



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 Higher Education
February 18, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Bonnie Irwin

Chancellor

University of Hawai'i at Hilo

HB 2409 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2409 which establishes the Hawai'i Geological Survey within the University of Hawai'i at Hilo (UH Hilo). UH Hilo supports HB 2409 provided the measure is sufficiently funded. Establishment of the Hawai'i Geological Survey will require a position and operating budget to support the establishment of the office.

This measure represents a pivotal step forward in both state-level natural resource management and the continued excellence of the geosciences in Hawai'i. By housing the Hawai'i Geological Survey at UH Hilo, the State will be leveraging the unique geographic advantages, existing infrastructure, and academic expertise of our institution to the benefit of all Hawai'i residents.

UH Hilo is uniquely positioned to lead this initiative. Our campus sits on the slopes of some of the most active and well-studied volcanoes in the world. This "living laboratory" has allowed the UH Hilo Geology Department to build a respected reputation for field-based geological research and hazard monitoring. The establishment of the Survey at UH Hilo formalizes our role as a hub for geological expertise and ensures that the State's geological data, sample collections, and resource assessments are managed by a program deeply embedded in the local landscape.

HB 2409 provides direct, transformative support for the UH Hilo Geology program in several ways:

1. Professional Pathways for Students: The Survey will create unparalleled opportunities for our undergraduate and graduate students to engage in "real-world" geological work. By assisting with state-mandated surveys, hydrogeological studies, and resource mapping, students will gain professional experience that makes them highly competitive for careers in environmental consulting, resource management, and government service.
2. Research Infrastructure: The mandate for the Survey to manage the state geological sample collection and conduct scientific research will naturally

enhance our laboratory and field capabilities. This synergy will attract further federal research grants and foster further collaborations with agencies like the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

3. Institutional Stature: Designating the State Geologist at UH Hilo elevates the profile of our geology program, attracting high-caliber faculty and students who want to be at the center of Hawai'i's geological policy and research.

Beyond the University, HB 2409 serves the public interest by centralizing the discovery and preservation of our water, mineral, and energy resources. A dedicated Hawai'i Geological Survey at UH Hilo ensures that decision-makers have access to the best available data regarding our State's physical foundation.

In addition, UH Hilo recommends a special fund be established to support the new Survey, to deposit revenues, moneys, and fees from services, and gifts, donations, and grants received by the Survey. Use of revenue from the special fund will help sustain the operations and activities of the office.

UH Hilo appreciates the Legislature's recognition of our program's strengths and the importance of a dedicated state geological survey.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2409.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII
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LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
Acting Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
HIGHER EDUCATION

Wednesday, February 18, 2026
2:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 309

In consideration of
HOUSE BILL 2409
RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

House Bill 2409 proposes to establish the Hawai'i Geological Survey in the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, and designates the Director of the Survey, rather than the Geophysics and Planetology Institute specialist qualified in geology, as the State Geologist. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) appreciates the intent of this measure and offers the following comments.**

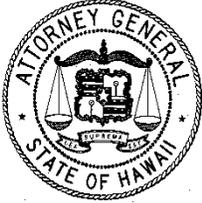
The Commission on Water Resource Management (Commission) sought and obtained the designation of State Geological Survey (housing the State Geologist), per the Association of American State Geologists (AASG), following the rockfall tragedy at Sacred Falls State Park on the island of O'ahu in May 1999. At the time, Commission geologists assisted in assessing rockfall hazards in various locations across the State. Soon thereafter, this function was transitioned and geological assessment services were contracted on an as-needed basis by the Department's Engineering Division to assess rockfall hazards on State-owned lands.

The AASG is a professional organization, founded in 1908, that represents the chief executive (or State Geologist) for state geological surveys across the United States and its territories to advance the application of earth science, promote geologic mapping, and work to mitigate natural hazards and manage resources. Due to the Commission's designation as the State Geological Survey, Commission staff often fielded inquiries in assessing geological conditions across the State, including rockfall hazards, sinkholes, springs, and groundwater seeps. Because this function was not consistent with the Commission's core mission to protect and manage the waters of the State of Hawai'i for present and future generations, the Commission asked to be removed as the designated State Geological Survey in 2025.

The Department provides these comments to highlight the responsibilities and duties that would need to be addressed by an established Hawai'i Geological Survey. The responsibilities associated with designation as the State Geological Survey are significant and extend beyond volcanology, including geologic hazards affecting public safety and state lands.

The Department recommends that, if a Hawai'i Geological Survey is established, its statutory duties and scope of responsibility should be clearly defined, including responsibility for statewide geologic hazard assessment, mapping, and maintenance of geologic data and records, including subsurface geologic coring logs. Clear delineation of these responsibilities will help ensure that the new entity is appropriately structured and resourced, avoid ambiguity regarding the roles of existing state agencies, and ensure that the statewide public safety functions historically associated with the State Geologist are maintained.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 2409, RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

DATE: Wednesday, February 18, 2026 **TIME:** 2:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 309

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Candace J. Park, Deputy Attorney General

Chair Garrett and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

This bill establishes the Hawaii Geological Survey at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo, which shall be headed by a director to be designated as the State Geologist.

This bill implicates article X, section 6, of the Hawai'i Constitution, which gives the Board of Regents of the University of Hawai'i "exclusive jurisdiction over the internal structure, management, and operation of the university." Section 6 further provides: "This section shall not limit the power of the legislature to enact laws of statewide concern. The legislature shall have the exclusive jurisdiction to identify laws of statewide concern." We recommend an amendment that adds a statement identifying this bill as a law of statewide concern.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

HB-2409

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 8:32:33 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/18/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT