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STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
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Testimony of
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
Acting Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Thursday, March 19, 2026
9:40 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 325

In consideration of
SENATE BILL 2756
RELATING TO CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT

Senate Bill 2756 appropriates funds for the purchase of equipment for the Hawai'i Island Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Supplemental Budget request.**

The Department anticipates the hiring of fifty-three (53) individuals to fill vacant Conservation and Resources Enforcement Officer positions statewide. With the filling of these positions, there will be a need for more equipment. This additional funding for equipment, including vehicles and a marine vessel, will increase enforcement capacity for the Hawai'i Branch, including ability to respond to emergencies and calls for service with increased responsiveness and efficiency.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment on this measure.



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

‘Ōlelo Hō‘ike ‘Aha Kau Kānāwai

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 2756
RELATING TO CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT

Ke Kōmike Hale o ke Ikehu a me ka Ho‘omalū Ao Kūlohelohe
(House Committee on Energy & Environmental Protection)

Ke Kapitala ‘o Hawai‘i
(Hawai‘i State Capitol)

Malaki 19, 2026

9:40AM

Lumi 325

Aloha e Chair Lowen, Vice Chair Perruso, and House Members of the Committee on Energy and Environmental Protection:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS** SB2756, which would restore much-needed funding to the Hawai‘i Island branch of the only state agency focused on enforcing laws that protect our natural and cultural resources.

Hawai‘i’s natural and cultural resources are a foundation of our economy, cultural values, and local way of life. For example, since the earliest human habitation of these islands, Hawai‘i’s nearshore resources alone have provided an invaluable source of food, recreation, and cultural significance for the people of Hawai‘i. Healthy coral reefs generate more than \$1.2 billion annually in tourism revenue and provide critical ecosystem services, including shoreline protection and food security, further enhancing their economic value.¹ State-supported analyses further show that coral reefs provide flood protection benefits valued at more than \$836 million annually, protecting people, property, and jobs throughout Hawai‘i’s coastal communities.² Our watersheds and terrestrial resources are similarly essential to our economy, our cultural foundation, and even our fresh water supply.

¹ [Restoring Hawai‘i’s Reefs | The Nature Conservancy](#) (Sept. 16, 2018).

² Hawai‘i Coral Reef Initiative, *The Economic Value of Hawai‘i’s Coral Reefs* (Honolulu: State of Hawai‘i, Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Aquatic Resources).

Despite the cultural and economic value of these natural and cultural resources, there is only one state agency focused specifically on enforcing the laws that protect them. As the enforcement arm of the Department of Land and Natural Resources, DOCARE's policing duties include such broad and diverse areas as fisheries, hunting, forestry, conservation lands, boating, historic preservation, and state parks. Geographically, DOCARE oversees 23,000 acres of inland surface water, 3 million acres of state ocean waters, 2 million acres of conservation land, and 1.2 million acres of state owned lands.³

Given this broad scope of responsibility, and the large amount and variety of equipment, training, and manpower needed to effectively carry out DOCARE's mission, it is clear that DOCARE has been critically underfunded for many years.⁴ A review of budget worksheets from the last ten years indicates past legislative appropriations for DOCARE have ranged from \$6 to \$8 million dollars annually; by contrast, the Honolulu Police Department – tasked with enforcing laws in the City and County of Honolulu, and primarily in developed or municipal areas – reported a budget of \$224 million in 2010 alone.⁵ Clearly, much greater investment is necessary to ensure that DOCARE has the resources to ensure that the laws protecting our natural and cultural resources have actual teeth, and to relieve mounting community concerns regarding the lack of support for DOCARE's important mission.

By providing funding to DOCARE to meet specific needs on Hawai'i Island, this bill provides a small but critical step in the right direction for investing in the conservation and protection of the resources that the Native Hawaiian community and the larger public rely upon.

OHA respectfully urges the Committee to **PASS** SB2756.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

³ Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement, Mission, <http://hawaii.gov/dlnr/docare/mission> (last accessed February 6, 2013).

⁴ THE AUDITOR, OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR, MANAGEMENT AUDIT OF THE DIVISION OF CONSERVATION AND RESOURCES ENFORCEMENT 17 (2006), available at <http://www.state.hi.us/auditor/Reports/2006/06-01.pdf>.

⁵ HONOLULU POLICE DEPARTMENT 2010 ANNUAL REPORT 31 available at <http://www.honolulupd.org/downloads/HPD2010annualreport.pdf>.



