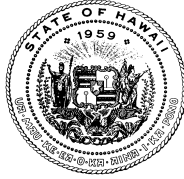


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'



KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
P. O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HCR155/HR147
SUPPORTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HAWAII'Ī WATER SAFETY
COALITION'S HAWAII'Ī WATER SAFETY PLAN.
REPRESENTATIVE MARK J. HASHEM, CHAIR**

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND

Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 10:00 AM | Room Number: 411

- 1 **Fiscal Implications:** None. Potential future costs depend on agency implementation decisions
- 2 and associated budgeting.
- 3 **Department Position:** The Department of Health supports and appreciates this resolution to
- 4 support the findings and recommendations of the Hawaii Water Safety Plan.
- 5 **Department Testimony:** The Emergency Medical Services & Injury Prevention System Branch
- 6 provides the following testimony on behalf of the Department.
- 7 Hawaii continues to face one of the highest drowning rates in the nation, affecting residents,
- 8 visitors, and especially our keiki. These tragedies are preventable, and they place long-term
- 9 emotional, physical, and economic strain on families and communities.
- 10 The Department actively supports the Hawaii Water Safety Coalition and the work they do to
- 11 bring together agencies, experts, and community partners to develop a comprehensive,
- 12 culturally grounded statewide plan that focuses on prevention, safety education, data
- 13 improvement, and coordinated action. The Coalition and plan offer practical, evidence based
- 14 steps to strengthen water safety across all islands, from expanding swim education for children

1 to improving aquatic environments, supporting lifeguard services, and enhancing statewide
2 coordination.

3 Adopting this resolution will help ensure that agencies and partners work together to carry out
4 these proven strategies and reduce preventable drownings across our state.

5 **Offered Amendments: None**

6 Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued commitment
7 to water safety.

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 7:34:36 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Allison Schaefer	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of HCR155 and HR147

My name is Allison Schaefer. I am a bereaved parent volunteer with the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition and the lead writer of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan. I strongly support HCR155 and HR147, which endorse the findings and recommendations of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan was developed by the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition, a statewide partnership of more than 200 members, including government agencies, first responders, lifeguards, watermen and waterwomen, medical professionals, researchers, nonprofits, and community and cultural leaders. I donated my professional writing and project management skills to synthesize their expertise and data into an inclusive, easy-to-read plan designed to inspire our communities to move toward a Hawai‘i where everyone is safe on, in, and around the water. The state Department of Health provided much of the core data, and coalition member Nā Kama Kai underwrote the cost of having DTL, a Hawaiian Strategy Studio, provide graphic design and cultural guidance. It was a massive endeavor, reflecting the scale and seriousness of the problem we are trying to solve.

We are now a program of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, but the co-founders of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition, Jessamy Town Hornor and Sarah Farichild, began this work under the fiscal sponsorship of the Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition, which remains one of our core partners.

The breadth of the coalition's partners underscores both the credibility of the work and the sustained concern about drowning across a variety of sectors in our island state.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan has been recognized nationally with a Safe Kids Champion for Children Award, presented at the Safe Kids Worldwide Annual Childhood Injury Prevention Convention. This award honors outstanding contributions to child injury prevention and underscores the plan’s credibility as a rigorous, evidence-based framework.

Torine Creppy, president of Safe Kids Worldwide, said in a statement, “It has been so gratifying to see what an enormous difference the coalition has been able to make. Efforts like this truly save lives—and we are honored to recognize this amazing team for its immeasurable contributions to the field of water safety.”

Hawai‘i is only the second state in the nation, after California, to release a statewide water safety plan in response to the U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan. While aligned with national evidence-informed actions, Hawai‘i’s plan is specifically tailored to the unique realities of our islands, counties, cultures, and communities—because drowning risk here is different, and the consequences are severe.

Despite our deep cultural and economic connection to the ocean, Hawai‘i is facing a worsening and unacceptable drowning crisis. In 2023, Hawai‘i’s drowning rate reached 3.34 deaths per 100,000—the **second highest in the nation**. Drowning remains the **leading cause of death for Hawai‘i’s children ages 1 to 15**, and the **leading cause of injury-related death among visitors**. These are not rare or random tragedies. They happen with disturbing regularity, year after year, and they are largely preventable. Yet without a coordinated, statewide strategy, lives continue to be lost.

The impact of drowning is measured not only in lives cut short, but in staggering economic cost borne by the entire state. Using CDC methodology that combines direct medical expenses with the statistical value of a life, the 40 drowning deaths in Hawai‘i in 2024 carried an estimated cost of **\$397.52 million**. Each drowning death represents an average loss of **\$9.94 million**, and drowning imposes a **per capita cost of approximately \$275 on every person in Hawai‘i**, whether their family has been directly affected. These figures still underestimate the true burden, as they do not fully capture the lifelong costs of nonfatal drownings, which can result in permanent brain injury, chronic health conditions, prolonged hospitalizations, and decades of ongoing care.

This crisis is also profoundly inequitable. **Children with autism are 160× more likely to die from drowning** than their neurotypical peers.

