

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY  
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS  
KA 'OIHANA PONO LIMAHANA

February 19, 2026

To: The Honorable David A. Tarnas, Chair,  
The Honorable Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair, and  
Members of the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

Date: Thursday, February 19, 2026  
Time: 2:00 p.m.  
Place: Conference Room 325, State Capitol

From: Jade T. Butay, Director  
Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR)

**Re: H.B. 2446 H.D.1 RELATING TO THE WAGE AND HOUR LAW**

**I. OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

The **DLIR offers comments** on this measure. HB2446 HD1 amends HRS Chapter 387, *Wage and Hour Law*, by adding a new section to establish a community wage theft enforcement partnership program to support enforcement of Chapter 387.

HB2446HD1 authorizes DLIR to enter into contracts or memoranda of agreement with community-based organizations to educate workers on their rights, document potential wage and hour violations, refer suspected violations to DLIR, and provide navigation and language-access support during the enforcement process. The measure also requires DLIR to submit an annual report to the Legislature detailing program activities and appropriates an unspecified amount of funds for implementation.

**II. CURRENT LAW**

Both the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and Chapter 387 govern wages and hour law (minimum wage, overtime, & recordkeeping requirements). Chapter 387 authorizes DLIR to assess penalties and issue orders of wage payment violations to employers found in violation.

For enforcement purposes, the determination of whether federal or state law applies is essentially dependent on whether the establishment is either engaged in interstate commerce as defined broadly or has annual gross proceeds of over \$500,000. If an establishment meets either of those criteria, then the U.S. Department of Labor conducts investigative and enforcement activities.

### **III. COMMENTS ON THE HOUSE BILL**

Similar programs like the one proposed are operated and funded by municipalities and counties and not states. The DLIR is the sole agency authorized under Chapter 387 to investigate and enforce wage and hour laws, and as noted above, has limited jurisdiction as most establishments fall under federal jurisdiction. Jurisdiction for the State is limited to establishments with gross revenue of less than \$500,000 and not involved in interstate commerce as interpreted very broadly by the U.S. DOL, for example, use of a computer or sending/receiving interstate mail or emails.

The DLIR also notes that by allowing community-based organizations to play a quasi-enforcement role, even indirectly, may create ambiguity about enforcement authority, which could lead to legal challenges if organizations act beyond their intended role. The DLIR cannot control the guidance or statements provided by community partners to workers or employers. If incorrect guidance is perceived as official advice, DLIR may face legal exposure.

While language access is critical, reliance on community-based organizations for translation services introduces risk of misinterpretation. Such errors could affect case outcomes and compliance with state and federal law. If these translation services are viewed as part of official enforcement, DLIR would bear responsibility for inaccuracies.

Additionally, wage theft complaints involve sensitive personal and employer information. Sharing this data with third-party organizations increases the risk of confidentiality breaches, which could violate state privacy laws and expose DLIR to liability.

The Intake and Certification Branch of the Wage Standards Division currently provides many of the services described in this proposal, including educational outreach services to the general public and community organizations. The Department believes this measure may be duplicative and respectfully suggests that its necessity be further evaluated.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



# HAWAII APPLESEED

CENTER FOR LAW & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Testimony of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice  
HB2446 HD1 – Relating to the Wage & Hour Law  
House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs  
Thursday, February 19, 2026, at 2:00 PM, Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

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Dear Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2446, which would authorize the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) to establish a Community Wage Theft Enforcement Partnership Program.

Wage theft is a profound injustice and a silent crisis in our economy. There is strong evidence that businesses throughout the U.S. frequently violate wage standards. A study conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor between 2010 and 2012 discovered that 5 out of every 6 restaurants under investigation had committed a wage violation.<sup>1</sup> These violations cost their employees millions of dollars in stolen wages.<sup>2</sup>

A 2017 study on the 10 most populous states in the U.S. found that 17 percent of workers were paid less than the minimum wage for their state. Based on this data, the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) estimated that U.S. workers were illegally underpaid by at least \$15 billion for that year.<sup>3</sup>

Here in Hawai‘i, with the highest cost of living in the nation, every dollar counts. For our low-wage workers already living paycheck to paycheck, stolen wages aren’t just an inconvenience—they are the difference between paying rent, buying groceries, and keeping the lights on.