Testimony Before The
House Committee on Energy & Environmental Protection (EEP)
IN SUPPORT OF SB2756
March 19, 2026, 9:40 a.m., Room 325 & Via Videoconference

We are Olan Leimomi Fisher and Kevin Chang, Kua'āina Advocate and Executive Director, respectively, testifying on behalf of [Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo \(or KUA\)](#). "Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo" stands for "grassroots growing through shared responsibility," and our acronym "KUA" means "backbone." **Our mission is to connect and empower communities to improve their quality of life through the collective care for their biocultural (natural and cultural) heritage, serving as a "backbone organization" that supports creative and community-driven solutions to problems stemming from environmental degradation.** Hawai'i's biocultural resources continue to be negatively impacted by political, economic, and social changes, and the increasing dangers of climate change make fostering and empowering resilient communities acutely critical.

Currently KUA supports three major networks of: (1) over 40 mālama 'āina (caring for our 'āina or "that which feeds") community groups collectively referred to as E Alu Pū (moving forward together); (2) over 60 loko i'a (fishpond aquaculture systems unique to Hawai'i) and wai 'ōpae (anchialine pool systems) sites in varying stages of restoration and development, with numerous caretakers, stakeholders, and volunteers known as the Hui Mālama Loko I'a ("caretakers of fishponds"); and (3) the Limu Hui made up of over 50 loea (traditional experts) and practitioners in all things "limu" or locally-grown "seaweed." **Our shared vision is to once again experience what our kūpuna (ancestors) referred to as 'ĀINA MOMONA – abundant and healthy ecological systems that sustain our community resilience and well-being.**

KUA strongly supports SB2756 as an incremental step towards 'āina momona.

This bill would appropriate funds to the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources, to supply needed equipment for the Hawai'i Island Branch to effectively carry out its mission to uphold the laws necessary to protect, conserve, and manage our unique and limited biocultural and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations.

A large number of our network members partner with DOCARE officers through growing community-based co-management initiatives from mauka to makai. These DOCARE officers are often the first representation community members face from DLNR. Some wahi pana (significant places) have become well-known for their absence of almost any DOCARE presence – largely due to inadequate training resources and capacity. A bill like this, which we urge you to support, and the growing DOCARE Academy we hope you continue to support, are already filling that gap. With the recent graduating classes, so far we have heard only praise and gratitude from our community members with DOCARE's increased presence and effectiveness throughout our state. **As DOCARE's officer pool continues to grow,**

likewise they need more equipment to carry out their enforcement duties, and particularly with a significant number of incoming officers assigned to Hawai'i Island.

The communities we work with are committed to ensuring the long-term health of our biocultural resources that they have cared for and depended on for generations since time immemorial. **We believe our environment, the foundation of our very existence and “that which feeds” us all, requires long-term investment through a shared vision of achieving ‘āina momona (abundance) once again.** To get there requires dedicating more resources for mālama ‘āina (caring for our environment), including through this measure to ensure that DOCARE officers on Hawai'i Island have the resources they need to protect our beloved ‘āina and all the lifeforms and practices that depend on it. Our decisions today will continue to shape the future that our keiki's keiki's keiki will one day inherit – we hope for a future of shared and harmonious abundance, and hope you do, too.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support. Please **PASS** SB2756.

Aloha ‘Āina Momona no Nā Kau ā Kau.

HAWAI'I OCEAN LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE



March 19, 2026

Hawai'i State Legislature
House Committee on Energy & Environmental Protection

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT for SB 2756, Relating to Conservation Enforcement

Aloha Chair Lowen, Vice Chair Perruso, and esteemed members of the committee,

The Ocean Legislative Task Force—a coalition of more than 150 individuals representing over 20 organizations statewide—strongly supports SB 2756, relating to conservation enforcement. Our members work across Hawai'i to protect marine and coastal resources, advance sustainable ocean management, and uphold laws designed to safeguard public trust resources for present and future generations. Effective enforcement is foundational to these efforts, and we appreciate the Legislature's attention to this critical need.

SB 2756 makes a targeted and necessary investment by appropriating funds for the purchase of equipment for the Hawai'i Island Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) within the Department of Land and Natural Resources. DOCARE officers are on the front lines of protecting Hawai'i's natural and cultural resources, often operating in challenging environments with limited staff and aging or insufficient equipment. Modern, reliable equipment directly enhances officer safety, response capacity, and the ability to deter and address illegal activities on land and in nearshore waters.

Strengthening conservation enforcement capacity will benefit not only ecosystems, but also law-abiding community members, subsistence practitioners, and responsible ocean users who depend on healthy, well-managed resources. For these reasons, the Ocean Legislative Task Force urges your support for Senate Bill 2756.

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

The Hawai'i Ocean Legislative Task Force advocates for measures that advance cesspool conversion and wastewater management, protect Hawai'i's coral reefs and reef fish, ensure transparent and sustainable implementation of the Green Fee program and long-term environmental staffing, and support other measures that strengthen Hawai'i's coastal and marine ecosystems.

