



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**

KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI
A HO'OMĀKA'IKAI

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT DIVISION

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
DIRECTOR

DANE K. WICKER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

DENNIS T. LING
ADMINISTRATOR

No. 1 Capitol District Building, 250 South Hotel Street, 5th Floor, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2359, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96804
Web site: dbedt.Hawaii.gov

Telephone: (808) 586-2355
Fax: (808) 586-2377

Statement of
Dennis T. Ling
Administrator

Business Development and Support Division
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism
before the

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**

Friday, March 27, 2026
9:30 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 423

In consideration of
HCR36

**ESTABLISHING A SISTER-STATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE OF
HAWAII, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE PREFECTURE OF
OKAYAMA, JAPAN.**

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and members of the Committee, the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports **HCR36**, which seeks to establish a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

A formal Sister-State partnership will strengthen the long-standing Spirit of Aloha shared between Hawai'i and Okayama and create opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration, particularly in the area of educational exchanges for our youth. These experiences build cross-cultural understanding, expand global perspectives, and forge relationships that endure for generations.

Okayama, known as the "Land of Sunshine" for its mild and dry climate, is a leading agricultural region. Hawai'i's tropical environment and multicultural society support a vibrant tourism industry that is vital to our economy. Both regions share economic similarities, with agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism contributing

significantly to their respective industries. Hawai'i and Okayama also share a commitment to sustainable agriculture, clean energy innovation, and climate resilience—areas where collaborative learning and partnership can bring meaningful benefits.

The Okayama Kenjin Kai in Hawai'i has nurtured cultural ties between our communities for many years. Hawai'i and Okayama share coastal geographies, mild climates favorable to farming, and deep historical and cultural connections through Japanese immigration. Most recently, Okayama Prefecture has expressed interest in expanding educational engagement with Hawai'i, including student exchanges, joint activities, and cross-cultural learning initiatives.

For these reasons—and for the potential to strengthen cultural understanding, foster youth development, and support economic and educational opportunities—DBEDT is pleased to support the establishment of a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Hawaii Global Education Foundation (HGEF)

P.O. Box 15149, Honolulu, HI 96830 Office: (808) 754-7353

HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY

HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM 423

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2026

HCR 36: ESTABLISHING A SISTER-STATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE OF HAWAII, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE PREFECTURE OF OKAYAMA, JAPAN

Hawaii Global Education Foundation (HGEF) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on HCR 36, which would establish a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii, and the Prefecture of Okayama, Japan.

Hawaii's future depends on globally aware, culturally competent young people. A sister-state relationship with Okayama creates a structured, long-term pathway for exactly that kind of learning. Okayama is home to respected universities, innovative K-12 programs, and strong STEM, agriculture, and cultural education initiatives — all areas where Hawaii students stand to gain tremendously.

Hawaii has deep historical ties to Japan, and Japanese language programs remain among the most popular in our schools. A partnership with Okayama would:

- Reinforce Japanese language learning
- Support cultural programs, festivals, and school partnerships
- Provide authentic, real-world contexts for students studying Japanese

This is especially valuable as schools seek to expand global education opportunities without placing additional financial burdens on families. Formal sister-state relationships ensures that students from all backgrounds, not just those with financial means, can participate in international learning experiences.

On the other hand, HGEF is assisting Kaimuki High School's Principal and faculty members along with the Complex Area Superintendent for an advance tour to Okayama in October 2026, in hopes to organize a study tour to Japan, including school visits in Okayama for Kaimuki High School students in the near future.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to support the establishment of a sister-state relationship between Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture, with a strong emphasis on educational exchange as a core pillar of the partnership.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "LJ", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

LeRoy Jenkins
President

LJ:snt

**DRAFT TESTIMONY
HCR 36**

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and members of the Committee, my name is Roberta Yorita and I am currently serving as president of Hawaii's Okayama Kenjin Kai. The Hawaii Okayama Kenjin Kai supports HCR 36, which seeks to establish a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture. A formal Sister-State partnership will strengthen the long-standing Spirit of Aloha shared between Hawai'i and Okayama and create opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration. As a sister state, the student exchange program may also be available. Here, students from Japan live and attend school with their host family. I am currently employed as a substitute teacher (retired teacher) in the DOE school setting, and have had the pleasure of having exchange students from Japan as students this semester. I have witnessed the interaction amongst the "locals" and Japan students working in groups to solve the assignments given. Even though there are language and cultural differences, the task gets completed working as a team. These students are our future leaders of tomorrow. Even with barriers and language differences, they have the opportunity to collaborate and work together effectively. We need this to give our keiki's a chance to expand their learning and experiences to have a better tomorrow.

The Okayama Kenjin Kai in Hawai'i has nurtured cultural ties between our communities for many years. Okayama Prefecture has expressed interest in expanding engagements with Hawai'i, including educational, economic and cultural exchanges.

The Okayama Kenjin Kai is pleased to support the establishment of a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

To: Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and members of the Committee

From: Debora I Lum, Okayama Kenjin-kai Member

Date: Friday, March 27, 2026

Re: Testimony in **Strong Support** of HCR 36, relating to the establishment of a sister-state relationship with Okayama, Japan.

Members of the Committee, my name is Debora Lum. As a member of Hawaii's Okayama Kenjin-kai, I am writing to express my strong support for House Concurrent Resolution No. 36, relating to the establishment of a sister-state relationship with Okayama, Japan.

A partnership with Okayama would provide strong cultural and educational connections for the people of Hawaii. Many of us grew up with the story and song of Momotaro. It wasn't until visiting this prefecture that I learned the story originated in Okayama as well as its connection to the area's history. In addition to this, the prefecture's castle, known as the Crow Castle is an educational and engaging museum of Japanese history. It provides hands-on experiences like kimono dressing, weaponry, measuring up to a samurai, and so many other activities and exhibits. Unlike other castles and museums, it goes beyond the guided read and look displays of artifacts.

In conclusion, I urge the Committee to support House Concurrent Resolution No. 36, relating to the establishment of a sister-state relationship with Okayama, Japan. This partnership would encourage a cultural and educational exchange of possibilities for making literature and history come alive.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide this testimony and for your time kind consideration.