The problem is not a lack of good laws; it is a gap in effective enforcement and outreach. The current complaint-driven system places the entire burden on workers who are often unaware of their rights, fearful of retaliation, or unsure how to navigate a complex bureaucratic process. As we saw in the 2023 [case](#) against Asian Restaurant Group Inc., which operated Max’s of Manila restaurants, major wage theft occurs here. That case recovered hundreds of thousands of dollars in stolen wages, but it undoubtedly represents only a fraction of the violations that go unreported.

HB2446 offers a proven, common-sense solution by empowering DLIR to partner with trusted, community-based organizations. These organizations are already on the front lines, embedded in the communities most vulnerable to exploitation. They have the linguistic capabilities, cultural competency,

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<sup>1</sup> Allegretto, Sylvia and David Cooper, “Twenty-Three Years and Still Waiting for Change: Why It’s Time to Give Tipped Workers the Regular Minimum Wage,” Economic Policy Institute, 2014, <https://www.epi.org/publication/waiting-for-change-tipped-minimum-wage/>

<sup>2</sup> Cooper, David and Teresa Kroeger, “Employers steal billions from workers’ paychecks each year: Survey data show millions of workers are paid less than the minimum wage, at significant cost to taxpayers and state economies,” Economic Policy Institute, 2017, <https://www.epi.org/publication/employers-steal-billions-from-workers-paychecks-each-year/>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

and established trust to effectively:

- Educate workers about their rights in accessible ways.
- Assist in filing complaints and navigating the process.
- Serve as a critical bridge between workers and state enforcement agencies.

This model works. Cities like San Francisco, Seattle and Minneapolis have successfully implemented similar community-labor partnerships, dramatically improving outreach and recovery of stolen wages. A 2023 Economic Policy Institute study confirms that such Community Enforcement Programs strengthen enforcement overall.

This bill is a smart investment in fairness and our local economy. Effective enforcement ensures a level playing field for ethical employers who follow the law, protects our most vulnerable workers from exploitation, and puts rightfully earned wages back into our local communities where they will be spent on necessities.

For the dignity of our workers and the integrity of our businesses, we urge you to pass HB2446. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



# HAWAII WORKERS CENTER

Advance and Defend the Rights of  
Workers in Hawai'i

(808) 743-1031

[contact@hawaiiworkerscenter.org](mailto:contact@hawaiiworkerscenter.org)

Mail: P.O. Box 29969, Honolulu, HI 96820

[hawaiiworkerscenter.org](http://hawaiiworkerscenter.org)

February 17, 2026

House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

Hawai'i State Capitol  
415 South Beretania St.  
Honolulu, HI 96813

**Executive Board  
Committee**

Rev. Sam Domingo  
*Board Chair*

Mary Ochs  
*Vice Chair*

Dr. Arcelita Imasa  
*Secretary*

Ananda Luttet  
*Treasurer*

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Innocenta  
Sound-Kikku

Ray Catania

Joli Tokusato

Justin Puaoi

Misty Pegram

Rich Rath

Nanea Lo

**Executive Director**

Kami Yamamoto, MPH

Dear Chair Tarnas & Vice Chair Poepoe,

My name is Kami Yamamoto and I am the Executive Director of the Hawai'i Workers Center (HWC), a non-profit that organizes low-wage, non-union workers.

For the past five years, we have worked diligently to find a champion in the legislature for our campaign against wage theft. We are grateful for the support of Rep. Shirley Templo and the other sponsors of HB2446 to support our vision for a Hawai'i in which all workers are empowered to exercise their right to education and organization for their social, economic and political well-being.

The Economic Policy Institute estimates that **wage theft costs workers across the country \$50 billion annually**, and the burden for workers in high-cost states like Hawai'i is magnified. Since our founding in 2020 and with our limited resources, we have trained over 500 workers through our Know Your Workers Rights trainings in partnership with local CBOs, service providers, and advocates.

Through our trainings, workers are learning about wage theft for the first time. This illustrates a limitation in the current outreach efforts by the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) and its ability to reach workers directly impacted by wage theft. While the DLIR already has the authority to enter into partnerships with community based organizations (CBOs), this bill would make it mandatory and provide accountability measures to service directly impacted communities.

