

OFFICE OF INFORMATION PRACTICES

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To: House Committee on Judiciary

From: Carlotta Amerino, Director

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

Re: Testimony on H.B. No. 2554, H.D. 1
Relating to Search and Rescue

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this bill, which would create an Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor. The Office of Information Practices (OIP) takes no position on the substance of this bill, but is testifying to recommend an amendment to a provision regarding fees for public disclosure of the new office's annual report.

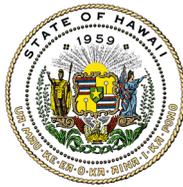
On page 12 starting at line 14, bill subsection 2(e) requires the new office's annual reports to be made public upon request "subject to a fee not to exceed the cost of printing and distribution." Chapter 92F, HRS, the Uniform Information Practices Act (UIPA), requires OIP to adopt rules setting the applicable fees for disclosure of records in response to a public record request, and OIP's rules setting the fees chargeable for search, review, and segregation of records are in chapter 2--71, Hawaii Administrative Rules. OIP's rules also allow for charging legally authorized costs, such as for copy fees as authorized by section 92-21, HRS. Thus, there is no need to have the new office set its own fees for providing copies of its annual report, and doing so is inconsistent with the UIPA's scheme.

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OIP therefore respectfully recommends that this Committee remove the phrase “subject to a fee not to exceed the cost of printing and distribution,” since the new office would already be authorized to charge for making copies under section 92-21, HRS, and OIP’s fee rules under the UIPA.

Thank you for considering OIP’s testimony.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



STEPHEN F. LOGAN
MAJOR GENERAL
ADJUTANT GENERAL
KA 'AKUKANA KENELALA

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR OF
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
KAHU HO'OMALU PŌULIA

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
KA 'OIHANA PILI KAUA
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
4204 DIAMOND HEAD ROAD
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96816-4420

STATE OF HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2554 HD1,
RELATING TO SEARCH AND RESCUE

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
JUDICIARY AND HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

February 19, 2026

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice-Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA) respectfully submits **COMMENT** testimony for House Bill 2554 HD1.

HIEMA supports the intent of HB 2554 HD1, which seeks to improve coordination and accountability for search and rescue operations statewide. We agree that Hawai'i's unique geography, high visitor volume, and fragmented response structure create significant challenges that warrant a more unified approach.

While HIEMA supports the goal of improved interagency collaboration, we strongly recommend several modifications related to the proposed Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator, some of which are:

- We question the necessity of requiring an annual report and suggest reevaluating this requirement to streamline efforts and focus on practical outcomes
- It is important to clarify that the coordinator should operate not with authority, but in collaboration with existing governmental partners and other agencies; maximizing efficiency among all stakeholders involved

- The bill currently lacks a specified funding source. This omission raises concerns about the sustainability and effectiveness of the coordinator's role

HIEMA does not oppose positioning this function within our agency; in fact, we believe that the coordinator should operate with the necessary oversight and proximity to agencies engaged in search and rescue missions, such as county fire departments, law enforcement, and specialized units, and we remain committed to enhancing interagency coordination, planning, and resource sharing, as outlined in the bill.

HIEMA supports all efforts that help build resilience within our state and looks forward to collaborating with all partners to ensure that our statewide search and rescue efforts achieve the highest levels of readiness and effectiveness. We support this measure provided it does not adversely impact the priorities of the Governor's executive budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment testimony on House Bill 2554 HD1.

James Barros: james.barros@hawaii.gov; 808-733-4300



KAUAI SEARCH & RESCUE
PO Box. Box 212 Hanamaulu, 96715
www.kauaisar.com

2/17/2026

To whom it may concern,

Kaua'i Search and Rescue (KSAR) respectfully submits this testimony in strong support of H.B. 2554 HD1.

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. 2554 HD1 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. 2554 HD1 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. 2554 HD1.

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

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS
Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair
Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair



Thursday, February 19th, 2026
RE: : HB 2554 HB1
SUPPORT with comments

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

Mahalo for placing this critical measure on your agenda and providing an opportunity to submit comments and testimony.

Hawai'i SAR Alliance is a collaborative effort of multiple agencies, teams, and organizations that conduct Search and Rescue (SAR) operations across the State of Hawai'i. It consists of local experts representing all relevant state agencies and national subject matter experts to determine best practices and support SAR system development.

On behalf of the Hawaii SAR Alliance, we stand in full support of this measure with comments. Upon consulting with the National Association of Search and Rescue this position is to be hired not appointed and as such we respectfully requests clarification and amendment to:

Page 15 Line 8-15 DELETE and REPLACE with:

a civil service position selected by the Governor in accordance with chapters 76 and 89, Hawaii Revised Statutes, and shall not be subject to the advice and consent of the senate.

Page 15 Line 15 -19 DELETE and REPLACE with:

If a vacancy occurs, the position will be filled by the Governor in accordance to chapters 76 and 89, Hawaii Revised Statutes, and shall not be subject to the advice and consent of the senate.

Page 16 Line 4: CHANGE

“may” to “shall”

Page 16 Line 5: INSERT:

a deputy, island coordinators and other assistants



As it stands, there are existing structural and administrative gaps within Hawai'i's fragmented SAR system, which **spans over a dozen different agencies and jurisdictions**. Each year, legislation related to SAR is introduced, with significant energy and resources invested in both the development of and opposition to these measures. One of the reasons for the repetitive opposition is the **lack of a foundational framework to support effective administrative implementation and enforcement** of proposed bills, including SB2937.

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—that 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.

I am available for any questions.

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

HB-2554-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 5:09:13 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dana McLaughlin	Civil Air Patrol Hawaii Wing	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Mahalo for this opportunity to add to the conversation. The purpose of placing the SAR coordinator within the Office of the Governor is to provide independent coordination across and between agencies, and to provide actionable information and reports on incidents across the state.

The latest round of changes are insightful and well informed and we request only a couple more for your consideration.

Due to the unique nature of each incident, the SAR Coordinator should not be preparing a plan for searches and rescues. Similarly this role is not well suited for coordinating or conducting training- rather focus on understanding what training and specialty techniques are already available in different departments. For example if a specialty bomb detection dog is needed it could be arranged and authorized to fly to the scene.

In addition, as a non-emergency response department, the intent should be on authorizing inter-agency use of search and rescue vehicles and equipment - not controlling or operating such equipment for a requesting agency. The term emergency services agency should be avoided to differentiate these responsibilities from HIEMA.

Thank you for this consideration,

Col. Dana McLaughlin

Hawai'i Wing Commander

Civil Air Patrol, U.S. Air Force Auxiliary

HB-2554-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2026 3:43:32 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Klayton Kubo	Individual	Comments	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Comments

Klayton Kubo

Waimea, Kaua'i

HB-2554-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/19/2026 9:22:01 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacy Haruguchi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Having participated in search and rescue activities as a volunteer and with the military for over 10 years and with Hawaii and Nevada, I advocate for the temporary creation of the state SAR coordinator position until such time that processes and procedures can be matured for placement into the appropriate department/agency within the state.