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To: House Committee on Public Safety

From: Carlotta Amerino, Director

Date: February 6, 2026, 10:15 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 411

Re: Testimony on H.B. No. 2554
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 13 starting at line 5, proposed section __-6, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), 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.

HB-2554

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 10:38:42 AM

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 alliance formed over the past five years and 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. Since that time we have met with stakeholding agencies to continue this process.

We stand in strong support of with HB2554 as written with exception of the following section which should follow the consistent with nationally recognized Search and Rescue governance best practices, as identified by the National Association for Search and Rescue.:

We recommend replacing the current appointment language

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17 § -9 State search and rescue coordinator; terms of

18 employment. (a) The state search and rescue coordinator shall

19 be appointed by the governor from a list of three names

20 submitted by the department of law enforcement and the Hawaii

21 emergency management agency, with outreach for nominations to

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1 volunteer organizations on the islands of Hawaii, Kauai, Maui,
2 and Oahu. The state search and rescue coordinator shall serve
3 for a term of five years. The appointment of the state search
4 and rescue coordinator shall be made without regard to
5 chapters 76 and 89, and shall not be subject to the advice and
6 consent of the senate. If a vacancy occurs, the department of
7 law enforcement and the Hawaii emergency management agency shall
8 meet expeditiously to submit a list of three names to the
9 governor for the appointment of a new state search and rescue
10 coordinator to serve the remainder of the unexpired term.

With the following framework:

Office of the state search and rescue coordinator; established. (a) There is established the office of the state search and rescue coordinator, within the office of the governor for administrative purposes. The office shall be headed by a state search and rescue coordinator, who shall be hired by and report directly to the governor. The coordinator may hire staff, as necessary, without regard to chapter 76. (b) The office shall oversee all statewide search and rescue operations, including coordination among participating agencies.

February 6th, 2026

RECEIVED
Date & Time
Feb 06, 2026, 9:40 am

LATE



RE: HB2554

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 requests clarification and amendment to Page 6, Line 21-Page 7 Line 2 to be: *Specifically, this Act establishes within the office of the governor, **on a temporary basis and for special purposes**, the office of Search and Rescue Coordinator.*

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-2554

Submitted on: 2/5/2026 5:58:56 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacy Haruguchi	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

I support the creation of a State SAR Coordinator, even if only temporary, in order for the State of Hawaii to determine the level of support required to effectively coordinate volunteer, county, state and federal SAR responses to minimize the loss of life.

My experience includes both military and civilian SAR as well as experience within both the State of Hawaii and Nevada.

My observations within Hawaii are as follows:

- Although all counties have an MOU with the US Coast Guard, whereby the county may request USCG support if they cannot effect rescue in a maritime or inland SAR event, to my knowledge no such MOU, policy or organization exists whereby the county may request the support of volunteer, other county, state or federal SAR capability.
- Although the DLNR was appointed to draft the state SAR plan, my third hand knowledge is that they do not have the personnel, facilities, funding or training to provide a 24/7 dispatch center to receive county requests for SAR assistance or the authority to request support from volunteer, other county, state or federal SAR assets. For counties to go directly to a federal organization without exhausting volunteers, other counties or state support violates the principles of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).
- During the helicopter SAR incident on the north shore of Kauai in July 2024, Kauai county requested the support of the USCG. A Hawaii Army National Guard helicopter also supported the incident, but that approval had to be given by acting Governor Sylvia Luke. I do not know if it was as direct request from Kauai county to the Governor's office or whether DLNR, HIEMA or the Hawaii National Guard Joint Operations Center acted as intermediaries.

Overall, a State SAR Coordinator would be of great benefit to more efficiently coordinate SAR operations while simultaneously reducing costs.