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy
Supporting SB2756, Relating to Conservation Enforcement
Committee on Energy & Environmental Protection
March 19, 2026 at 9:40 am
Conference Room 325 and via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Lowen, Vice Chair Perruso, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify today. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Hawai'i and Palmyra supports SB2756, which appropriates funds for the purchase of equipment for the Hawaii Island Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

The natural environment in Hawai'i is the engine that drives our state's economy and a natural, recreational, and cultural treasure supporting our island lifestyle and livelihoods. Careful, thoughtful, and intentional conservation, management, and restoration is critical for the environment to withstand the increasing impacts of climate change while continuing to protect our islands' economic engine. TNC is proud of our decades of working in partnership with so many local organizations, agencies, and communities to care for this vital and fragile resources.

This bill would provide funding for DOCARE to purchase equipment vital to their ability to effectively carry out its mission to uphold the laws necessary to protect, conserve, and manage marine resources, such as responding to violations and enforcing rules and regulations. DOCARE's operations on Hawai'i are critical to the long-term management of the islands depleting marine resources which are impacted by increased, often illegal, fishing pressure. This legislation will ensure DOCARE has the equipment and resources its needs to more effectively enforce fishing regulations and provide the opportunity for herbivores and other reef fish populations to recover.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of SB2756.

Guided by science, TNC is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the lands and waters upon which all life depends. The Conservancy has helped protect more than 200,000 acres of natural lands in Hawai'i and Palmyra Atoll. We manage 84,000 acres in 13 nature preserves and 18 managed areas and have supported over 50 coastal communities to help protect and restore the nearshore reefs and fisheries of the main Hawaiian Islands.

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SB-2756

Submitted on: 3/18/2026 8:39:52 AM

Testimony for EEP on 3/19/2026 9:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daniel Elvenia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this bill again. As an enforcement officer with the DLNR DOCARE, I fully support this bill. On Hawaii Island, as well as throughout the State, our Division sorely lacks the patrol vehicles and equipment needed to perform our duties. We currently have 26 vehicles shared amongst 31 sworn personnel, and project another 16 to join our ranks through our upcoming Academy recruitment with no vehicles expected to supplement our aging fleet. Our vehicles are outdated, the majority of which are over ten years old and in constant need of service and repair. These vehicles also lack proper enforcement identification and equipment for our personnel to effectively and efficiently respond to calls for service. The passage of this bill would allow us to nearly double our current fleet, helping to alleviate the wear and tear on these vehicles. Additionally, it would bolster our presence and visibility throughout our islands, and allow us to better provide the services and protection our communities expect and demand.

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lawrence L. Terlep Jr., and I serve as an Assistant Chief for the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) serving as the Hawaii Island Branch Chief. I am submitting this testimony again in strong support of SB2756.

SB2756 is critically important to maintaining and strengthening DOCARE's enforcement capacity on Hawai'i Island, particularly as the division prepares to onboard a new class of officers through the upcoming DOCARE Academy. Hawai'i Island is expected to receive a significant share of the approximately fifty-three (53) incoming Conservation and Resources Enforcement Officer I (CREO I) positions, which will place immediate and substantial demands on our already strained operational resources.

At present, the Hawai'i Island Branch faces a severe shortage of vehicles. The majority of our existing fleet has exceeded its intended service life, with most vehicles over ten years old and at least two vehicles exceeding twenty years of use. These aging vehicles present growing safety, reliability, and maintenance challenges that directly affect our ability to respond to calls for service, conduct enforcement operations, and support officer safety.

SB2756 would help address these deficiencies by supporting the acquisition of essential equipment, including vehicles and marine assets. Specifically, the Hawai'i Island Branch has an urgent need for twenty (20) replacement and additional vehicles in Fiscal Year 2027, with an additional twenty (20) vehicles in Fiscal Year 2028. While fleet replacement will remain an ongoing need, this phased approach would significantly mitigate what is becoming an operational crisis and ensure that both current and newly assigned officers have safe and reliable transportation.

In addition to land-based resources, SB2756 is also vital to strengthening DOCARE's marine enforcement capabilities. The West Hawai'i District Marine Unit is expected to receive additional marine officers from the upcoming academy. However, without an additional patrol vessel, our ability to effectively deploy those officers will remain limited. An additional vessel would allow us to increase patrol hours, expand coverage range, and more effectively protect nearshore waters and marine resources.

These investments represent practical, near-term solutions to critical equipment shortages that directly impact DOCARE's mission to protect Hawai'i's natural, cultural, and historic resources. Without adequate vehicles and vessels, staffing increases alone cannot translate into meaningful enforcement capacity.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support SB2756 and help ensure that DOCARE officers have the tools necessary to safely and effectively carry out their duties on Hawai'i Island.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued support of resource protection and public safety.

