



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 51 / HR 47**  
**URGING THE HAWAII TOURISM AUTHORITY TO ADD A STIPULATION TO ITS SIGNATURE  
EVENT PROGRAM TO REQUIRE THIRTY PERCENT OF FUNDS AWARDED THROUGH THE  
PROGRAM TO BE USED TO MARKET EVENTS TO OUT-OF-STATE MARKETS.**

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

The Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) offers comments on HCR 51 / HR 47, which urges HTA to require that thirty percent of funds awarded through the Signature Events Program be used to market events to out-of-state markets.

HTA's Signature Events are chosen because they highlight Hawai'i's culture and contribute to the visitor economy. Instead of focusing on how marketing dollars are spent, we recommend concentrating on the outcomes.

Final reports for signature events held between January and June 2025 — the latest period for which reports are available — show that these events attracted over 470,000 attendees, including approximately 171,000 visitors and more than 298,000 residents. This attendee mix demonstrates the program's success in creating shared experiences that not only draw travelers but also engage local communities. By hosting culturally rich festivals, major sporting events, and globally recognized experiences, the program promotes visitor travel, influences the timing of visits, and extends economic benefits across the state. These results align with the program's goal of enriching communities, fostering interactions between residents and visitors, and strengthening Hawai'i's global brand.

HTA's \$785,000 investment in these signature events<sup>1</sup> contributed to more than \$137<sup>2</sup> million in direct visitor spending, approximately \$256<sup>3</sup> million in total economic output and \$15.9 million in

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<sup>1</sup> Signature events held between January and June 2025

<sup>2</sup> Source: Final reports submitted by event organizers. Due to incomplete data, spend and output for two events were modeled using data sets from 21 similar events and using actual reported attendance numbers.

<sup>3</sup> Generated using the State's economic impact model

state tax revenue. This represents a return of roughly \$20 in state tax revenue<sup>4</sup> for every \$1 invested.

About 63% of these Signature Events used 30% or more of the HTA funds on marketing. If we required the funds to go to “visitor marketing,” most expenses could be easily and accurately labeled as “visitor” marketing without any substantial impact on effectiveness.

We believe that to accomplish the intent of this resolution, which is to empower these Signature Events to achieve higher returns through visitor spending, we should instead pursue a funding model where there is less uncertainty in the funding amounts and the timing of funds. By requiring these events to use HTA funding for marketing, they typically shift a large percentage of their marketing funds to be covered by the HTA funding. Their other funding then goes to cover operations, event production and overhead.

Prior to FY2022, HTA’s funding came from the Tourism Special Fund, which was funded solely by the TAT. This allowed HTA to budget further in advance because of the dedicated funding source. It was subject to approvals and oversight but its budget was not subject to the general fund budgeting process, which is not designed to support marketing efforts that require multi-year planning and commitments.

This changed in FY2022, when the Tourism Special Fund was defunded and HTA’s funding was subject to general fund budget processes. That made the budgets for all Signature Events also subject to general fund budget processes and timing. In effect, this means Signature Events often don’t know their total marketing budget until weeks before their event. The organizations with the most lead time of a certain budget would be May events, which would have just 11 months of knowing their marketing budget. This hampers their ability to create sustainable and competitive marketing partnerships, which often require years of planning and commitment. By switching the Signature Events funding to the Tourism Special Fund, their marketing plans will not be subject to HTA’s annual funding.

To empower our Signature Events to realize their full marketing potential and maximize the State’s investment in them, we recommend the legislature allocate TAT revenue to the Tourism Special Fund and restore the Signature Events’ funding source to be the Tourism Special Fund instead of the general fund.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share our comments.

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<sup>4</sup> DBEDT 2017 I-O Model, Type II multiplier

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 31<sup>st</sup>, 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

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Tourism writer and community events enthusiast