Years of experience in a multitude of contexts (state, city, and county level) have demonstrated that partnerships with CBOs help government agencies to expand their capacity. We humbly ask for your full support of HB2446 as a concrete way to protect the dignity, rights, and livelihood of all of Hawai'i's workers.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Kami Yamamoto, MPH  
Executive Director  
Hawai'i Workers Center



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB2446, HD1  
RELATING TO THE WAGE AND HOUR LAW**

**Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs**

Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair

Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: February 19, 2026 | Letter Date: February 18, 2026

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

The Legal Clinic (TLC) strongly supports HB2446, HD1, which authorizes the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) to establish a Community Wage Theft Enforcement Partnership Program to strengthen outreach, referrals, and recovery of stolen wages.

TLC is a nonprofit organization advancing immigrant justice in Hawai'i through immigration legal services, community education, and policy advocacy. Wage theft disproportionately harms immigrant communities, many of whom face language barriers, fear of retaliation, or limited familiarity with their legal rights. Although Hawai'i has seen significant wage theft cases over the years, enforcement remains largely complaint-driven, and many violations likely go unreported.

HB2445, HD1 responds to these realities by authorizing DLIR to partner with trusted community-based organizations to educate workers about their rights, assist in documenting violations, refer cases for investigation, and provide language access and navigation support throughout the enforcement process. Workers often report they do not know their rights or how to assert them, and community organizations are uniquely positioned to provide culturally appropriate outreach, build trust, and help vulnerable workers safely access wage justice and remedies.

Community enforcement models in other jurisdictions have improved compliance and increased recovery of stolen wages. HB2446, HD1 offers a practical, evidence-based approach to ensure that all workers can meaningfully access the protections of Hawai'i's wage and hour laws. We respectfully urge the Committee to advance this bill.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of The Legal Clinic  
and Board President Dr. Amefil Agbayani,

Christina Sablan

Community & Policy Advocate

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 2:08:18 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jen	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

No. Too convoluted. Public-Private Partnerships, NGO money funneling all needs to be investigated, not protected by more bullshit laws. Really? Transparency anyone?

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 4:00:08 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
William Caron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am testifying in strong support of HB2446, which authorizes the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations to establish a Community Wage Theft Enforcement Partnership Program in collaboration with community-based organizations. This bill recognizes a fundamental truth: the current enforcement system is failing workers, and meaningful change requires bringing trusted community partners into the fight.

**The Scale of Wage Theft Is Staggering**

Wage theft is the largest form of theft in the United States. Employers steal an estimated **\$15 billion to over \$50 billion annually** from workers—more than the total of all robberies, burglaries, and motor vehicle thefts combined. This is not a minor problem affecting a few bad actors; it is a systemic crisis that touches millions of workers, particularly those in low-wage industries.

The forms of wage theft are familiar: unpaid overtime, minimum wage violations, forced "off-the-clock" work, illegal tip confiscation, misclassification of employees as independent contractors. Each violation represents real money stolen from real people—money that was supposed to pay for rent, groceries, medication, and child care.

**Hawai'i's Workers Are Especially Vulnerable**

Hawai'i consistently ranks as the state with the highest cost of living. Low-wage earners here are not just struggling; they are living paycheck to paycheck, often working multiple jobs just to keep a roof over their heads. When wages are stolen, the consequences are not abstract. A family misses rent. A child goes without needed medication. A worker falls deeper into debt.

In this context, wage theft is not merely an labor violation; it is a direct contributor to poverty, housing instability, and the erosion of economic security for working families.

**The Current Enforcement System Is Insufficient**

Currently, wage theft enforcement is carried out by the federal Department of Labor and DLIR through complaint-driven investigations and audits. This approach has fundamental limitations:

- Workers are often unaware of their rights or how to assert them.
- Fear of retaliation—being fired, blacklisted, or reported to immigration authorities—keeps workers from filing complaints.
- Language barriers, lack of transportation, and limited access to information further compound the problem.
- Enforcement agencies are under-resourced and cannot proactively reach the workers most in need.

The result is a system that catches only a fraction of violations and leaves billions in stolen wages unrecovered.

### **Community Partnerships Work**

HB2446 takes a different approach. It empowers DLIR to partner with community-based organizations that already have deep trust within immigrant communities, low-wage worker networks, and neighborhoods where wage theft is most prevalent. These organizations are not government agencies; they are neighbors, advocates, and allies who workers already know and trust.

The model is proven. A 2023 study by the Economic Policy Institute found that community enforcement programs have significantly improved wage theft enforcement in jurisdictions that have adopted them. Cities and counties including **San Francisco, San Diego, Minneapolis, Chicago, Seattle, and Washington D.C.** have established local labor enforcement programs similar to what HB2446 proposes. These programs increase outreach, improve referral rates, and recover stolen wages that would otherwise remain in employers' pockets.

