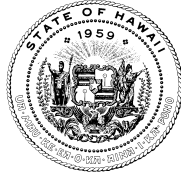


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GOVERNOR  
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*Ke Kia'āina o ka Moku'āina 'o  
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SYLVIA J. LUKE  
LT. GOVERNOR  
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*Ka Hope Kia'āina o ka Moku'āina  
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KALI WATSON  
CHAIRPERSON, HHC  
*Ka Luna Ho'okele*

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DEPARTMENT OF HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS  
*Ka 'Oihana 'Āina Ho'opulapula Hawaii'i*

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TESTIMONY OF KALI WATSON, CHAIR  
HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION  
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
ON APRIL 7, 2026 AT 10:15AM IN CR 016

**HB2309, HD1, RELATING TO THE HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION ACT, 1920**

April 7, 2026

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and members of the Committee:

The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) strongly **supports** this bill which amends the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920, as amended, to include sibling's children as qualifying relatives of lessees for the purposes of lease transfer and lease successorship, in the same manner currently allowed for spouses, children, grandchildren, and siblings.

Sections 208 and 209 of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920, as amended, specifies only certain relatives may qualify for lease successorship or transfer including:

- (1) Your spouse, children, grandchildren, brother or sister provided the person or persons designated have at least 25 percent Hawaiian blood;
- (2) Father and mother, the widows or widowers of your children, widows or widowers of your brothers and sisters, or your nieces and nephews, provided that person or persons designated have at least 50 percent Hawaiian blood.

The law was changed effective October 27, 1986 by lowering the Hawaiian blood requirement to 25 percent in the case of spouse and children, effective June 27, 1997 in the case of grandchildren, and effective April 20, 2005 in the case of brothers or sisters.

This legislative proposal was approved by the Hawaiian Homes Commission and included in the Governor's Administrative Package. Certain lessee beneficiaries do not have a qualifying Native Hawaiian spouse, child, grandchild or sibling to succeed or transfer their lease. Certain lessee beneficiaries have also indicated a desire to transfer or succeed their lease to their Native Hawaiian niece or nephew. This bill will

allow lessee beneficiaries to transfer or succeed a lease to a one-quarter Native Hawaiian niece or nephew of the lessee as a qualifying relative. Nieces and nephews would be considered qualifying relatives of the lessee that would have priority before surviving spouses of the children, and surviving spouses of the siblings.

This bill does not change the blood quantum requirement to qualify for application to the DHHL Waiting List, nor does it change the blood quantum requirement for lease successorship or transfer. This measure simply allows for an expanded opportunity to maintain beneficiary leases within beneficiary families. Lastly, proposed amendments to the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920, as amended, requires review and approval by the U.S. Department of the Interior as well as Congressional review and consideration.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT HOUSE BILL 2309 HD1

RELATING TO THE HAWAIIAN HOMES  
COMMISSION ACT, 1920, AS AMENDED

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

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

‘Apelila 7, 2026

10:15 AM

Lumi 308

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Aloha e Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi and Members of the Finance:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) submits testimony in **SUPPORT** of **HB2309 HD1**, which amends Sections 208 and 209 of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA), 1920 related to successorship.

This measure expands the categories of qualified relatives eligible to receive or succeed to a Hawaiian Home Lands lease by adding nieces and nephews at the one-quarter Hawaiian blood quantum threshold. It further clarifies sibling transfer provisions and aligns succession language with the pathway established under Act 80, which provides for a blood quantum threshold for certain successors pending Congressional consent. In addition, the bill maintains federal mortgage compatibility under Section 247 loan authority, preserves existing Hawaiian Home Loan Fund and Hawaiian Home General Loan Fund protections, and recognizes that certain provisions remain subject to federal review under 43 C.F.R. Part 48. This ensures continued compliance with federal oversight requirements applicable to amendments to the HHCA while promoting generational stability within Native Hawaiian ‘ohana.

OHA’s constitutional and statutory responsibilities include advocating for the betterment of Native Hawaiians and supporting public policies that promote stable housing, community well-being, and the responsible stewardship of land. **OHA supports this measure because it expands eligible successorship and reflects the lived reality of Hawaiian ‘ohana structures, where extended family members often serve as caregivers and household anchors.** Allowing nieces and nephews to succeed to leases reduces lease

cancellations due to technical heir limitations, preserves improvements built over generations, advances the rehabilitative purpose of the HHCA of 1920. The HHCA was enacted as a rehabilitative trust to restore Native Hawaiians to the land and promote self-sufficiency. Ensuring generational continuity of homestead leases is central to that purpose. The bill also supports long term demographic realities.

Native Hawaiians continue to experience housing insecurity, overcrowding, and displacement. Strengthening succession rights under the HHCA promotes housing stability, protects generational wealth-building opportunities, and reduces the risk of trust land reverting due to narrow successor eligibility rules.

For these reasons, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs urges the committee to **PASS HB2309 HD1** this measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.