



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts
Friday, April 17, 2026 at 1:15 pm

By

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and

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and

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HCR 106 – ENDORSING WAIKIKI AS A WORLD SURFING RESERVE

Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee:

The College of Social Sciences (CSS) and Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) strongly support the intent of HCR 106, which recognizes 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.

CSS 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 give CSS 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. To build membership, refine the scope and prepare a foundational background brief on the history and culture of surfing in Hawai'i.

Phase 2: Researching and consultation. To convene practitioner and community conversations, review archival and scholarly sources, and identify major themes, risks and heritage documentation priorities.

Phase 3: Obtaining public products and policy support. To deliver 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.

Hawai'i Sea Grant is a formidable partner in this endeavor. Its mission is to provide integrated research, extension and educational 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, conversation and use of coastal resources.

In summary, this resolution represents a meaningful step toward safeguarding the environmental integrity, cultural significance and economic sustainability of Waikīkī for future generations. CSS and Hawai'i Sea Grant respectfully ask for your support.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.



Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on
Water, Land, Culture and the Arts (WLA)

Friday, April 17, 2026; 1:15pm

By
Rick Egged, President
Waikiki Beach Special Improvement District Association

HCR106– ENDORSING WAIKIKI AS A WORLD SURFING RESERVE.

Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee:

The Waikiki Beach Special Improvement District Association (WBSIDA) supports House Concurrent Resolution (HCR) 106, which recognizes 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 looks forward to continued discussion on the details.

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April 15, 2026

The Honorable Chris Lee, Chair
The Honorable Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair
Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts
Hawaii State Senate
Re: HCR 106 Support
Via email submission

Dear Chair Lee and Vice Chair Inouye:

Mahalo to you both and members of the Water, Land, Culture and the Arts Committee for hearing this bill. I write to support House Resolution HCR 106 to endorse Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve.

A World Surfing Reserve designation helps to preserve wave breaks, surf zones and their surrounding environments. Besides preservation, this designation for Waikīkī will reinforce global recognition of Hawai'i as the home of surfing. Although this is commonly recognized in our Aloha State, competition from other destinations are attempting to lay claim the heritage of surfing. I thus believe that Hawai'i would benefit from being more pro-active in positioning surfing as an essential part of our culture, environment, and people. The World Surfing Reserve is one step in this direction.

I therefore kindly request the Hawai'i State Senate's Water, Land, Culture and Arts Committee endorse this designation through a favorable vote on HCR 106.

Mahalo nui loa for your kind consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Loui