



TESTIMONY OF
Caroline Anderson
Interim President & CEO
Hawai'i Tourism Authority
before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TOURISM
Tuesday, March 31, 2026
10:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Room 423 and Videoconference

In consideration of
HCR 49

**URGING THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH TO ADVANCE EFFORTS TO EMERGE AS A
GLOBAL LEADER IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM THAT PRESERVES AND RESTORES
CULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES, ENHANCES RESIDENT QUALITY OF LIFE,
AND ENSURES HIGH-QUALITY VISITOR EXPERIENCES.**

Aloha Chair Tam, Vice Chair Templo, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) offers comments on HCR 49, which urges the Executive Branch to advance efforts to help Hawai'i emerge as a global leader in sustainable tourism that preserves cultural and natural resources, enhances resident quality of life, and ensures high-quality visitor experiences.

HTA supports the intent of HCR 49 to strengthen Hawai'i's leadership in sustainable tourism, which aligns with HTA's statutory mandate, which includes developing and implementing statewide tourism policy, coordinating destination management, and advancing regenerative tourism practices that consider economic, social, and environmental impacts (HRS §201B-3, §201B-6).

Sustainable and regenerative tourism have guided HTA's work for many years and are central to our statutory responsibilities under HRS §201B. In fact, HTA's 2020–2025 Strategic Plan—and the updated 2026–2030 Strategic Plan—were built expressly to address the economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts identified in this resolution. These plans, along with our island-based Destination Management Action Plans (DMAPs), continue to prioritize resource protection, safe visitor experiences, resident well-being, and community-driven decision-making.

HTA has been leading statewide sustainable tourism efforts. Our work reflects the United Nations' definition of sustainable tourism, which calls for "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities." Hawai'i is already recognized for sustainable and regenerative tourism leadership. In 2020, HTA launched the Mālama Hawai'i program—a globally recognized initiative inviting visitors to participate in volunteer stewardship across the islands—and

in 2025, the Hawaiian Islands became the first destination to receive Travel Weekly's Sustainable Leadership Award. Additionally, sustainable tourism achievements are supported by initiatives such as the DMAPs, mindful and respectful travel messaging, regenerative tourism programming, and HTA's Qurator Program, a tourism quality assurance certification program, and strong partnerships with environmental and cultural organizations statewide.

Regarding specific statements in the resolution, HTA respectfully provides clarification. While we agree that Hawai'i must continue strengthening sustainability practices, we respectfully disagree with its characterization of the State's present tourism industry. HTA's ongoing initiatives—developed with communities, Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners, and 'āina-based organizations—demonstrate significant progress in resource protection, cultural preservation, and regenerative visitor education. Similarly, while sustainable tourism does support long-term economic resilience, Hawai'i has already begun integrating these practices into its tourism economy rather than operating under a separate or outdated model.

HTA also respectfully notes that the language in HCR 49 does not accurately reflect the work underway. HTA's programs intentionally elevate Native Hawaiian stewardship, cultural education, and place-based practices across all islands

We respectfully provide the following language modifications and additions to more accurately define the areas of focus and necessary tools to achieve the most sustainable tourism model:

- HTA cautions against mandating and imposing additional restrictions on businesses and instead recommends incentives and affordable options to achieve the same. As such, we recommend changing the phrase "Mandate" to "Encourage." (page 2, line 31)
- For clarity, we recommend either defining the term "tourist-facing" (page 2, line 31) or referencing the business categories used by the U.S. Census Bureau.
- HTA has a certification program called Qurator, designed to guide visitors to Hawai'i products and experiences that promote responsible tourism practices. This program aims to add value and acknowledge businesses for their positive contributions to the environment, community, and economy. However, due to funding limitations, the certification process was paused in fiscal year 2026. If the necessary funding is secured, the program could be reinstated.
- We support the recommendation (page 2, lines 38-42) to obtain the Certified Sustainable Destination designation from the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, provided that the necessary funding and staffing are allocated to pursue and achieve it.
- We recommend changing the phrase "tourism industry is" to "industries are" (page 3, lines 7 and 8) to more accurately reflect the challenges.
- On page 3, line 20, we recommend inserting the word, "society" for "tourism" to more accurately reflect the scale of cooperation necessary to achieve the goals of this resolution.
- On page 3, line 24, we recommend inserting the term "illegal transient" in place of the term "tourist."

HTA remains committed to advancing sustainable tourism in partnership with residents, cultural practitioners, environmental organizations, government agencies, and visitor industry partners. We

March 31, 2026
Page 3

share the Legislature's vision for a tourism model that protects Hawai'i's cultural and natural resources, enhances resident well-being, and offers meaningful visitor experiences.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide comments.

HCR-49

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 11:47:02 AM

Testimony for TOU on 3/31/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cristina De Leon	Teran James Young Foundation	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Tam, Vice Chair Templo, and Members of the Committees:

I support HCR49, urging the executive branch to advance sustainable tourism to preserve and restore cultural and natural resources and enhance resident quality of life. My name is Jake Snyder, and I am a third-year Ph.D. candidate at the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology. I use computer models, informed by field data, to identify management options that can enhance coral reef resilience in areas affected by land-based pollution.

