



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
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**Testimony in SUPPORT of (HB2508)  
RELATING TO AIR MEDICAL SERVICES**

REPRESENTATIVE GREGG TAKAYAMA, CHAIR  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at 9:00 AM | Room Number: 329

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health (“Department”) requests that this measure be  
2 considered as a vehicle to provide the needed funding so long as it does not supplant the  
3 priorities and requests outlined in the Governor's executive budget request, and emphasizes  
4 that emergency air medical transport licensure and accreditation fees will be deposited into the  
5 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Special Fund to provide a long-term, sustainable funding  
6 source through ongoing air medical and ambulance licensing revenues to support these  
7 positions and program functions.

8 **Department Position:** The Department supports this measure offering testimony.

9 **Department Testimony:** The Emergency Medical Services & Injury Prevention Systems Branch  
10 (EMSIPSB), on behalf of the Department, respectfully submits this testimony in strong support  
11 of this measure.

12 Air medical services are an essential component of Hawaii’s healthcare delivery system,  
13 emergency medical systems of care, and overall healthcare infrastructure. Due to Hawaii’s  
14 geographic isolation, multi-island structure, rural and remote communities, and limited access  
15 to specialty and tertiary care on neighbor islands, timely access to emergency aeromedical and

1 interfacility air medical transport is critical to ensuring equitable, lifesaving care for residents  
2 and visitors across the State.

3 Air medical transport is not a supplemental service in Hawaii; it is a foundational element of  
4 emergency response, trauma care, stroke care, cardiac care, and disaster preparedness. These  
5 services are relied upon daily to bridge geographic barriers and ensure continuity of care across  
6 islands.

7 EMSIPSB recognizes that while demand for emergency and interfacility air medical transport  
8 has continued to increase, the State currently lacks permanent, dedicated resources within the  
9 Department to comprehensively monitor, manage, coordinate, and develop this critical  
10 component of the emergency medical services system. The Air Medical Working Group,  
11 convened pursuant to 2025 Senate Concurrent Resolution 86 (SCR86), confirmed that Hawaii  
12 requires a formalized governance structure and designated staffing within the Department to  
13 provide statewide oversight, coordination, performance monitoring, quality improvement, and  
14 disaster readiness for air medical services.

15 House Bill 2508 (HB2508) represents the initial and necessary implementation step for the  
16 Department to operationalize the recommendations outlined in the SCR86 (2025) Air Medical  
17 Working Group Report. By establishing statutory authority, dedicated staffing, and sustainable  
18 funding mechanisms, this measure enables the Department to begin systematically  
19 implementing the Working Group's recommendations to improve coordination, efficiency,  
20 equity, and outcomes for air medical resources across all islands.

21 It should be noted that the positions proposed under this measure are intended to be initially  
22 established using Rural Healthcare Transformation Funds for the first five years. This approach  
23 allows time for emergency air medical transport licensure and accreditation fees to be collected  
24 and deposited into the EMS Special Fund. Over this initial implementation period, the revenue  
25 generated from air medical and ambulance licensing would serve as the long-term, sustainable

1 funding mechanism to support these positions and programmatic functions within the  
2 Department.

3 This phased funding strategy represents a prudent investment in rural health infrastructure and  
4 is directly aligned with the goals and intent of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services  
5 (CMS) Rural Healthcare Transformation initiatives. Leveraging time-limited federal resources to  
6 establish durable state infrastructure allows Hawaii to strengthen its emergency air medical  
7 systems while ensuring long-term sustainability.

8 This measure provides the framework necessary for DOH to strengthen statewide governance,  
9 improve coordination across counties and healthcare systems, support data-driven quality  
10 improvement, enhance disaster preparedness, and promote health equity by improving timely  
11 access to emergency medical care for rural and neighbor island communities. Collectively, these  
12 actions will drive improved performance and patient outcomes for air medical resources across  
13 the State.

14 For these reasons, the EMSIPSB strongly supports HB2508.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued commitment to  
16 strengthening Hawaii's EMS system.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII  
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII

KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH  
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH  
KA LUNA HO'ŌKELE



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

In reply, please refer to:  
File: 26-006

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**Testimony in Support of House Bill 2508 (HB2508)  
RELATING TO AIR MEDICAL SERVICES**

REPRESENTATIVE GREGG TAKAYAMA, CHAIR  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

February 10, 2026

Honorable Chair Takayama, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB2508.

