



**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. 2439, RELATING TO SEARCH AND RESCUE.

**BEFORE THE:**

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

**DATE:** Friday, February 6, 2026

**TIME:** 10:15 a.m.

**LOCATION:** State Capitol, Room 411

**TESTIFIER(S):** Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or  
Ryan Endo, Deputy Attorney General

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Chair Au Belatti and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

This bill adds a new chapter to the Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) that establishes the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor, and allows the coordinator to hire staff without regard to chapter 76, HRS.

Article V, section 6, of the Hawai'i State Constitution requires all executive and administrative offices to be placed within one of the principal departments of the Executive Branch, unless the offices are temporary and for special purposes. This bill may be subject to challenge on the basis that placing the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor raises concerns under article V, section 6. To address this issue, we recommend amending page 5, line 6, of the bill to place the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within one of the principal state departments listed in section 26-4, HRS.

The bill also allows the Coordinator to broadly hire staff without regard to Hawaii's civil service law, chapter 76, HRS. Section 76-16(b)(17)(A), HRS, limits the duration of any exemptions not identified in section 76-16(b) to three years, unless later extended by an act of the Legislature. If the Committee intends to make the Coordinator's staff permanently exempt from chapter 76, we recommend amending section 76-16(b), HRS, to identify the particular positions to be exempted.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

**HB-2439**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 4:43:00 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/6/2026 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rosemarie Johnson	Hawaii SAR Alliance	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments and testimony.

I am speaking today on behalf of the Hawai‘i SAR Alliance, a collaborative effort that for the past five years has brought together multiple agencies, teams, and organizations that conduct Search and Rescue across the State of Hawai‘i.

On August 2, 2024, more than one hundred Search and Rescue professionals and national subject-matter experts participated in a virtual symposium focused on best practices and SAR system development. Local experts representing all relevant state agencies were in attendance.

Through that process, participants identified systemic gaps, defined the challenges facing Hawai‘i’s SAR system, and began working toward coordinated, solution-focused approaches tailored to the unique needs of our state.

Today, we stand in complete support of HB2439 as written.

With respect to the brief “quick reference” description displayed on the bill’s overview page in the Capitol portal, the third sentence, as currently written, has prompted questions from agency partners—specifically regarding the use of the word “designates,” which may be interpreted as assigning authority rather than facilitating coordination.

To help avoid confusion and to ensure the intent of the bill is clearly reflected, we respectfully request consideration of a minor wording clarification to the third sentence. Specifically, we suggest:

- Using the phrase “coordinates inter-agency”
- Removing “designates participating agencies and their duties”
- Including reference to mutual aid response

For clarity, the suggested language would read:

*Establishes the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor. Provides for the authority and duties of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator. Coordinates inter-agency search and rescue communications, operations, mutual aid*

*response, and training. Establishes the Search and Rescue Special Fund. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.*

Rather than:

*Establishes the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor. Provides for the authority and duties of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator. **Designates participating agencies and their duties with regard to state search and rescue operations and training.** Establishes the Search and Rescue Special Fund. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.*

**HB-2439**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 2:45:10 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/6/2026 10:15:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Noelle Hamilton-Cambeilh	Kauai Search and Rescue	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony in Support of H.B. 2439  
Relating to Search and Rescue**

To: **Senate Committee on [Public Safety / appropriate committee]**

From: Kaua'i Search and Rescue

Position: **Strong Support**

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

Kaua'i Search and Rescue (KSAR) respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of H.B. 2439.

KSAR works closely and regularly with county, state, and federal public safety agencies on Kaua'i to conduct search and rescue operations, including wilderness, urban, and coastal searches, missing person cases, extended multi-day incidents, and disaster readiness efforts. As a volunteer organization that meets recognized training and operational standards, we understand firsthand the importance of coordination, communication, and clear authority during emergency response.

In prolonged or complex search operations, local resources can quickly become stretched. In these situations, the ability for public safety agencies to formally request mutual aid from qualified volunteer search and rescue organizations across the state can be critical to saving lives. H.B. 2439 provides a framework that allows for this type of coordination while maintaining consistent standards, qualifications, and accountability among participating organizations.