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities in Hawai‘i experience drowning at approximately **1.5 times the rate of the general population**, and NHPI children drown at **3 times the rate** of other children. Addressing drowning is therefore not only about public safety—it is a matter of health equity and justice.

Hawai‘i once provided swimming instruction in public schools, but that ended in the late 1980s. Today, fewer than **2% of Hawai‘i’s second graders** have the basic skills needed to keep themselves from drowning. This gap leaves children vulnerable during the years when drowning risk is highest. Expanding access to water safety education and swim instruction is a central recommendation of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

While most drowning deaths in Hawai‘i occur in the ocean, **children 5 years old and under are far more likely to drown in pools, ponds, and other inland waters**. In 2004, my five-year-old daughter, Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer, drowned in an improperly maintained and flooded detention pond. Her death was preventable. That loss is why this work is personal for me, and why I remain committed to making sure other families do not endure the same devastation.

Recent Kona-low storms further demonstrate why drowning prevention must be integrated into disaster preparedness and climate resilience planning. Flooding, extreme rainfall, and

storm events dramatically increase drowning risk. The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan explicitly addresses drowning hazards during floods, storms, and extreme weather—conditions that are becoming more frequent and severe.

Legislative endorsement of this plan is both warranted and urgent. Endorsement affirms that the Legislature recognizes drowning as a preventable public health crisis with profound human, economic, and equity implications. It establishes a shared, evidence-based roadmap; strengthens cross-agency coordination; supports future funding and grant opportunities; and ensures continuity beyond individual programs or administrations. Most importantly, it signals to communities across the state that water safety is a statewide priority and a shared responsibility.

By endorsing the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, you can help prevent needless drowning deaths and the devastation of nonfatal drowning injuries, reduce long-term costs, advance equity, and strengthen Hawai‘i’s resilience in a changing climate.

Mahalo for your leadership and for your commitment to protecting Hawai‘i’s children, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

Allison Schaefer

Bereaved Parent Volunteer, Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition

Lead Writer, Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 1:02:52 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sarah Fairchild	Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation submits this testimony in strong support of the resolutions before your committee calling for the adoption of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

As an organization rooted in the legacy of Duke Kahanamoku — a celebrated waterman, Olympic champion, and lifelong ambassador of aloha — water safety is not simply a policy priority for us. It is central to our mission and to the values Duke embodied throughout his life.

The data before us is sobering. Hawai‘i has the second-highest drowning rate in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 in our state, and the number one cause of injury-related death among visitors to our islands.

This crisis strikes at the heart of communities whose identities are inseparably linked to the ocean. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) drown at approximately 1.5 times the rate of the general population, and NHPI children drown at three times that rate. Duke Kahanamoku shared the gift of the ocean with the world without exception; we have a responsibility to ensure that gift is accessible and safe for all, particularly for the communities most deeply connected to these waters.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan provides a drowning prevention framework developed from community-based participatory research to prevent drownings and save lives.

The Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation respectfully urges this committee to adopt the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan. In doing so, you will honor the spirit of Duke Kahanamoku and help ensure that Hawai‘i’s waters remain a source of life, culture, and joy — not tragedy.



March 29, 2026

The Honorable Representative Hashem
House Committee on Water and Land

The Honorable Representative Au Belatti
House Committee on Public Safety
Hawai'i State Legislature

RE: Support for HCR155 / HR147 – Hawai'i Water Safety Plan

Aloha Chair Hashem and Chair Au Belatti and Members of the Committees,

I write as Coordinator of the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition (HWSC) in strong support of HCR155 / HR147 and the continued advancement of the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition was established to bring together diverse partners across sectors—including ocean safety, public safety, healthcare, government, education, the visitor industry, private industry, and community organizations—to address one of the State's most persistent and preventable public health challenges: drowning.

Hawai'i's risk profile is unique. High visitor volumes, dynamic ocean conditions, and widespread exposure to aquatic environments create a complex safety landscape that requires coordination across agencies and disciplines. No single entity can address this challenge alone.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan provides a framework for that coordination. It supports data-driven decision making, aligns prevention strategies, and strengthens communication and collaboration across jurisdictions and sectors. Importantly, it shifts the focus from reactive response to proactive prevention—reducing incidents before they occur.

From the coalition's perspective, this plan is not theoretical. It reflects ongoing work already being carried out by partners across the state and provides a structure to grow, strengthen and sustain those efforts over time. HCR155 affirms the importance of this coordinated approach and supports continued progress toward reducing drowning and improving water safety outcomes statewide.

For these reasons, the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition respectfully urges your support.

Mahalo for your leadership and your commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Hermstad
Coordinator, Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition
Executive Director, Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

March 25, 2026

The Honorable Representative Hashem
House Committee on Water and Land

The Honorable Representative Au Belatti
House Committee on Public Safety

Hawai'i State Legislature

RE: **Support for HCR155 – Hawai'i Water Safety Plan**



Aloha Chair Hashem and Chair Au Belatti and Members of the Committees,

As President of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, I write in strong support of HCR155 / HR147 and the continued advancement of the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan.