I am writing in strong support of HB2508. Air medical transport is essential to Hawaii's emergency response system, and nowhere is this more evident than on Kaua'i, where limited specialty services and long transport distances make timely aeromedical access a critical determinant of survival for trauma, cardiac, and stroke patients. For rural communities like those on Kaua'i, coordinated and reliable air medical services are not optional—they are the only pathway to definitive care.

The SCR86 Air Medical Working Group identified the need for dedicated staffing and statewide oversight within the Department of Health. HB2508 provides statutory authority, governance structure, and sustainable funding needed to implement these recommendations and modernize Hawaii's air medical system.

The bill's phased funding approach—initially using Rural Healthcare Transformation Funds and transitioning to licensure and accreditation fee revenue—creates a stable, long-term mechanism without supplanting existing budget priorities.

HB2508 strengthens statewide coordination, improves quality and performance monitoring, enhances disaster readiness, and advances health equity for rural and neighbor island communities such as Kaua'i. For these reasons, I respectfully urge passage of this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Eric Vaughan, MD  
Kauai County, EMS Medical Director  
State of Hawaii, Department of Health

# KAUA'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

ELTON USHIO, ADMINISTRATOR



DEREK S.K. KAWAKAMI, MAYOR  
REIKO MATSUYAMA, MANAGING DIRECTOR

Testimony of  
**Solomon Kanoho**

Special Executive Officer - KEMA, County of Kauai

Before the  
**House Committee on Health**  
February 11, 2026; 08:00 AM  
Conference Room #329 and Videoconference

In consideration of  
**HB 2508**  
Relating to Emergency Air Medical Services

Honorable Chair Takayama, Vice Chair Keohokapu-Lee Loy, and Members of the Committee:

As the Special Executive Officer of the Kaua'i Emergency Management Agency (KEMA), I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in **support** of HB2508, which seeks to establish a much-needed statewide air medical services program. Having participated as a member of the SCR86 Aeromedical Working Group, we have seen first-hand the systemic gaps that exist in our current model. In Hawai'i's unique multi-island environment, air medical transport is not a luxury; it is a life-saving necessity and a cornerstone of health equity for our neighbor island and rural residents.

We support this measure because it moves Hawai'i away from a fragmented collection of individual providers and toward a unified, core emergency medical system. Currently, the lack of centralized governance leads to coordination delays and inefficiencies that directly impact patient outcomes.

This legislation addresses these gaps by:

- **Centralizing Leadership:** Establishing dedicated staffing within the Department of Health to oversee statewide operations.
- **Standardizing Care:** Providing clinical governance and data-driven quality improvement based on best national practices.
- **Enhancing Readiness:** Strengthening multi-island disaster preparedness and emergency response capabilities.
- **Sustainable Funding:** Creating a dedicated funding stream through licensure and accreditation fees to ensure the program's long-term viability.

Importantly, this bill does not replace existing providers. Instead, it creates the framework necessary for air medical operators, EMS agencies, and hospitals to function as a single, efficient system. For these reasons I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this measure.

Sincerely,

Solomon K. Kanoho  
Special Executive Officer



## Hawaii Medical Association

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

Representative Gregg Takayama, Chair  
Representative Sue Keohokapu-Lee Loy, Vice Chair

Date: February 11, 2026

From: Hawaii Medical Association (HMA)

Elizabeth Ann Ignacio MD - Chair, HMA Public Policy Committee

Christina Marzo MD and Robert Carlisle MD, Vice Chairs, HMA Public Policy Committee

**RE HB 2508** RELATING TO AIR MEDICAL SERVICES. DOH; State Emergency Medical Services System; Statewide Air Medical Services Program; Emergency Medical Services Special Fund

### **Position: Support**

This measure would establish the Statewide Air Medical Services Program within the Department of Health, Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention Systems Branch to coordinate and strengthen air medical services, provide for an air medical director, an air medical program manager, and an air medical coordinator, provides for annual licensure and accreditation fees to be deposited into the Emergency Medical Services Special Fund for costs of the program.