### **What the Program Would Do**

The Community Wage Theft Enforcement Partnership Program would:

- Expand outreach to workers who are currently unaware of their rights.
- Provide education and know-your-rights training in multiple languages.
- Assist workers in filing complaints and navigating enforcement processes.
- Build trust between enforcement agencies and vulnerable communities.
- Increase recovery of stolen wages for workers who need them most.

This is not about replacing DLIR's enforcement authority; it is about augmenting it with community capacity and community trust.

### **A Matter of Basic Justice**

Wage theft is not a victimless crime. Every dollar stolen from a worker is a dollar that family will never see. Every violation that goes unenforced is a message to employers that exploitation pays. Every worker who is too afraid to come forward is a worker who remains trapped in an abusive situation.

HB2446 says that Hawai'i will do better. It says we will meet workers where they are, through organizations they trust. It says we will invest in outreach and education, not just investigation and enforcement. It says we recognize that effective enforcement requires partnership, not just authority.

### **Benefits for Employers, Too**

Effective enforcement benefits law-abiding employers as well. When wage theft goes unchecked, businesses that follow the rules are undercut by competitors who cheat. Strong enforcement levels the playing field and ensures that responsible employers are not at a disadvantage.

### **Conclusion**

Wage theft is the largest form of theft in America, and Hawai'i's workers are not immune. In the state with the highest cost of living, stolen wages can mean the difference between stability and crisis, between staying housed and becoming homeless, between hope and despair.

HB2446 offers a practical, proven, and community-centered solution. It builds on successful models from across the country and adapts them to Hawai'i's unique communities and needs. It empowers workers, supports community organizations, and strengthens enforcement without creating new bureaucracy.

I urge you to pass this bill and take a meaningful step toward ending wage theft in Hawai'i.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 4:03:26 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nanea Lo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Nanea Lo, and I am writing to testify in strong support of HB2446, which would authorize the Hawai‘i Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) to establish a Community Wage Theft Enforcement Partnership Program in collaboration with community-based organizations (CBOs).

I currently serve on the board of the **Hawai‘i Workers Center**, a grassroots organization that works directly with workers to protect their rights, address workplace abuses, and provide education and support around wage theft. My role gives me firsthand insight into the challenges workers face in understanding their rights and seeking enforcement. Many workers, particularly in vulnerable communities, are not aware of their rights and do not feel confident asserting them. This demonstrates the limitations of current outreach efforts and highlights the need for proactive engagement.

HB2446 addresses this gap by making partnerships with CBOs mandatory, permanently funded, and accountable. CBOs are uniquely positioned to reach workers in communities that the state might not otherwise reach. Expanding DLIR’s capacity in this way will increase both the number of referrals and the recovery of stolen wages.

Research supports this approach. A 2023 study by the Economic Policy Institute found that Community Enforcement Programs improve wage theft enforcement outcomes. Cities including San Francisco, San Diego, Minneapolis, Chicago, Seattle, and Washington D.C. have implemented similar local labor enforcement programs with success.

Hawai‘i has already experienced significant wage theft cases, such as the 2023 DOL investigation of Asian Restaurant Group Inc., which operates Max’s of Manila restaurants. It is likely that numerous other cases go unreported due to workers’ lack of knowledge or fear of retaliation. HB2446 will help ensure that these workers have a clear path to reclaiming what is rightfully theirs.

As a board member of the Hawai‘i Workers Center, I see daily how community-based support empowers workers and amplifies their voices. HB2446 formalizes this approach, making it a permanent and accountable part of our state’s enforcement strategy.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the Committee to pass HB2446. Empowering DLIR to work directly with trusted community partners is a necessary step to protect workers, enforce labor laws, and ensure fair treatment for all in Hawai'i.

me ke aloha 'āina,

Nanea Lo, 96826

Hawai'i Workers Center Board Member

Sierra Club of Hawai'i Member

Honolulu Tenants Union Member

350 Hawai'i Member

Carbon Cashback Hawai'i Member

Hawai'i Tax Fairness Coalition Member

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 5:47:31 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kanani Kai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I SUPPORT HB2446.

Mahalo.