SB-2756

Submitted on: 3/18/2026 8:49:19 AM

Testimony for EEP on 3/19/2026 9:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daisy Franco Rodriguez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Members of the Committee,

As an officer for the DLNR-DOCARE, Hawaii Branch, I support this bill for providing the Hawaii Branch DOCARE with new operating vehicles. Having access to new and properly functioning vehicles is important in order for our officers to safely and efficiently respond to calls and perform our duties. In Hawaii, many of our vehicles are old and unserviceable, often requiring frequent repairs, which takes time away from performing our duties to patrol and protect. Hawaii Island is fortunate enough to have the most land with important natural resources that the community cares for and has a deep responsibility for. The areas that we often monitor and maintain are only accessible via unpaved roads, which require vehicles that are properly suited for those conditions. These include game management areas, forest reserves, state parks, and unencumbered shorelines. Vehicles that are not suited for these conditions can hinder our ability to properly respond to calls. Additionally, the Division is currently expanding, and it is vital that our officers are safely equipped to carry out their duties in order to continue protecting Hawaii's natural resources. I show my profound support and hope to shed light on this bill, which not only provides continued protection of Hawaii's unique and historic resources but also allows for the safety of Hawaii DOCARE Officers.

Mahalo for your time and efforts.

SB-2756

Submitted on: 3/18/2026 9:16:20 AM

Testimony for EEP on 3/19/2026 9:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Roxanne O’Neal	DLNR/DOCARE	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Roxanne O’Neal, and I respectfully submit testimony in strong support of SB2756. I am currently a Conservation and Resource Enforcement Officer with the Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement (DOCARE), assigned to Hawai‘i Island.

As a DOCARE officer, I operate a marked patrol vehicle from our existing fleet. Many of these vehicles are well beyond their intended service life and lack standard emergency equipment such as audible sirens and visual emergency lights. This limitation directly affects our ability to operate safely and effectively while performing our duties on Hawai‘i County roadways.

DOCARE officers regularly travel throughout the island and are often required to assist as first responders at traffic collisions or other incidents until additional emergency personnel arrive. Without proper emergency lighting, responding or stopping safely on active roadways is challenging and increases risk to officers, motorists, and the public. Hazard lights alone are not sufficient in these situations.

In addition, the lack of fully equipped patrol vehicles restricts our ability to conduct traffic enforcement when necessary. There have been instances of reckless or unsafe driving observed while operating a marked DOCARE vehicle, where the only available option was to notify Hawai‘i Police Department dispatch rather than take immediate action. Properly equipped vehicles would allow DOCARE officers to better support public safety and interagency coordination.

The age and condition of the current fleet also result in frequent mechanical issues and extended repair times. When vehicles are out of service, officers are required to share patrol trucks, which presents logistical challenges, as these vehicles function as our mobile offices and carry essential equipment.

With new officers expected to join DOCARE following the upcoming academy, the existing shortage of patrol vehicles will become even more pronounced. Reliable, fully equipped patrol vehicles are essential to training, deployment, and the overall effectiveness of our enforcement mission on Hawai‘i Island.

For these reasons, I strongly support SB2756 and the proposed appropriation to modernize and expand the DOCARE fleet. This investment is critical to officer safety, operational readiness, and the continued protection of Hawai'i's natural and cultural resources.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Roxanne O'Neal
Conservation and Resource Enforcement Officer
Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement (DOCARE)

SB-2756

Submitted on: 3/18/2026 11:35:51 AM

Testimony for EEP on 3/19/2026 9:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Klayton Kubo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support

SB-2756

Submitted on: 3/18/2026 3:52:03 PM

Testimony for EEP on 3/19/2026 9:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Micah Stevens	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Micah K. M. Stevens, and I am a Conservation and Resources Enforcement Officer with the State of Hawai‘i, Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE), Hawai‘i Island Branch. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB2756.

Through my experience in the field, I have seen firsthand the challenges associated with enforcing Hawai‘i’s natural resource laws. The areas we patrol are often remote, expansive, and difficult to access, requiring significant time, coordination, and resources. Effective enforcement is critical to protecting our natural and cultural resources, yet current limitations can hinder our ability to respond appropriately and deter violations.

SB2756 provides necessary support to strengthen enforcement capabilities and improve compliance. Measures such as this help ensure that officers are better equipped to carry out their duties safely and effectively while holding violators accountable. Increased accountability and clearer enforcement authority ultimately contribute to the long-term protection and sustainability of Hawai‘i’s resources.

Additionally, the presence of strong enforcement tools serves as a deterrent. When individuals understand that violations will be addressed appropriately, it promotes greater respect for the law and helps preserve these resources for future generations.

From an operational standpoint, legislation like SB2756 supports officers in making timely decisions in the field and reduces ambiguity when taking enforcement action. This is especially important in dynamic situations where immediate judgment is required.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass SB2756. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued support of resource protection and enforcement in Hawai‘i.

Respectfully,
Micah K. M. Stevens