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Honorary Legends

Ralph Goto
Brian Keaulana
Archie Kalepa
Mark Cunningham

For those of us working on the front lines of ocean and public safety, the need for a coordinated, statewide approach to water safety is clear. Hawai'i faces unique and persistent risks, shaped by our ocean environment, high levels of public access, and the significant number of residents and visitors who enter the water each day.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan represents an important step forward. It brings together agencies, organizations, and community partners around a shared framework focused on prevention, coordination, and long-term impact. This kind of alignment is essential to reducing drowning and improving safety outcomes across our islands.

Lifeguards see firsthand the consequences of gaps in awareness, coordination, and access to information. We also see the difference that proactive education, consistent messaging, and collaborative efforts can make. A statewide plan helps ensure that these efforts are not isolated but instead reinforced and expanded through partnership.

This resolution supports a more unified and strategic approach—one that reflects both the complexity of the challenge and the collective responsibility to address it.

On behalf of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, I respectfully urge your support for HCR155.

Hawaiian Lifeguard Association
P.O. Box 844
Kapa'a, Hawaii 96746
Tax Id 99-0308213

Mahalo for your leadership and your commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,

Kalani Vierra

Kalani Vierra
President
Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 4:18:35 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessamy Town Hornor	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. I am writing in strong support of HCR 155 SUPPORTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HAWAI‘I WATER SAFETY COALITION'S HAWAI‘I WATER SAFETY PLAN. I submit this testimony as an individual, noting my experience as Co-Founder of the Hawaii Water Safety Coalition and a member of the executive team, and as an Executive Editor of the Hawaii Water Safety Plan. Last year I also worked at DOH's EMS & Injury Prevention Systems Branch in a temporary capacity to restart the 'Public Health Educator in Drowning and Aquatic Injury Prevention' position which had been vacant since Covid.

First and foremost I am testifying as a bereaved family member, and I will share my family's story as an example of the need for a policy-led, cohesive, inter-agency solution to drowning prevention. In 2016 I lost my husband Mark and my youngest daughter Mina, age 6, to a sudden storm surge at the Makapu'u Tidepools which originated from Hurricane Celia, a hurricane that was far offshore and not visible from the Lighthouse trail or from the tidepools themselves. The tidepools are accessed via an unofficial trail from the main Lighthouse access road but the destination is very popular. That day when the tide shifted the little tidal shelf on the edge of the Ka Iwi Channel became a death trap. My husband and three daughters were in the inner tidepools closer to the cliff, but the first wave that arrived was so massive that Mina was washed out to sea immediately, and Mark jumped in after her before the next wave hit. Neither survived the extreme conditions and long response time from Sandy Beach. A good samaritan was able to pull my two other daughters to safety from the tidepools as they had been pushed towards the cliffs by the wave.

How is this tragic story relevant to a policy level Resolution? I believe that the accident was the result of a lack of inter-agency coordination in an acute weather event when the risks of the tidepool area were well known to state and county officials, including DLNR which manages the site. Given the offshore hurricane, this was a grave oversight as the area had become more popular since the parking lot renovation and posts on social media, and Honolulu Ocean Safety lifeguards and the Fire Department had made many rescues and recoveries from that location over the years. Also, the DLNR's Task Force on Beach and Water Safety required by Act 190 had not met since 2012 to review signage and public communication of known risks. Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) for these weather conditions were not in place or activated that day, such as a text alert and a site closure via caution tape and DOT light up signs. That day

there could have been a mass casualty incident as a large group visiting for a wedding was there just prior to the tide turning, and they were able to assist my two other daughters in walking up the hill to meet firefighters arriving on the scene during the rescue efforts. Mark and Mina were found via jetski one after the other, and they were taken to Sandy Beach where resuscitation was attempted on the beach, in the ambulances, and at two different hospitals where they were finally declared.

The impact of this loss on my family has been profound, we struggle to make our way every day almost 10 years later. After the incident, I tried to understand the systems that could have prevented it. My takeaway was that the agencies were siloed and opportunities for an intervention had been missed.

My experience at DOH last year confirmed to me that inter-agency collaboration has to be initiated at the policy and leadership level to be effective. It is very difficult to do from within a single department and a lower level role within that department. To initiate inter-agency collaboration there needs to be a top-level mandate to reduce drowning in Hawaii, as well as a dedicated funding stream for injury prevention and drowning prevention. At this time DOH EMS & IPSB only has funding for the Public Health Educator position. Within the Branch EMS is the immediate priority and Injury Prevention has been long neglected, and an Injury Prevention Manager position at the Branch needs to be restarted to address an administrative backlog and to advocate for and implement a dedicated funding solution for the different injury prevention areas. The current state budget allocation from the Trauma Fund for drowning and aquatic injury prevention is just \$25,000-\$35,000 per year year, with occasional federal funds. The Drowning and Aquatic Injury Prevention Advisory Committee has been difficult to convene consistently as it is not required at the leadership level and has no budget. A one-time allocation was made for a water safety media campaign that is in the works, but consistent funding is needed to keep it going to make an impact over time.