Establishing a State Search and Rescue Coordinator and a centralized structure for oversight, training, and mutual aid will strengthen Hawai'i's overall emergency response capacity. This bill recognizes that volunteer organizations are an essential part of the state's search and rescue ecosystem and ensures they can be integrated effectively and responsibly when their assistance is needed.

H.B. 2439 will improve operational efficiency, reduce duplication of effort, and enhance responder safety by ensuring that all participating agencies and volunteer organizations operate under shared protocols and qualifications. Ultimately, this coordination will lead to faster

response times, better outcomes for missing or injured individuals, and increased public confidence in Hawai'i's search and rescue capabilities.

For these reasons, Kaua'i Search and Rescue respectfully urges the Senate Committee to pass H.B. 2439.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued support of public safety and emergency response across our state.

Respectfully submitted,  
**Kaua'i Search and Rescue**



HAWAI'I WING HEADQUARTERS  
CIVIL AIR PATROL  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AUXILIARY  
419 Lele St.  
Honolulu, HI 96819



5 February 2026

**TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2439  
RELATING TO SEARCH AND RESCUE**

**TESTIMONY TO:  
REPRESENTATIVE DELLA AU BELATTI, CHAIR  
REPRESENTATIVE KIM COCO IWAMOTO, VICE CHAIR  
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY**

**BY:  
COLONEL DANA MCLAUGHLIN  
COMMANDER, HAWAI'I WING, CIVIL AIR PATROL**

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Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT** of HB 2439, Relating to Search and Rescue.

For over 80 years, the Civil Air Patrol ("CAP"), an auxiliary of the United State Air Force, has provided critical services to the State of Hawai'i in times of emergencies. The Hawai'i Wing has worked closely with emergency management agencies in all four counties and with the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency and has conducted missions including, but not limited to: Search and rescue, damage assessments, aerial photographs of impacted areas, alerts and notifications, and transportation of supplies.

When emergencies occur, efficiency is paramount to ensure the expediency of our response. To accomplish this, it is our experience that pre-planned coordination between agencies is required. For this reason, we support the intent of this bill which would create a coordinator position within the Office of the Governor, who would facilitate inter-agency emergency response and rescue efforts. This is especially relevant in situations where local emergency responders are overwhelmed and require additional resources from other counties, and specialized support from the state, including the Civil Air Patrol.

The duties of the SAR coordinator within the Office of the Governor should focus on pre-planning efforts with a systematic approach to identifying hazards, assessing risks, and developing actionable response strategies across and between agencies, prior to an emergency.

However we respectfully offer a critical clarification to ensure this bill creates an effective office. The proposed role of the SAR Coordinator, as currently described, risks becoming an operation bottleneck by conflating coordination with operational command and training oversight. A more effective, proven model, is to define the State SAR Coordinator as a strategic administrator and

force multiplier, not an operational section chief, or responsible for conducting training in any jurisdiction. The core responsibilities should be:

1. **Maintain a Statewide SAR Resource and Certification Database:** The Coordinators's primary tool should be a real-time directory of currently certified SAR resources across counties and agencies. The coordinator should understand the specific capabilities, limitation and certification types in order to enable intelligent resource deployment.
2. **Authorize Mutual-aid and Inter-agency Response:** The Coordinator's main action role should be to facilitate the swift movement of resources across jurisdictions. Their deep knowledge of the database allows them to advise: "For this missing hiker on O'ahu's steep terrain, Team A from Maui has the relevant advanced technical certification, while Team B has a general wilderness certification." This approach ensures that the requesting agency gets the right type of assistance.
3. **Understand Pre-Plans and Anticipate Interactions:** The Coordinator in the Office of the Governor should be the central repository for geographic and scenario-specific response pre-plans. This creates institutional memory across agencies and is invaluable for improving future response.

On the Critical Issue of Training: Training standards and certifications must remain the responsibility of the individual counties, agencies and departments. The SAR Coordinators office should be a consumer of that data, not the entity delivering that training. This preserves local control, acknowledges existing expertise, and allows the state office to focus on it's core mission: knowing who has what, and getting them where they are needed most efficiently.

In summary, we strongly recommend amending the bill to remove the responsibility of training and reframing the role to a coordinating administrator and intelligence hub. Mahalo for your consideration. We stand react to support the creation of an effective SAR coordination system that truly serves all of Hawai'i.