The tourism industry forces residents to compete with tourists for the same space, resources, and infrastructure, while simultaneously perpetuating colonial economic structures, disproportionately impacting Native Hawaiian residents. Tourism also contributes to the rapid urbanization of forested lands, decreasing the land's capacity to retain land-based pollutants. This causes increased sediment, nutrient, pathogen, and heavy metal inputs into nearshore environments, damaging coral reefs and threatening human health.

Evidently, Hawai'i's present-day tourism industry is neither culturally nor environmentally sustainable. Furthermore, it is not economically viable, since unsustainable tourism degrades the cultural and natural resources that drive the industry. For these reasons, I support HCR49, and urge the Committee to consider this as a precursor for a future legal mandate to ensure sustainable tourism practices.

HCR-49

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 9:33:05 AM

Testimony for TOU on 3/31/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keoni Shizuma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am testifying in support of HCR49.

Acknowledging that the tourism industry is currently unsustainable and that changes need to happen, as well as that the direction should be grounded in Hawaiian culture and environmental health is critical, and that expansion of tourism accommodations should not occur till sustainable practices are adopted and enforced is key!

I am especially in agreement with the following points:

(4) Acknowledge that the State's present-day tourism industry is not culturally, environmentally, and economically sustainable and must urgently adopt and effectively enforce sustainable practices;

(6) Acknowledge that sustainability in Hawaii must involve restoring and preserving Native Hawaii ancestral land, rights, and practices, and thus tourism must stop the ongoing exploitation of Native Hawaiian cultural and natural resources;

(7) Minimize the expansion of tourist accommodations until sustainable practices are adopted and effectively enforced to reduce stress on the State's residents, infrastructure, and environment; and

(8) Continue to actively co-develop policies and financial incentives with Hawaii residents, cultural stewards, and environmentalist organizations to ensure tourist-serving businesses honor the shared responsibility to preserve and restore cultural and natural resources;

Mahalo for your consideration,
Keoni Shizuma

HCR-49

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 10:35:42 AM

Testimony for TOU on 3/31/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacob Snyder	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Tam, Vice Chair Templo, and Members of the Committees:

I support HCR49, urging the executive branch to advance sustainable tourism to preserve and restore cultural and natural resources and enhance resident quality of life. My name is Jake Snyder, and I am a third-year Ph.D. candidate at the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology. I use computer models, informed by field data, to identify management options that can enhance coral reef resilience in areas affected by land-based pollution.

The tourism industry forces residents to compete with tourists for the same space, resources, and infrastructure, while simultaneously perpetuating colonial economic structures, disproportionately impacting Native Hawaiian residents. Tourism also contributes to the rapid urbanization of forested lands, decreasing the land's capacity to retain land-based pollutants. This causes increased sediment, nutrient, pathogen, and heavy metal inputs into nearshore environments, damaging coral reefs and threatening human health.

Evidently, Hawai'i's present-day tourism industry is neither culturally nor environmentally sustainable. Furthermore, it is not economically viable, since unsustainable tourism degrades the cultural and natural resources that drive the industry. For these reasons, I support HCR49, and urge the Committee to consider this as a precursor for a future legal mandate to ensure sustainable tourism practices.

HCR-49

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 7:37:43 PM

Testimony for TOU on 3/31/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Scott Young MD	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this as we need more sustainable and regenerative tourism in Hawaii to preserve the tourist industry And our quality of life. We are suffering from overtourism and the answer to the problem is to have quality over quantity tourism and to Opt for Sustainable Tourism certification the best of which is the Global Sustainable Tourism Council certification. Maui County has already passed a resolution indicating the value of quality over quantity tourism and in the Maui Island community plan There are 2 be no more than 33% tourists to resident ratio and we have also passed a resolution that the Global Sustainable Tourism Council certification should be used for Maui County- the county, the hotels, the travel industry and so on. Let's pass this as a good principle for the Hawaiian Tourism Association and for the state and the preservation and improvement of our tourist industry and our quality of life for ourselves- the residents as well. Mahalo

March 30, 2026

Re: Testimony for

HCR 188/HR178/

HCR51/HR47/

HCR50/HR 46

HCR 49

HCR 48

TO: COMMITTEE ON TOURISM

Rep. Adrian K. Tam, Chair – Rep Shirley Ann Templo, Vice Chair

Rep. Ikaika Hussey, Reb. Kyle T. Yamashita, Rep. Greggor Hagan, Rep Joe Gedeon

The listed Agenda for March 31st, 2026, at 10:00 am for the Committee on Tourism is a priority for the State of Hawai`i. Each of these bills is favorable for tourism and facilitates sustainable development. I personally agree that tourism is our breadbasket for our people, their families, and their businesses. The employment that tourism supports is equal to our most important economic assets.

Please pass in Committee today for each hearing on this agenda. Hawai`i Tourism Authority is a respected State of Hawaii frontrunner that has delivered expert development and sustainable progress. They have created marketing for Hawai`i as the eighth most desirable destination. in the world. It may be the eighth or tenth in the world, and it matters for all of us.

Mahalo for your consideration. The time for support of TOURISM IS NOW.

Aloha

Marie Agular

P.O. Box 1874, Kailua Kona, Hawai`i 96745

Tourism writer and community events enthusiast