The collective cost of drowning in Hawaii has not yet been documented but needs to be. According to the National Drowning Prevention Alliance, drowning in the United States costs over \$53 billion annually, accounting for both fatal and non-fatal incidents. A single pediatric drowning can exceed \$250,000 in immediate medical care, with total societal costs for a single death estimated at over \$4 million. According to the NIH, the average cost associated with a fatal drowning event (including direct/indirect costs) can range between \$370,000 and over \$600,000, with the engagement of lifeguard and emergency services, medical care, autopsy and investigations, reports etc.. The impact on a family's financial, mental, and physical health should also be calculated over the long term, just as we are starting to do for those who lost loved ones and were impacted by the Lahaina fire.

In the field of injury prevention, the term 'accident' is not used because unintentional injuries and deaths are understood to be preventable, and drowning is in fact preventable with the implementation of evidence-based interventions and appropriate funding. The fact is that our current drowning data in Hawaii is a policy level choice - and we can leave it as is or implement scalable, consistent solutions to reduce it. And solutions do work, we are seeing reduced ocean drowning data in some counties which are likely the result of an increase in lifeguard towers and hours. We are seeing that rescue tubes have reduced ocean drowning data on Kauai and other

locations. We know from other states and countries that making free water safety and swim lessons widely available reduces drowning data among children and gives them critical lifesaving skills over a lifetime. The CDC shared that mandatory residential pool fences reduce drownings among young children immediately, and lifejacket use on open water reduces drownings as well.

Drowning is a collective, chronic trauma in Hawaii, and yet it has been accepted as the norm, and its costs have been invisible for too long. I am here to share the very real impact of one preventable incident and to put faces behind the anonymous data points. This Resolution will facilitate high-level prioritization at the relevant departments, more inter-agency coordination, and encourage funding pathways to reduce Hawaii's drowning data. With the Coalition's support and active community networks, with the Plan in hand, and with guidance from national experts such as the US National Water Safety Action Plan committee, the National Drowning Prevention Alliance, and the CDC Foundation, we are well positioned to move forward.

I share this testimony in memory of Mark and Mina, and all those lost to drowning in Hawaii, who should still be here with us today.

Mahalo for you time,
Jessamy Town Hornor



March 30, 2026

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HCR155, HR147
RELATING TO THE ADOPTION OF THE HAWAI‘I WATER SAFETY PLAN**

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Branch Lotspeich, and I am the Executive Director of The Rescue Tube Foundation. I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support** of **HCR155, HR147**.

Hawai‘i faces a persistent and measurable drowning crisis. The state consistently ranks among the highest in the nation for drowning rates. Drowning is the **leading cause of death for children ages 1–15 in Hawai‘i** and the **leading cause of injury-related death among visitors**. These are not isolated incidents—they represent a systemic public safety challenge.

Environmental conditions further elevate risk. Hawai‘i’s dynamic ocean environment, combined with increasing visitor exposure and the growing impacts of climate-related events such as storms and flooding, make drowning prevention an essential component of disaster risk reduction.

The burden of drowning is not evenly shared. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders experience significantly higher drowning rates—approximately **1.5 times that of the general population**, and for children, as much as **three times higher**. This makes water safety a clear issue of **health equity** as well as public safety.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, developed by the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition, establishes a coordinated, data-driven framework focused on prevention, education, and interagency alignment.

Through our work at The Rescue Tube Foundation, we have seen firsthand how immediate access to rescue equipment and public readiness can change outcomes. Rescue Tubes are now widely deployed across Hawai‘i and have been used in hundreds of documented bystander rescues—often bridging the critical gap before lifeguards or first responders arrive. These real-world interventions demonstrate that **prevention, access, and rapid response systems save lives**.

Adoption of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan will unify these efforts, strengthen coordination, and provide a scalable Statewide strategy to reduce drownings statewide.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support and adopt this measure.

Mahalo for your leadership and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai‘i.

Respectfully submitted,

Branch Lotspeich
Executive Director
The Rescue Tube Foundation

Rescue Tubes Save Lives!

Rescue Tube Foundation, Inc.
4350 Kahili Makai St., Kilauea, HI 96754
501 (c)(3) Federal Tax Identification #27-4350046



Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HCR155 and HR147 Relating to Hawai'i Water Safety Plan:

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Water & Land Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. As a leading child safety organization working to protect all children from preventable injuries, we urge you support **adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan**, as proposed in the resolutions **HCR155 and HR147** before your committee.

Both nationally and in Hawai'i, drowning is the leading cause of death among young children, ages one through four.ⁱ In Hawai'i, the risk is even more pronounced, with drowning remaining the leading cause of death through age 15. Out of all 50 states, Hawai'i has the **second-highest drowning rate in the nation**. For every child that passes, seven more visit the ER.ⁱⁱ These frightening and tragic events for families across the islands highlight the urgent need for coordinated prevention efforts.

