

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 (SB2521 SD1, HD1)
RELATING TO EMERGENCY SERVICES**

REPRESENTATIVE DAVID A. TARNAS, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 2:00 PM | Room Number: 325

1 **Fiscal Implications:** None.

2 **Department Position:** The Department of Health (“Department”) supports this measure
3 offering testimony.

4 **Department Testimony:** The Emergency Medical Services & Injury Prevention Systems Branch
5 (EMSIPSB), on behalf of the Department, respectfully submits this testimony in **support** of this
6 measure.

7 Hawaii’s emergency response framework requires targeted statutory updates that promote
8 clarity, readiness, and public safety. Updating Hawai’i Revised Statutes (HRS) §286-235.5 to use
9 the term “emergency medical services personnel” aligns the Commercial Driver’s License (CDL)
10 exemption language with the definitional framework in HRS §321-222. This change eliminates
11 ambiguity and ensures the exemption applies to the intended Emergency Medical Services
12 (EMS) workforce.

13 The Senate Draft 1 (SD1) version appropriately clarifies that emergency medical services
14 personnel who drive disaster response, recovery, and emergency vehicles are exempt from CDL
15 requirements, reducing administrative barriers that can delay deployment and hinder
16 recruitment and retention of qualified personnel.

1 The measure also modernizes the definition of “authorized emergency vehicle” in HRS §291C-1
2 to reflect current emergency operations by explicitly including emergency medical services
3 vehicles, disaster response and recovery vehicles, and Department of Health vehicles. This
4 clarification acknowledges that emergency response extends beyond traditional ambulances
5 and supports the State, appropriate county councils, and emergency management agencies in
6 designating authorized vehicles for disaster and emergency activities.

7 Importantly, the SD1 amendments introduce critical safeguards by requiring federal, state, and
8 county firefighters, emergency medical services personnel, and law enforcement officers who
9 operate authorized emergency vehicles to maintain proof of successful completion of an
10 agency-approved or other state-approved training program. These provisions address concerns
11 regarding non-CDL operation of larger or specialized vehicles, ensuring consistent, verifiable
12 competencies and reinforcing public health and safety standards.

13 For these reasons, EMSIPSB respectfully supports Senate Bill 2521 SD1, HD1 to clarify scope,
14 strengthen safeguards, and enhance Hawaii’s capacity to respond effectively to emergencies
15 and disasters.

16 **Offered Amendments: None**

17 Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued
18 commitment to strengthening Hawaii’s EMS system.

HONOLULU EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
KA 'OIHANA LAWELAWE ULIA PŌPILIKIA O HONOLULU
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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March 27, 2026

The Honorable Karl Rhoads, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
House of Representatives
415 South Beretania Street, Room 213
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

SUBJECT: Letter of Support SB2521, Relating to Emergency Services

Dear Chair Rhoads:

The Honolulu Emergency Services Department (HESD) strongly supports SB2521, Relating to Emergency Services.

This measure expands the categories of HESD personnel authorized to operate disaster response, recovery, and emergency vehicles by removing the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) requirement. This change increases the pool of qualified operators and enhances HESD's ability to respond quickly and effectively during emergencies.

Despite the removal of the CDL requirement, HESD will continue to provide comprehensive training in the safe and proper operation of emergency vehicles, consistent with stringent department and state standards.

SB2521 also aligns the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) division with established practices of the Honolulu Fire Department and Honolulu Police Department, which already permit qualified personnel to operate emergency vehicles without a CDL. CDL-related training will continue through approved emergency vehicle operation programs, but the separate state commercial licensing process will be eliminated. The measure further recognizes the distinct difference between emergency vehicle operations—such as lights-and-sirens responses and emergency maneuvers—and commercial freight transportation.

The Honorable Karl Rhoads, Chair

March 27, 2026

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SB2521 will have a significant impact on our ability to staff emergency vehicles as well. During recent Kona Low storms, we experienced firsthand how critical it is to quickly mobilize qualified drivers for disaster response. During the most recent Kona Low disaster response, crews used our specialized high-water vehicle to reach affected areas and safely transport individuals who were unable to evacuate on their own.


By expanding the pool of individuals eligible to operate disaster-response vehicles, this bill strengthens our readiness and improves our ability to respond when our communities need help most. SB2521 directly relates to CDL requirements for disaster vehicles and will enhance our overall emergency response capability.

For these reasons, the City and County of Honolulu and the Honolulu Emergency Services Department strongly support SB2521 and respectfully urge its passage.

Should you have any questions, please contact Deputy Director Ian T.T. Santee at (808) 723-7811 by email at isantee@honolulu.gov.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support.

Sincerely,



James H.E. Ireland, M.D.
Director

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA LIMAHANA
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
KOKUA PO'O

March 27, 2026

The Honorable David A. Tarnas, Chair
The Honorable Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair
and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs
The House of Representatives
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street, Room 325
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

SUBJECT: Senate Bill No. 2521, SD1, HD1
Relating to Emergency Services

The Department of Human Resources, City and County of Honolulu **strongly supports** Senate Bill No. 2521, SD1, HD1, which would exempt emergency medical services personnel from commercial driver's license requirements, similar to other licensed first responders operating in the State.

Importantly, this bill does not negatively impact public health and safety because it does not exempt emergency services personnel from meeting federal and state requirements related to drug and alcohol testing, specifically Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS), §321-226, which provides in part, that "ambulance service providers licensed by the State establish and maintain an alcohol and substance abuse policy for employees that the department deems is equivalent to, or exceeds the provisions of, the safety and health standards established by the federal Department of Transportation for holders of commercial driver's licenses." Instead, this bill allows emergency medical services personnel to operate under the same requirements as other licensed first responders while maintaining public health safety standards.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nola N. Miyasaki'.

Nola N. Miyasaki
Director



UNITED PUBLIC WORKERS

AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 2026**

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair
Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Tuesday, March 31, 2026, 2:00 PM
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

Re: Testimony on SB2521, SD1, HD1 – RELATING TO EMERGENCY SERVICES

Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

The United Public Workers, AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO (“UPW”) is the exclusive bargaining representative for approximately 12,000 public employees, which includes blue collar, non-supervisory employees in Bargaining Unit 1 and institutional, health, and correctional employees in Bargaining Unit 10, in the State of Hawaii and various counties.

UPW **supports** SB2521, SD1, HD1, which exempts emergency medical services (“EMS”) personnel from commercial driver’s license (“CDL”) requirements. This bill also requires federal, state, and county firefighters, emergency medical services personnel, and law enforcement officers to maintain proof that they have successfully completed an agency approved or other state approved training on authorized emergency vehicles.

EMS personnel are required, pursuant to Section 453-32, Hawaii Revised Statutes, to complete training that meets U.S. Department of Transportation standards. The additional requirement for EMS personnel to acquire a commercial driver’s license exceeds these standards and is inconsistent with current CDL exemptions for firefighters and law enforcement officers. UPW agrees that exempting qualified EMS personnel from CDL requirements may help to alleviate barriers to recruitment and retention, and streamline essential functions, while maintaining public safety standards.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

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