Kanani Kai

Member Indivisible Hawaii

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 6:17:56 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Alex Tam	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The cost of living here is already extraordinarily high, and wage theft is just adding insult to injury. Workers deserve a living wage, and powerful special interests are taking advantage of them. Increasing community's role in governance is a critical step to ensure that workers are paid fairly for the work they do.

Currently, the enforcement of wage theft law is carried out by the federal Department of Labor (DOL) and the state's Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) through **complaint-driven investigations and audits**.

Workers have reported that they are not aware of their rights nor do they feel confident about how to assert them - this shows us that there is still a limit to the current outreach efforts and its ability to reach more workers. This bill would make contracts with community based organizations (CBOs) mandatory for the DLIR to expand their outreach capacity, and in turn increase referrals and the recovery of stolen wages.

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 6:30:11 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Patti Cook	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support passage of this soonest to better protect more vulnerable members of the workforce. There have been major cases of worker wage theft here in Hawai'i and this will help protect workers who for many reasons may not know their rights and/or have the capacity to speak out and/or report illegal activity. Mahalo, Patti Cook - Waimea, Island of Hawai'i

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/17/2026 7:59:51 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Cori Farrow	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawai'i needs these increased resources in order to reach the most vulnerable workers in our community. There is a high probability that there are more wage theft cases which are not reported.

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 1:00:34 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Valerie Clack	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

***Testimony to the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs***

***Hearing: Thursday, February 19 at 2:00pm***

***Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 325***

*RE: House Bill No. 2446, Relating to the Wage and Hour Law*

Haʻa Mitákuyepi and Greetings Members of the Committee,

I am writing in **support** of HB2446. As a worker in Hawai'i, I support authorizing the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations to establish a Community Wage Theft Enforcement Partnership Program and enter into contracts or memoranda of agreements with community-based organizations to enhance outreach, referral, and recovery of stolen wages as well as appropriating funds to make it all happen.

This bill will ensure increased workers' rights education and awareness in Hawai'i, making this a beautiful place to work and in the spirit of pilina and right relation, this bill would also support collaboration with community-based organizations. This bill would **help Hawai'i workers** be more aware of their rights and build the confidence to assert them.

I invite you to **join me in my support** of this bill because it would provide accountable funding to make these partnerships and education programs permanent and mandatory to expand reach Hawai'i's most at-risk workers.

In community,

Valerie J. Clack

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 1:48:57 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Mary K Ochs	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Too many workers especially in lower waged but essential jobs do not know their rights and are not paid or classified correctly. This bill is essential to having a more effective DLIR and stronger enforcement of fair pay for a days work. At the recent hearing on this bill in the Labor Committee, DLIR Director admitted that they did a total of 4 outreach engagements in 2025. They clearly need more funds/capacity to engage with workers and in partnership with organizations.

It is unacceptable that our Hawaii workers should not be paid fairly=have their wages stolen.

Mahalo,

Mary Ochs, Honolulu

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 4:42:35 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Skyler Rogers	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I highly support this. I was a victim of Carey Mills wage theft back in 2020. My wife and I worked for him to the point where he owed us thousands of dollars of back pay that never came. I filed a complaint with the state and they basically said "too bad." and that they couldn't locate him to deliver the subpoena. Later, I found out that he actually had received his subpoena and the state decided not to pursue it. I then had to pay for a lawyer out of my own pocket to try and recoup my losses. The court sided on my side, but by this point, Carey had been indicted by the federal government. My wife and I had racked up credit card debt while working for no pay and finally had to leave Hawaii to go to the mainland and live with family to try and pay off our debt. This experience was so poorly handled by the department of labor that I couldn't believe it. We lost so much- the place we wanted to spend the rest of our lives, raise our kids, go to school, etc. this truly altered the course of our entire life and I wish it would have been handled with more care. A dedicated workforce to fight for people like my wife and I sounds like a wonderful idea.

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 8:44:50 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Patrick Switzer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Labor Committee Chair Rep. Sayama and Vice Chair Rep. Lee,

I support HB2446 because I support workers' rights to receive fair compensation and I recognize we need resources committed to worker education and outreach to combat the problem of wage theft.

I am a well-informed nurse working in a major hospital in Honolulu and I often find my paychecks are missing hours or coded incorrectly in ways that benefit the employer at my expense. If it's an issue for me and my colleagues, imagine the fight that less educated workers must be going through in order to be fairly paid.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter, please vote yes on HB2446.