At Safe Kids Worldwide, we envision a world in which every child is protected from preventable injuries, where everyone is safe in, on, and around water. As it stands, **Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at approximately 1.5 times the rate of Hawai'i's general population, and NHPI children drown at three times the rate of the general population**. By making drowning prevention a priority and centering water safety education, we can reach underserved communities and reduce the threat to these communities.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan was developed by the **Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition**, a statewide partnership of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. In 2025, we awarded the **Safe Kids Champion for Children Award** to the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition for their work in developing this Water Safety Plan and its significant impact in the field of child injury prevention.

Adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan would provide a comprehensive, data-driven framework to reduce drownings, improve coordination, strengthen education and prevention, and ultimately save lives across the islands.

Safe Kids Worldwide is a nonprofit organization working to reduce unintentional injuries to children ages 0-19 and build sustainable systems that support injury prevention. Safe Kids works

with strategic partners and an extensive network of more than 400 coalitions in the U.S. to reduce traffic injuries, drownings, sleep-related deaths, falls, burns, poisonings, and more.

Thank you for your consideration.

Safe Kids Worldwide

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *WONDER Underlying Cause of Death*. Available at: <http://wonder.cdc.gov/>.

ⁱⁱ Safe Kids Worldwide. *Open Water Drowning by the Numbers*. Available at: https://www.safekids.org/sites/default/files/fast_facts_ow_drowning.pdf

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 10:00:34 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chad Listman	HGEA unit 15	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Urgent Request to Adopt the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan

Aloha,

As the current president of HGEA unit 15,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for **adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan**, as proposed in the resolutions (**SCR55 and SR53 or HCR155 and HR147**) before your committee.

Hawai‘i is currently in the midst of a **drowning crisis**. Our state has the **second-highest drowning rate in the nation**, and drowning is the **leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 in Hawai‘i**. It is also the **number one cause of injury-related death for Hawai‘i’s visitors**, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated prevention efforts.

The recent storms in Hawai‘i serve as a reminder that Hawai‘i is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including drowning, which must become a disaster reduction priority.

This crisis is **not equitable**. **Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at approximately 1.5 times the rate of Hawai‘i’s general population**, and **NHPI children drown at three times the rate of the general population**. These disparities make clear that water safety is not only a public safety issue, but also a matter of health equity.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan was developed by the **Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition**, a statewide partnership of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan has been **recognized nationally** with a **Safe Kids Champion for Children Award from Safe Kids Worldwide**.

Adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan would provide a comprehensive, data-driven framework to reduce drownings, improve coordination, strengthen education and prevention, and ultimately save lives across our islands.

Mahalo for your time, leadership, and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai‘i.

Sincerely,
Chad k listman
Hanalei, Kauai, Hawaii

COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND

Rep. Mark J. Hashem, Chair

Rep. Dee Morikawa, Vice Chair



March 30, 2026

RE: SUPPORT OF HCR155 and HR147 *Adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan*

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa and committee members,

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony. The Hawai'i Search and Rescue (SAR) Alliance is a collaborative effort of multiple agencies, teams, and organizations that consist of first responders, specifically those who conduct SAR operations across the State of Hawai'i. Our Alliance consists of subject matter experts—including local experts representing all relevant state agencies as well as national partners—who meet to determine best practices and support system development. We advocate for a safer Hawai'i with prevention as our first line of defense.

Hawai'i is currently in the midst of a **drowning crisis**. Our state has the **second-highest drowning rate in the nation**, and drowning is the **leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 in Hawai'i**. It is also the **number one cause of injury-related death for Hawai'i's visitors**, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated prevention efforts. This data is alarming.

There is a **3-3-3 survival rule**: Humans can live three weeks without food, three days without water and **THREE minutes without breath**. In the water, **seconds make the difference between life and death**.

The recent storms in Hawai'i is evidence of how our communities are affected by the **increase of extreme weather**. Therefore, drowning must become a disaster reduction priority. **Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) drown** at approximately **1.5 times the rate** of Hawai'i's **general population**, and **NHPI children drown** at **three times the rate of the general population**. These disparities make clear that water safety is not only a public safety issue, but also a matter of health equity.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan was developed by the **Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition**, a statewide partnership of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan has been **recognized nationally** with a **Safe Kids Champion for Children Award from Safe Kids Worldwide**.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan is a critical step in increasing safety through a comprehensive, data-driven framework to reduce drownings, improve coordination, strengthen education and prevention, and ultimately save lives across our islands.

I will be available for questions.

Mahalo

Rosemarie Johnson

BSE, MBA, MBB, TICC, Strategist

Director, Hawai'i SAR Alliance

Director@Hawai'iSARalliance.org

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 4:22:46 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Margaret ANN Renick	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support both HCR155 and HR 147.

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 7:29:16 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

155 HCR SUPPORTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HAWAI'I WATER SAFETY COALITION'S HAWAI'I WATER SAFETY PLAN.

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 3:59:41 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike town	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha all. Very strong family community neighborhood support of this effort. It will save lives allow others to work in the first responder area and create a legacy for anyone who lives within the ocean or a pool or where people swim. This is based upon best evidence and best practices. Thank you for what you do respectfully Mike Town.