Thank you,

[Col. Dana McLaughlin](#)  
Hawaii Wing Commander

**Civil Air Patrol, U.S. Air Force Auxiliary**

February 6th, 2026

RECEIVED  
Date & Time  
Feb 06, 2026, 9:36 am

LATE



RE: HB2439

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

Article V, Section 6, of the Hawai'i State Constitution requires all executive and administrative offices to be placed within one of the principal departments of the Executive Branch listed in section 26-4, HR, unless the office is temporary and for special purposes. For this reason, the Alliance has consistently recommended—and continues to recommend—that the State SAR Coordinator be placed within the Office of the Governor **on a temporary basis and for special purposes**.

The Hawaii SAR Alliance respectfully recommends a different amendment to Page 5, Line 6-7 as follows: *“There is established the office of the state search and rescue coordinator, within the office of the governor **on a temporary basis and for special purposes**.”*

This approach mirrors the structure used for the Office of Wellness and Resilience, which was established within the Office of the Governor on a temporary basis and for special purposes. That model has proven highly successful in coordinating efforts across multiple state departments while avoiding jurisdictional conflicts. The Hawai'i SAR Alliance recommends that the State Search and Rescue Coordinator follow this same structure, as it has demonstrated effectiveness and constitutional compliance in practice.

Our findings over the past several years of developing this measure indicate that, given Hawaii's unique needs and based on guidance from national subject matter experts—including consultations with DLE, HI-EMA, the DOD, the Coast Guard, and other agencies involved in search and rescue—the most appropriate placement for the State SAR Coordinator at this time is on **a temporary basis, for special-purpose** within the Office of the Governor. Once the office is fully established, an appropriate permanent home will be identified. Until then, placement within the Office of the Governor best addresses existing jurisdictional conflicts.

Thank you.  
Rosemarie Johnson  
BSE, MBA, MBB, TICC, Strategist  
Director, Hawai'i SAR Alliance  
Director@Hawai'iSARalliance.org

**HB-2439**

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 5:31:58 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/6/2026 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacy Haruguchi	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha,

I support the creation of a State SAR Coordinator, even if by temporary position, so that the State of Hawaii may determine how to best coordinate search and rescue efforts throughout the state and minimize to loss of life.

My background includes SAR within both the military and civilian communities and the states of Nevada and Hawaii.

In my previous involvement with SAR within the state, I've noted the following:

- Although all counties have the ability via MOU with the US Coast Guard to request USCG direct support for coastal and inland SAR that the county cannot resolve within 1 hour, no such MOU, policy or department exists for the counties to request other non-county SAR support such as volunteer organizations or state agencies such as the Hawaii National Guard (helicopter, CERF-P teams, Civil Support Teams). Although DLNR has been appointed to write the State SAR plan, their lack of a 24/7 dispatch center to receive requests from counties or to request support from volunteer SAR organizations, other counties, the National Guard or Federal military units prevents them from acting as a SAR coordinator. My third hand knowledge is that the DLNR does not have the funding, facilities, personnel or training to fulfill the role of state SAR coordinator (please verify with DLNR in case I misunderstand).
- During the July 2024 SAR for a missing helicopter on the north shore of Kauai, Kauai county requested the support of the USCG per their MOU. Somehow, a Hawaii National Guard helicopter was also dispatched to assist, but the approval had to go through acting Governor Sylvia Luke. I do not know if it was the request of the Kauai Mayor direct to the Governors office, or if DLNR, HIEMA or the Hawaii National Guard Joint Operations Center were intermediaries. To my knowledge, no such MOU exists whereby the USCG may request the support of state assets for SAR, which would also violate the principles of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) whereby counties request other county or state support before requesting federal assistance.
- Over the years, multiple bills have been introduced due to concerns about how the state or counties would pay for SAR. However, during the majority of SAR events throughout the state, volunteer SAR organizations such as Kauai/Oahu/Maui SAR and Civil Air Patrol were rarely requested to support the SAR effort. In theory, a State SAR Coordinator would be able to request volunteer SAR support (and verify their

training/qualifications), county, state or federal SAR support, and thereby save county and state agencies significant funds.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.