



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI
A HO'OMĀKA'IKĀ'I

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
DIRECTOR

DANE K. WICKER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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

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

Statement of
JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
Director
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism
before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

Tuesday, February 10, 2026
1:02 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 229

In consideration of
SB2072
RELATING TO TOURISM.

Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai and Members of the Committee.

The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) **supports** SB2072, which appropriates funds to sponsor a Michelin Guide for restaurants statewide.

The Michelin Guide is recognized globally as the benchmark for culinary excellence and a powerful driver of international travel. Hawai'i's absence from the guide is not due to a lack of quality, but rather because Michelin inspectors do not currently evaluate restaurants in the state. Sponsoring a Michelin Guide for Hawai'i would close this gap and provide well-deserved recognition for the islands' world-class culinary scene.

A Michelin Guide for Hawai'i would generate economic benefits, including global brand recognition that positions Hawai'i as a world-class culinary tourism destination. Michelin-recognized restaurants attract high-value visitors who tend to stay longer and spend more than the average traveler.

Hawai'i's food culture has evolved into a major visitor draw, featuring nationally and internationally acclaimed chefs, vibrant local agriculture, and a distinct multicultural

identity. Michelin recognition would amplify Hawai'i's global brand, attract experience-driven travelers, and deliver sustained international exposure.

The rise of “foodcations” underscores this opportunity, as more travelers plan trips specifically around culinary experiences — seeking authentic, local, and bucket-list dining that connects them to culture through cuisine.

This initiative also supports workforce development. Culinary positions remain among the most difficult to fill statewide, and Michelin recognition establishes clear professional benchmarks that attract talent, raise industry standards, and inspire local residents to pursue culinary careers.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our strong support for this measure.

LATE

SB-2072

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 10:51:48 AM

Testimony for EDT on 2/10/2026 1:02:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Randall John Francisco	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of this legislation which most of all makes a statement that the State of Hawaii and its ecosystem of restaurateurs, farmers, vendors and various organizations, especially, the Hawaii Restaurant Association all recognize what we already know: Hawaii is renowned for not only its regional cuisine and farm-to-table ecosystem of locally grown produce and value-added products, its also its own culiary regional destination. The investment demonstrates a committment to excellence in recognizing that the state and its ecosystem of farmers, etc., are indeed as serious as its aforementioned culinary US, Asian and European counterparts. Ev erything is about timing, and, now, is the time to truly invest in a renowned brand that covers and review culinary excellence. Mahalo for the opportunity to share mana'o and for your consideration of this testimony. Aloha