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 6:04:37 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Norris	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this please do anything we can to help out people be safer in the ocean

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 7:55:04 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
joshua schaefers	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of HCR155 and HR147

My name is **Joshua Schaefer**s. I am the brother of Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer, who drowned in Hawai‘i while trying to save a child who did not know how to swim from a flooded and poorly maintained detention pond. I strongly support **HCR155 and HR147**, which endorse the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

Drowning is a serious and preventable public health crisis in Hawai‘i. Our state has one of the highest drowning rates in the nation. It is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 and a leading cause of injury-related death among visitors. These tragedies happen far too often, and they do not have to.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan provides a coordinated, evidence-based roadmap to reduce drownings through education, prevention, and collaboration across agencies and communities. It reflects Hawai‘i’s unique ocean conditions, cultures, and risks.

My ohana’s loss is permanent. No ohana should have to experience this kind of grief. Endorsing this plan is an important step toward saving lives and protecting our keiki and communities.

Mahalo for your consideration and for taking action to make Hawai‘i safer.

Sincerely,

Joshua Schaefer

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 8:07:12 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pamela Louise Ramsay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HCR155 and HR147

My name is **Pamela Ramsay**, and I am the grandmother of Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer, who drowned on February 28, 2004. It has been 22 years, but there is not a day that passes without thinking of her.

Charlotte could swim like a fish and had the courage of a lion. Her heart was so big that she jumped into a dirty, poorly maintained retention pond to save a younger friend who could not swim. She pushed him to safety, but she did not make it out herself. My granddaughter died a hero.

Of all my grandchildren, Sharkey was the one most like me—the way she walked, turned her head, rolled her eyes, and smiled with that dimpled grin. Her “I can do it” spirit, her sweet laughter, and her grandma kisses are unforgettable. My only comfort is knowing she loved God, and I believe she is waiting to welcome me with open arms.

Hawai‘i continues to lose far too many children to drowning. The state has the second highest drowning rates in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for Hawai‘i’s children ages 1 to 15, and these deaths happen year after year. The fatal drowning rate is so very sad, because drowning is preventable.

I strongly support **HCR155 and HR147** and urge you to endorse the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, which is designed to ensure that everyone in Hawaii is safe on, in and around the water. Please take action to support this roadmap of drowning prevention so that other grandmothers are not deprived of the hugs, laughter, and love that were taken from me.

Mahalo for protecting Hawai‘i’s keiki and families.

Pamela Ramsay

Grandmother of Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer

Aloha,

Je me prénomme Nora et je suis française.

Je viens par ce présent témoignage, exprimer mon expérience sur les plages d'O'ahu !

L'archipel d'Hawaii !!! ...

des noms qui font rêver, ces îles que l'on a vu uniquement au cinéma....

Alors, on envisage le voyage d'une vie, de concrétiser un rêve, d'oser parcourir tous ces kilomètres,

de traverser plusieurs aéroports immenses avec tellement de gens, de bruits, de mouvements ...

En Mai 2025, j'arrive (seule) à Honolulu !!! il est très tard, je suis épuisée et tellement survoltée d'être à Honolulu !

Le voyage s'est très bien passé,

Pour moi, c'est la première fois que je prends l'avion, c'est mon premier voyage !

Premier contact avec l'archipel d'Hawaii, c'est l'accueil des hawaiiens, le sourire, la décontraction, la gentillesse !!

Je ressens d'avance que mon séjour sera inoubliable !!!

Pour remercier la vie de ce bel événement, je décide d'offrir de mon temps de vacances en étant bénévole, quelques jours lors d'une compétition de surf pour athlètes en situation de handicap.

J'ai programmé des visites, des balades, des dégustations, une visite incroyable chez un tatoueur, des achats de cadeaux pour la famille et les amis... ... mais la première question est où aller se baigner ???

Ce qui est fonctionnel c'est que les tours des lifeguards sont très visibles aux abords des plages.

De là se pose la question de la sécurité de la baignade, des affaires que l'on laisse sur la plage, quand on ne connaît pas l'environnement public !

Alors, le seul repaire de confiance c'est les maîtres nageurs, les secouristes, les lifeguards.

Personnalités professionnelles mondialement connues et trop souvent pas assez reconnues ...

Je m'approche donc de la plage, c'est difficile de décrire la beauté infinie du lieu !!!

J'arrive pas à croire que je suis là.

Les maîtres nageurs sont là, en surveillance, tôt le matin, je décide donc de leur demander quelques informations, concernant la sécurité de la plage, des affaires pendant la baignade, l'endroit semble très familial et calme.

Je suis très bien renseignée et me voilà rassurée et prête à nager dans l'océan pacifique Hawaïen !

Durant toutes mes escapades à la plage, j'ai pu profiter sereinement de la baignade, j'ai pu nager sans stress pour mes affaires laissées sur la plage,

J'ai également remarqué le travail des lifeguards au quotidien.

Les lifeguards viennent nous aider dans l'eau si besoin, nous renseigne également, j'ai noté aussi leurs respects pour la faune aquatique,

à plusieurs reprises nous avons eu l'heureuse visite des phoques moines, les lifeguards ont mis en place un périmètre de sécurité, ont informé les baigneurs des règles de sécurité pour ces animaux et nous mêmes.

