



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Culture & Arts
Wednesday, March 25, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

By

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and

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and

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HCR 106/HR 98 – ENDORSING WAIKIKI AS A WORLD SURFING RESERVE.

Chair Kapela, Vice Chair Kong, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) and the Climate Resilience Collaborative (CRC) strongly support the intent of House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 106 and House Resolution (HR) 98, which recognize Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve.

Waikīkī is not only an iconic cultural and recreational landscape, but also a cornerstone of Hawai'i's visitor economy. Its world-renowned surf breaks, beaches, and coastal ecosystems are intrinsically linked to the economic vitality of the region. The health of these natural resources directly underpins the livelihoods of local businesses, supports employment, and sustains the broader economic resilience of the State. As such, there is a clear and compelling social, cultural and economic rationale for protecting and stewarding the environmental systems that make Waikīkī both unique and globally significant.

Designation as a World Surfing Reserve would formally acknowledge Waikīkī's exceptional environmental, cultural, and recreational value while elevating public awareness of the growing threats facing its coastal resources. These include coastal erosion, sea level rise, increased storm impacts, and ongoing pressures from urban development and heavy use. Recognizing Waikīkī through this designation provides an important platform to highlight these challenges and to promote proactive, science-informed management strategies. Our understanding is that designation as a Reserve does not necessarily trigger new environmental or commercial regulations but instead requires the formation of a stewardship committee and subsequent community-based management plan.

Equally important, this recognition would help strengthen and formalize community-based stewardship. It offers a mechanism to enhance collaboration among local stakeholders, practitioners, cultural leaders, and resource managers, fostering a shared commitment to protecting Waikīkī's natural and cultural heritage. By aligning conservation efforts with community values and local knowledge, this initiative can support more effective, inclusive, and adaptive management approaches.

In summary, HCR 106 and HR 98 represent a meaningful step toward safeguarding the environmental integrity, cultural significance, and economic sustainability of Waikīkī for future generations. Hawai'i Sea Grant and the CRC respectfully urge your support for these resolutions.

Hawai'i Sea Grant's mission is to provide integrated research, extension, and education activities that increase understanding and use of ocean and coastal resources of the Hawaiian and Pacific Islands and support the informed personal, policy, and management decisions that are integral to realizing this vision. Hawai'i Sea Grant is part of a national network of 34 university-based programs associated with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that promote better understanding, conservation, and use of coastal resources.

CRC is a multi-investigator research project at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa focused on sea level rise adaptation and climate resilience. CRC is updating coastal models that project the impacts of sea level rise.



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Wednesday, March 25, 2026 10:00am

By
Rick Egged, President
Waikiki Beach Special Improvement District Association

HCR106/HR98 – ENDORSING WAIKIKI AS A WORLD SURFING RESERVE.

Chair Kapela, Vice Chair Kong and Members of the Committee:

The Waikiki Beach Special Improvement District Association (WBSIDA) supports House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 106 and House Resolution (HR) 98, which recognize Waikiki as a World Surfing Reserve.

Waikiki's world-renowned surf breaks and coastal ecosystems are foundational to both its cultural significance and economic vitality, demonstrating the clear connection between environmental health and long-term economic resilience. Protecting these natural resources is essential to sustaining the livelihoods, visitor industry, and community identity that depend on them. Designation as a World Surfing Reserve would formally acknowledge Waikiki's exceptional environmental, cultural, and recreational value while elevating public awareness of the growing threats facing its coastal resources.

This designation would elevate awareness of the increasing threats to Waikiki's coastal environment, while providing a framework to strengthen community-based stewardship. Designation as a World Surfing Reserve does not automatically trigger new environmental or commercial regulations but instead facilitates the formation of a stewardship committee and subsequent community-based management plan. Recognizing Waikiki as a World Surfing Reserve can help align stakeholders, support informed management, and advance a shared vision for protecting these vital natural and cultural resources for future generations.

Equally important, this recognition would help strengthen and formalize community-based stewardship. It offers a mechanism to enhance collaboration among local stakeholders, practitioners, cultural leaders, and resource managers, fostering a shared commitment to protecting Waikiki's natural and cultural heritage. By aligning conservation efforts with community values and local knowledge, this initiative can support more effective, inclusive, and adaptive management approaches. The WBSIDA supports the intent of HCR106 and HR98 and looks forward to continued discussion on the details.

**Testimony Presented in Support
Of Hawai'i House Concurrent Resolution 106**

**By
Denise Eby Konan
Private Individual**

HCR 106 – RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF WAIKĪKĪ AS A WORLD SURFING RESERVE

Testifying as a private individual, I am in strong support of HCR 106, a resolution endorsing Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve.

Surfing in Hawai'i is not merely recreation or sport. It is part of a deep Native Hawaiian history of wave knowledge, place-based practice, craftsmanship, teaching and environmental relationship. Because Waikīkī has developed a central and undeniable place in the global history of surfing, this resolution offers a timely policy context.

While I am testifying as a private individual, I am very proud of the College of Social Sciences (CSS) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where I am Dean of CSS. At the College, I oversee the Social Science Research Institute (SSRI). SSRI has formed a research- and advisory-based Surf Culture and Heritage Hui (Surf Hui), which supports surfing heritage initiatives in Hawai'i. These initiatives include legislative, cultural and historical impacts, and policy work connected to surfing as a Native Hawaiian cultural practice.

This Surf Hui will provide a formal platform to organize research, community engagement and strategic advising around surfing as culture and heritage. As this resolution formerly endorses recognition of Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve, the Surf Hui could complement the effort by advancing the historical, cultural, social and policy research aspects needed to support national and international recognition of surfing in Hawai'i.

Work has already begun on producing a small set of visible, useful products that establish credibility and support future funding or legislative collaboration. These objectives include:

Phase 1: Developing the organization and framework. Building membership, refining the scope and preparing a foundational background brief on the history and culture of surfing in Hawai'i.

Phase 2: Researching and consultation. Convening practitioner and community conversations, reviewing archival and scholarly sources, and identifying major themes, risks and heritage documentation priorities.

Phase 3: Obtaining public products and policy support. Delivering a white paper or issue a brief, policy memo for state leadership, and roadmap for future heritage-oriented research, documentation and advisory work.

Potential deliverables include a surfing heritage background report, a bibliography and archive map, one or more community-engagement roundtables, testimony or policy support materials as requested, and a strategic short memo outlining future opportunities for cultural heritage, research and public engagement.

Housing the Surf Hui in CSS would be a natural fit. The College could provide an interdisciplinary home for the historical, cultural, policy and community dimensions of surfing, while serving as a bridge to other UH units. CSS brings institutional credibility, research infrastructure and public-facing policy orientation for a group that is both scholarly and applied.

In practice, CSS would provide administrative coordination, meeting support, communications assistance and a platform for collaborative grant development. The College would help ensure that the Surfing Hui's work products are useful beyond the university to legislators, cultural organizations, schools, local communities and the broader public. By convening the proposed team and engaging additional community voices as needed, the Surfing Hui can become a credible institutional home for research and advisory work related to surfing as one of Hawai'i's most visible and culturally significant practices.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support as a private individual.

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