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STATE OF HAWAI'I | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION | KA 'OIHANA ALAKAU
869 PUNCHBOWL STREET
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-5097

Wednesday, February 11, 2026
1:15 PM
State Capitol, 225

SB2521
RELATING TO EMERGENCY SERVICES

Senate Committees on Transportation and Health and Human Services

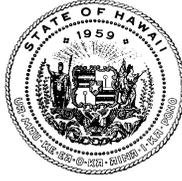
The Department of Transportation (DOT) supports Senate Bill 2521, which exempts emergency medical services personnel from commercial driver's license requirements and amends the definition of 'authorized emergency vehicle' under the State Traffic Code to include emergency medical services vehicles, not just ambulances.

This bill addresses two important aspects of emergency medical services operations. First, by exempting emergency medical services personnel from commercial driver's license requirements, it alleviates a significant burden on the recruitment and retention of these essential first responders. The DOT recognizes that there is currently a shortage of drivers with commercial driver licenses, and this exemption will help to ensure that emergency medical services can maintain adequate staffing levels without the added hurdle of commercial licensing.

Second, broadening the definition of 'authorized emergency vehicle' to include emergency medical services vehicles beyond just ambulances reflects the evolving nature of pre-hospital care and the variety of vehicles now used in emergency medical response. This change will provide appropriate legal recognition and protections for all emergency medical services vehicles operating in our state.

The DOT believes that these changes will enhance the ability of emergency medical services to respond effectively to the needs of our communities while maintaining high standards of safety on our roads.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.



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

**Testimony COMMENTING on (SB2521)
RELATING TO EMERGENCY SERVICES**

SENATOR JOY A. SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

SENATOR LORRAINE R. INOUE, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at 1:15 PM | Room Number: 225

1 **Fiscal Implications:** None.

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

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

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

12 The measure also modernizes the definition of “authorized emergency vehicle” in HRS
13 §291C-1 to reflect current emergency operations by explicitly including emergency medical
14 services vehicles, disaster response and recovery vehicles, and Department vehicles. This

1 clarification acknowledges that emergency response extends beyond traditional ambulances
2 and supports the State and counties in designating appropriate vehicles for disaster and
3 emergency activities.

4 Finally, the amendments introduce critical safeguards by requiring federal, state, and
5 county agencies to train personnel who operate authorized emergency vehicles and maintain
6 proof of successful completion of an agency-approved or state-approved training program.
7 These provisions address concerns about non-CDL operation of larger or specialized vehicles,
8 ensuring consistent, verifiable competencies and reinforcing public health and safety standards.

9 For these reasons, EMSIPSB recommends adopting these amendments to clarify scope,
10 strengthen safeguards, and enhance Hawaii's capacity to respond effectively to emergencies
11 and disasters.

12 **Offered Amendments:**

13 §286-235.5 Persons exempt from licensure.

14 (2) Federal, state, and county firefighters, emergency medical services personnel, and law
15 enforcement officers who drive federal, state, or county fire trucks, including fire pumpers,
16 aerial ladder trucks, and elevated platform trucks, or authorized **disaster response, recovery,**
17 **and** emergency vehicles; provided that they are trained by the federal, state, or county
18 government and the commercial motor vehicles are equipped with audible and visual signals
19 and are not subject to normal traffic regulation. **Federal, state, and county government agency**
20 **must maintain proof personnel have successfully completed an agency approved or other**
21 **state approved training on authorized emergency vehicles.** For purposes of this paragraph,
22 "authorized emergency vehicle" shall have the same meaning as in section 291C-1."

23 GENERAL PROVISIONS

24 §291C-1 Definitions.

1 "Authorized emergency vehicle" includes fire department vehicles, police vehicles,
2 ~~ambulances,~~ emergency medical services vehicles, disaster response and recovery vehicles,
3 ocean safety vehicles, law enforcement vehicles, conservation and resources enforcement
4 vehicles, ~~and~~ office of the state fire marshal, and Department of Health vehicles authorized
5 and approved pursuant to section 291-31.5 that are publicly owned and other publicly or
6 privately owned vehicles designated as such by the state or a county council, or emergency
7 management agency."

8

9 Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued
10 commitment to strengthening Hawaii's EMS system.

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

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KOKUA PO'O

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Lorraine R. Inouye, Chair
The Honorable Brandon J.C. Elefante, Vice Chair
and Members of the Senate Committee on Transportation
The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
The Honorable Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair
and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
The Senate, Room 225
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chairs Inouye and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Elefante, and McKelvey, and Members of the Committees:

SUBJECT: Senate Bill No. 2521
Relating to Emergency Services

The Department of Human Resources, City and County of Honolulu strongly supports SB 2521, 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

THE SENATE
KA 'AHA KENEKOA

THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 2026

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Chair
Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 11, 2026, 1:15 PM
Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

Re: Testimony on SB2521 – RELATING TO EMERGENCY SERVICES

Chairs Inouye and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Elefante and McKelvey, 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, which exempts emergency medical services ("EMS") personnel from commercial driver's license ("CDL") requirements. This bill also amends the definition of "authorized emergency vehicle" under State Traffic Code to replace ambulances with emergency medical services 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.

HEADQUARTERS

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1.866.454.4166

Toll Free - Molokai/Lanai only

SB-2521

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 1:15:50 AM

Testimony for TRS on 2/11/2026 1:15:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry Support

2521 SB RELATING TO EMERGENCY SERVICES.

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

3375 KOAPAKA STREET, SUITE H450 • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96819
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IAN T. T. SANTEE, MPA
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
HOPE PO'O

February 10, 2026

LATE

The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
House Committee on Health and Human Services
House of Representatives
415 South Beretania Street, Room 213
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

SUBJECT: Letter of Support SB2521, Relating to Emergency Services

Dear Chair San Buenaventura:

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

This measure assists in expanding the scope of personnel who are authorized to operate HESD's disaster response, recovery, and emergency vehicles without the requirement of a Commercial Driver's License (CDL). By removing the CDL requirement, HESD expands the pool of eligible drivers, facilitating quicker and more efficient emergency response during critical incidents.

Although the bill removes the CDL requirement, HESD remains committed to ensuring personnel receive comprehensive and appropriate training in the proper management and safe operation of emergency vehicles. This training will meet rigorous department and state standards to maintain the highest levels of safety and performance.

SB2521 also brings the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) division into alignment with existing practices of the Honolulu Fire Department and Honolulu Police Department, both of which allow qualified personnel to operate emergency vehicles without a CDL. CDL training will continue to be conducted by agency-approved or state-approved programs focused on emergency vehicle operations. However, the bill eliminates the separate state commercial licensing process.

The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair

February 10, 2026

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Importantly, SB2521 recognizes the distinct difference between emergency driving, which involves lights-and-sirens operations, intersection clearance, and emergency response maneuvers, and freight and other commercial transportation operations.

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