La connexion est immédiate, le milieu aquatique est un tout, on est tous connecté avec l'océan pour divers raisons et le lien irremplaçable, c'est le lifeguard!

C'est plus qu'un surveillant de baignade ... c'est le trait d'union indispensable, c'est tout de suite visible,

ces hommes et ces femmes connaissent l'environnement, les dangers propres au site, la météo, ils se déplacent sur l'eau avec du matériel professionnel, maîtrisent les techniques de secourisme et de sauvetage.

ils sont le premier repaire et le dernier rempart sur une plage et ses alentours, c'est un métier dans lequel vous engager votre responsabilité

à chaque instant durant votre journée de travail !

pour protéger et sauver des vies !!

À la fin de mon séjour, je suis allée remercier ces lifeguards pour leur travail et je me suis dit quel privilège de les avoir rencontré, ils ont participé à la sécurité durant mon séjour.

Pour toutes ces raisons mon séjour a été un merveilleux voyage et je souhaite vivement que les lifeguards reçoivent la reconnaissance professionnelle digne de leur engagement total et dévoué à la sécurité en mer.

Je remercie chaleureusement cette corporation de lifeguards.

Bien à vous,

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 10:21:30 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sheila Hill	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HCR155 and HR147

My name is Sheila Hill, and I am a high school classmate of Allison Schaefer Dubovsky. I submit this testimony in strong support of HCR155 and HR147.

Allison and I grew up together, and I have watched her turn unimaginable personal loss into tireless advocacy to protect others. The death of her daughter, Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer, changed her life—and through her work, it is now helping change Hawai‘i for the better.

Hawai‘i has one of the highest drowning rates in the nation, and drowning remains the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15. These are not random accidents. They are preventable tragedies that continue year after year without a coordinated response.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan reflects deep collaboration among lifeguards, first responders, health professionals, educators, and community leaders. It is grounded in evidence, shaped by lived experience, and tailored to Hawai‘i’s unique waters and communities. I have seen firsthand the care, integrity, and purpose that went into this work.

Endorsing this plan is an important step toward saving lives and protecting keiki, families, and visitors. I urge you to support HCR155 and HR147 and help ensure that fewer families endure the kind of loss that shaped my classmate’s life forever.

Mahalo for your leadership and commitment to water safety in Hawai‘i.

Sheila Hill
High School Classmate of Allison Schaefer Dubovsky

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 10:52:35 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leslie Leibbrandt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for **adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan**, as proposed in the resolutions (**SCR55 and SR53 or HCR155 and HR147**) before your committee.

Hawai'i is currently in the midst of a **drowning crisis**. Our state has the **second-highest drowning rate in the nation**, and drowning is the **leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 in Hawai'i**. It is also the **number one cause of injury-related death for Hawai'i's visitors**, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated prevention efforts.

The recent storms in Hawai'i serve as a reminder that Hawai'i is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including drowning, which must become a disaster reduction priority.

This crisis is **not equitable**. **Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at approximately 1.5 times the rate of Hawai'i's general population**, and **NHPI children drown at three times the rate of the general population**. These disparities make clear that water safety is not only a public safety issue, but also a matter of health equity.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan was developed by the **Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition**, a statewide partnership of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan has been **recognized nationally** with a **Safe Kids Champion for Children Award from Safe Kids Worldwide**.

Adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan would provide a comprehensive, data-driven framework to reduce drownings, improve coordination, strengthen education and prevention, and ultimately save lives across our islands.

Mahalo for your time, leadership, and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai'i.

Sincerely,

Leslie

(Kekaha/Kauai)

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 11:34:57 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
glenn pang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senator/Representative

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan, as proposed in the resolutions ([SR54 & SCR56]; [HR42 & HCR46]; [SCR55 and SR53]; [HCR155 and HR147]) before your committee.

As you may know, our state has the second-highest drowning rate in the nation, and drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 in Hawai'i. It is also the number one cause of injury-related death for Hawai'i's visitors, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated prevention efforts.

As a formal water safety educator with the Windward Community College Professional Development program and a Water Safety/Lifeguard Instructor Trainer with the American Red Cross, I ask for your support for these two very important sets of resolutions to continue as building blocks to strengthen our statewide water safety plan.

Mahalo

Glenn R Pang
naia82904@gmail.com
(808)-829-0010 (c)

#be smart, become water safe, and enjoy our beautiful beaches and pools
[#hoea96744.com](http://hoea96744.com) [#HiOceanSafety.com](http://HiOceanSafety.com) [#HawaiiWaterSafetyCoalition.com](http://HawaiiWaterSafetyCoalition.com)
[#thesurfprofessor.com](http://thesurfprofessor.com)
[#bwrag.com](http://bwrag.com) [#hawaiilifeguardassociation](http://hawaiilifeguardassociation.com) [#aoap.com](http://aoap.com)
website:
<https://hoea96744.weebly.com>

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 1:22:13 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ezgi Green	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ezgi, and I am a mother here in Hawai‘i. I am writing in strong support of HCR 155 and HR147. As a mom, I think about water safety every single time my child is near the ocean, a pool, or any body of water — and the data makes clear that my concern is well-founded.