HMA supports this measure which can strengthen statewide coordination of aeromedical services, improve timely access to definitive care, support safer interfacility transfers, and reduce avoidable delays when minutes matter. Reliable air medical transport is a lifeline for patients across our islands - especially for emergencies and for neighbor-island residents who must reach specialty and tertiary care on O'ahu. In addition, a coordinated statewide approach helps ensure consistent clinical standards, clear oversight, and reliable readiness for disasters and major incidents.

HMA appreciates these efforts that prioritize patient safety, workforce readiness, and transparent performance monitoring for an essential component of Hawaii's emergency care continuum.

Thank you for allowing the Hawaii Medical Association to testify in support of this measure.

### **2026 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team**

Elizabeth A Ignacio, MD, Chair • Robert Carlisle, MD, Vice Chair • Christina Marzo, MD, Vice Chair  
Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

### **2026 Hawaii Medical Association Officers**

Nadine Tenn-Salle, MD, President • Jerald Garcia, MD, President Elect • Elizabeth Ann Ignacio, MD, • Immediate Past President  
Laeton Pang, MD, Treasurer • Thomas Kosasa, MD, Secretary • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

## REFERENCES AND QUICK LINKS

Brittany Lyte. "Game Changer? Free Medical Flights Start For Some Neighbor Island Residents." *Honolulu Civil Beat*, 20 Jan. 2026.

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Hawaii Department of Health. [DOH issues notice of award for emergency aeromedical ambulance transport service for Maui county.](#)

Hawaii Air Ambulance and Medical Escort Costs. <https://airambulance.com/locations-served/hawaii-air-ambulance/> Accessed Feb 1 2026.

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Hawaii residents complain of high prices for medevac flights. <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/29981390/hawaii-residents-complain-of-high-prices-for-medevac-flights/> Accessed Feb 1 2026

### **2024 Hawaii Medical Association Officers**

Elizabeth Ann Ignacio, MD, President • Nadine Tenn-Salle, MD, President Elect • Angela Pratt, MD, Immediate Past President  
Jerris Hedges, MD, Treasurer • Thomas Kosasa, MD, Secretary • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

### **2024 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team**

Beth England, MD, Chair  
Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director



ALOHA CARE

To: The Honorable Gregg Takayama, Chair  
The Honorable Sue Keohokapu-Loy, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Health

From: Paula Arcena, External Affairs Vice President  
Mike Nguyen, Director of Public Policy  
Maria Rallojey, Public Policy Specialist

Hearing: Wednesday, February 11, 2026, 9:00am, Conference Room 329

RE: **HB2508 Relating to Air Medical Services**

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AlohaCare appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support of the intent of HB2508**. This measure would (1) establish the Statewide Air Medical Services Program within the Department of Health, Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention Systems Branch to coordinate and strengthen air medical services; (2) provide for an air medical director, an air medical program manager, and an air medical coordinator; and (3) provide for annual licensure and accreditation fees to be deposited into the Emergency Medical Services Special Fund for costs of the program.

AlohaCare is a community-rooted, non-profit health plan founded by Hawai'i's Community Health Centers and the Queen Emma Clinics. We serve over 66,000 Medicaid and Medicaid-Medicare dual-eligible residents on all islands. Since 1994, AlohaCare has partnered with providers, government entities, and community-based organizations to meet the evolving needs of our safety net community as Hawai'i's only health plan focused solely on Medicaid-eligible individuals. Our mission is to serve individuals and communities in the true spirit of aloha by ensuring and advocating for equitable access to quality, whole-person care for all.

AlohaCare is committed to whole-person care by improving access to care for our members. Hawai'i residents in rural and remote communities have long been accustomed to travelling to urban areas to access specialized care and routine treatment. Residents of Moloka'i and Lāna'i rely on air travel to access emergency and, oftentimes, routine medical care. Timely access to care can hinge on whether air medical transport is coordinated efficiently across counties and facilities. AlohaCare already provides medically necessary transportation for eligible members to access covered services, including when members must travel to receive appropriate levels of care. Timely coordination is important so that our members can actually access the care they need.



For these reasons, AlohaCare supports efforts that reduce avoidable delays and improve the reliability of emergency and interfacility transport because those improvements translate directly into better health outcomes and more equitable access to care. We defer to the Department of Health and the administration on the most appropriate and sustainable funding approach to operationalize this program.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify in **support of the intent** of **HB2508**.

**HB-2508**

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 3:03:54 PM

Testimony for HLT on 2/11/2026 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

STRONG SUPPORT!!!