Sincerely,

Patrick Switzer, R.N.

February 17, 2026

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe and members of the Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs,

My name is Lauren Taijeron and I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 2446. I submit this testimony keeping in mind community members, namely those of COFA Micronesian communities, who are victims of wage theft, discrimination, insecure housing, and overall a system of neglect.

Working closely with community members I have learned about the conditions that COFA workers face in their workplace, school, and community. Coming here through the Compact of Free Association with their family members at the forefront of their minds, some work upwards of 60 hours every week and are not given overtime pay. Some are made to pay their bosses for every word they say in their own language. We have even heard from folks that the money they receive whether through their jobs, social security, or disability leaves them with almost nothing after paying their bills. Wage theft remains to be an incredible weight on working class families namely, the families of COFA and other migrant communities who work in low wage and high violations industries.

Building stronger protections against wage theft such as the ones described in this bill, would benefit the workers whose stories I have just shared. It would open up doors as we have seen in Santa Clara and San Francisco which stand as examples to the impacts that greater protections such as partnership programs with community organizations could have on workers. Overall, establishing a formal relationship with a community liaison would ensure that there is a greater trust from workers thus aiding in the process of recovering wages, and protecting working class families.

I ask the committee to consider these stories, support HB 2446, and protect the working class of Hawai'i.

Thank you,

Lauren Taijeron

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 11:10:17 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Julianna Davis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing in strong support of HB2446 which would enhance outreach, referral, and recovery of stolen wages through a community enforcement model. The community enforcement model has been implemented in cities such as San Francisco, San Diego, Minneapolis, Seattle, and Washington, D.C. and has proven successful in curbing wage theft. Here in Hawai‘i, wage theft impacts the most vulnerable workers, often immigrants/migrants working multiple jobs to support themselves and their families. Workers in Hawai‘i are already grappling with the highest cost of living of any state, and it is crucial that the State does everything it can to ensure that workers' hard earned wages are not taken from them. I respectfully urge you to pass HB2446 and enact a community enforcement model to combat wage theft.

Mahalo for your consideration and for the opportunity to testify.

Julianna Davis

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 3:37:40 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ken Reyes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs,

I wholeheartedly support HB2446, which would authorize DILR to establish a Community Wage Theft Enforcement Partnership Program in collaboration with community-based organizations.

I have personally been impacted by wage theft and remember how disempowering it felt to be left hanging and "forced" to accept my situation. At the time, I was unaware of what rights I had as a worker and did not know how to contend for what was owed to me.

I know I'm not alone in this. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of workers across Hawai'i who have experienced or are currently experiencing wage theft as well. But there is such a lack of public education and awareness in our communities about how to assert our rights as workers.

This bill ensures that the working class communities of Hawai'i receive the support and advocacy they need, especially during a time when cost of living is already high and making ends need has become increasingly difficult for many living in Hawai'i.

Mahalo nui,

Ken Reyes

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 10:44:26 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Deanna Espinas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this measure. Thank you

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/19/2026 12:49:27 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
rose elovitz	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Rose I am a worker and a community member. I'm testifying in support of House Bill 2446 because the workers most vulnerable to wage theft exploitation should be provided with every avenue possible to fight for their fair wages, treatment, and dignity. Increasing access to the necessary resources through third party community organizations bridges the gap between workers and the bureaucratic system. The inclusion of a third party organization ensures that an exploited and overworked laborer does not have to move through the bureaucratic process alone. Instead they will be provided with education, language access, and continual support to ensure they are empowered to embark on a clear pathway to hold their corrupt bosses accountable. This committee should pass this bill today to ensure Hawai'i's anti-wage theft laws are exercised by the people who need them most.

**HB-2446-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/19/2026 10:33:23 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/19/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nikos Leverenz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and JHA Committee:

I strongly support this measure. A dozen years ago, [the Economic Policy Institute estimated that wage theft cost American workers \\$50 billion each year](#), more than the value of all property crime combined. That figure has likely increased substantially since.

Sadly, there has been little movement in state government policies and practices to remedy this situation, in stark contrast to the continued criminalization of poverty and behavioral health issues, including "habitual offender" laws.

There have been a few enforcement actions by the federal Department of Labor in recent years in Hawaii [impacting Filipino workers at chain restaurants](#).

The short of it is that workers deserve the payment that they are due regardless of their immigration status or the sector where they are employed.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.