Hawai‘i is in the midst of a drowning crisis that demands immediate legislative attention. As a mother, the statistics below are not just data points — they are every parent’s worst nightmare:

- Drowning is the number one cause of death for children in Hawai‘i ages 1–15.
- Hawai‘i is in the midst of a drowning crisis. These are not just statistics — they are every parent’s worst nightmare:
- have the basic skills to avoid or recover from drowning.
- Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, who make up approximately 27% of Hawai‘i’s population, account for 36% of resident drowning deaths — a deeply troubling disparity.
- 88% of fatal drowning victims ages 1–15 are residents, and 64% of those children drowned in swimming pools.

Each number represents a family shattered by a loss that was preventable. I do not want to be one of those parents, and I don’t want any ohana in Hawai‘i to carry that grief.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan — developed by the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition with guidance from the CDC and WHO — gives me hope. It offers real, actionable solutions, including:

- **Integrating water safety into the DOE curriculum, so every keiki learns how to stay safe in and around the water.**
- Expanding lifeguard services along our coastlines and at public pools.
- Addressing the disproportionate drowning rates among Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities through culturally informed prevention.

I want my children to love the ocean — it is part of who we are in Hawai‘i. God's name we are on an island. But I also want them to be safe. It is our collective kuleana to protect our keiki and our community in and around the water. Passing HCR 155 and HR147 sends a clear message

that the Legislature stands with families like mine and is committed to turning these recommendations into reality.

As a mother, I am asking you to please pass HCR 155. Our keiki are counting on us.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify and for your commitment to keeping our keiki safe.

Ezgi Green

Waialua, O'ahu, Hawai'i

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 1:51:03 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brandon Treloar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for **adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan**, as proposed in the resolutions (**SCR55 and SR53 or HCR155 and HR147**) before your committee.

Hawai'i is currently in the midst of a **drowning crisis**. Our state has the **second-highest drowning rate in the nation**, and drowning is the **leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 in Hawai'i**. It is also the **number one cause of injury-related death for Hawai'i's visitors**, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated prevention efforts.

The recent storms in Hawai'i serve as a reminder that Hawai'i is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including drowning, which must become a disaster reduction priority.

This crisis is **not equitable**. **Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at approximately 1.5 times the rate of Hawai'i's general population**, and **NHPI children drown at three times the rate of the general population**. These disparities make clear that water safety is not only a public safety issue, but also a matter of health equity.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan was developed by the **Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition**, a statewide partnership of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan has been **recognized nationally** with a **Safe Kids Champion for Children Award from Safe Kids Worldwide**.

Adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan would provide a comprehensive, data-driven framework to reduce drownings, improve coordination, strengthen education and prevention, and ultimately save lives across our islands.

Mahalo for your time, leadership, and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai'i.

Sincerely,
Brandon Treloar

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 1:54:04 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louis Erteschik	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In support.

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 5:05:57 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nick Dubovsky	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Strong Support of HCR155 and HR147

My name is **Nick Dubovsky**. I am Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer’s stepfather and the husband of **Allison Schaefer Dubovsky**, the lead writer of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan. I strongly support **HCR155 and HR147**.

Charlotte drowned in Hawai‘i in 2004 while trying to save a child who did not know how to swim. She was brave, capable, and compassionate beyond her years. She acted without hesitation, but she lost her life because the conditions around her were unsafe and because her friends, like most children in Hawaii, could not swim. Our ohana lives with loss every day.

Drowning is not a rare accident in Hawai‘i. It is a preventable public health crisis. Hawai‘i continues to have one of the highest drowning rates in the nation, and drowning remains the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15. These deaths happen year after year, often without change or accountability.

My wife poured her professional skills and her grief into helping write the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan and I lent early graphic design expertise because no ohana should have to endure the pain that ours continues to experience. The plan brings together recommendations and best practices from lifeguards, first responders, health professionals, educators, and community leaders to provide a clear, coordinated path forward.

Endorsing this plan means recognizing that drowning prevention saves lives, protects keiki, and spares families from lifelong heartbreak. I urge you to support HCR155 and HR147 and help make Hawai‘i safer for everyone who lives here and visits our waters.

Mahalo for your leadership and consideration.

Nick Dubovsky

Stepfather of Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer

Hawaii Water Safety Coalition Volunteer

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 9:27:51 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jesse King	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Jesse King.

I support this bill and it's companion resolution.

I am an Ocean Safety lifeguard in the Honolulu County. We are the first line of defence in protecting people from hazardous conditions in the ocean. Collectively, ocean lifeguards on every island interact with, educate, help, render medical aid, and rescue thousands of beachgoers on a daily basis. Lives are saved every day in our state due to lifeguard intervention. Being officially recognized as first responders is long overdue.

Mahalo for your time!

HR-147

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 9:59:59 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dan Worden	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I write in strong support of HCR155 and HR147, and urge the committee to adopt the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan and position our state as a leader in drowning prevention.

Mahalo for your leadership, and your consideration of this resultion.