



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

‘Ōlelo Hō‘ike ‘Aha Kau Kānāwai

TESTIMONY IN POSITION OF SENATE BILL SB2781 SD1

RELATING TO LEI

Ke Kōmike ‘Aha Kenekoa o ka ‘Oihana Kālepa a me ka Ho‘omalū Mea Kemu
(Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection)

Ke Kōmike ‘Aha Kenekoa o ke Ki‘ina Hana a me nā Kumuwaiwai
(Senate Committee on Ways and Means)

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

Malaki 3, 2026

10:16 AM

Lumi 211

Aloha e Chair Keohokalole and Vice Chair Fukunaga, and Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and Members of the Committees on Commerce and Consumer Protection and Ways and Means:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) submits this testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB2781 SD1**, which requires the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to convene a working group to gather data and conduct a comprehensive study of Hawai‘i’s floriculture industry, including the production and sourcing of lei materials. OHA supports this measure because lei are not merely commercial products; they are living expressions of cultural relationship that connect land, people, and ceremony across generations.

The lei is a cultural practice deeply rooted in Native Hawaiian tradition, used in ceremony, celebration and daily expressions of aloha. The growing use of imported materials in lei-making, while marketing these products with Hawaiian language and imagery risks misleading consumers and eroding the cultural integrity of this practice. Supporting locally grown and assembled lei helps safeguard authenticity, protects cultural practitioners, and reinforces the intergenerational transmission of ‘ike associated with gathering, cultivating, and preparing lei materials.¹

¹ See Mary Kawena Pukui, Samuel H. Elbert & Esther T. Mookini, *Place Names of Hawai‘i* xv–xvii (rev. ed. 1974) (describing cultural significance of plant gathering and lei traditions in Hawaiian practice); Nona Beamer, *Nā Lei Makamae: The Treasured Lei* 1–5 (1996).

Hawai‘i imports a significant percentage of its agricultural products for both food and lei-making, making local production capacity, supply chains, and land allocation matters of cultural, economic, and food system resilience.² Supporting local lei production not only protects cultural practices, but also sustains small farms, reduces dependence on imports, and reinforces rural economic stability.

Requiring data collection regarding local production capacity lays the groundwork for informed policy decisions to promote fair labeling, protect intellectual and cultural integrity. OHA supports this approach as a data-driven step toward strengthening Hawai‘i’s floriculture sector, advancing food security goals, while honoring the cultural significance of lei as a practice of relationship to ‘āina and community. OHA urges the committees to **PASS SB2781 SD1**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

² See Univ. of Hawai‘i Econ. Research Org., *Hawai‘i’s Local Food Systems: Strengthening Resilience and Economic Stability* 3–7 (2023); Haw. Dep’t of Agric., *Hawai‘i Agriculture Facts & Figures 2022*, at 2–4.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



LATE

SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i
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**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON WAYS AND MEANS
AND COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION**

**TUESDAY MARCH 3, 2026
10:16 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 211 & VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2781, SD1
RELATING TO LEI**

Chairs Dela Cruz and Keohokalole, Vice Chairs Moriwaki and Fukunaga and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to Senate Bill No. 2781, SD1 Relating to Lei. This bill requires the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to convene a working group that shall identify, gather, and report on any existing studies or assessments conducted or data assembled by the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity or University of Hawaii on flower farms, lei materials, and the capacity of local floriculture to meet public and private demand; conduct a study of the State's floriculture industry; and submit a report to the Legislature. Sunsets the working group on 6/30/2027.

The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (Department) supports this measure and offers comments. The Department agrees that support in the form of data collection, market research and branding of locally grown flowers for lei is essential to protect and provide the information the lei industry can rely on when making business decisions regarding increasing production to achieve a profitable business.

The Department requests that the working group would be enhanced with a member from the Hawaii Tourism Authority and the Air Cargo Association of Hawaii.

Should the measure be enacted the Department requests \$50,000 for outreach and additional staffing in the Agricultural Development Division.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



Hawai'i State Senate
Committees on Commerce and Consumer Protection
& Ways and Means
SB2781, SD1 – Relating to Lei

RE: Comments on SB2781, SD1

March 3, 2026

Hawaiian Council the following comments for SB2781, SD1. The original draft of the bill advanced consumer education that prioritized Hawai'i's local farmers, cultural practitioners, and small businesses. While the legislature should make an informed decision, the current draft of the bill establishes an unnecessary working group that simply delays support to our local economy.

Lei is a deeply rooted cultural expression that can represent aloha, celebration, remembrance, and connection to the land. At graduations, birthdays, community events, and Opening Day, lei are a visible and meaningful part of daily life in our islands. Because of this cultural significance, it is essential that consumers have the opportunity to better understand where their lei come from and how their purchasing choices impact Hawai'i's economy.

From the humble lei lā'i to the intricate Ni'ihau shell lei, lei makers have long used the materials around them to create a vast array of lei with different meanings and complexities. Today, Hawai'i is home to about 291 floriculture and nursery operations as well as countless lei shops that rely on consistent local demand to remain viable. Lei is one of the strongest enduring symbols of Hawai'i and, to put it simply, what is a lei if it is not grown or made in Hawai'i nei?

The original version of SB2781 set up a system to provide consumers with accurate information to make informed decisions that align with their values. For residents and visitors alike, the ability to choose a locally-grown or locally-made lei is an easy way to support Hawai'i's economy, appreciate Native Hawaiian culture, and promote sustainable purchasing habits. SB2781 also encouraged state tax dollars to stay within the state economy. When multiplied across numerous agencies, schools, and organizations statewide, lei represents a significant economic opportunity. By phasing in a procurement schedule, the original draft of the bill a gradual transition such that demand can still be met by local growers and makers. SB2781 ensures that public funds, when possible, can intentionally support local farms and businesses.

SB2781, SD1 transforms the original bill, which created concrete support for our local businesses and agriculture, into a working group to gather more information on Hawai'i's floriculture industry. While we do not dismiss efforts to make an informed decision, the working group as it is currently written misunderstands the original intent of the bill and the practice of lei making generally. For

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example, surveying the number of flower farms in the state overlooks the numerous lei makers who gather their materials from somewhere other than a farm. This is also true with the study of the state's floriculture industry, which ignores the diversity of lei materials that exist that would not likely be captured by this research. A working group with misplaced parameters will not yield information that guides us forward more than the original version of this bill.

SB2781's companion bill, HB2194, clarifies the bill's support for both Grown in Hawai'i and Made in Hawai'i lei, understanding the distinction between lei made with materials from our land versus lei made with our hands. By supporting two types of labels, HB2194 creates wiggle room for local supply to catch up with local demand. Both of these classifications are important to supporting our local economy, businesses, makers, and growers.

For these reasons, Hawaiian Council respectfully urges the Committee to **PASS SB2781 and amend to its original draft**. Mahalo for your commitment to supporting Native Hawaiian culture, agriculture, and local lei makers.

Mālama pono,

Madelyn McKeague
Director of Advocacy
Hawaiian Council

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March 3, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

TESTIMONY ON SB 2781, SD1
RELATING TO LEI

Conference Room 211 & Videoconference
10:16 AM

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawai'i's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate, and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

The Hawai'i Farm Bureau supports SB 2781, SD1, which requires the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to convene a working group to identify, gather, and report on existing studies or assessments conducted or data assembled by the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity or the University of Hawai'i on flower farms, lei materials, and the capacity of local floriculture to meet public and private demand; conduct a study of the State's floriculture industry; and submit a report to the Legislature.

Lei are deeply rooted in Hawai'i's cultural traditions and represent an important agricultural product for many local flower growers and lei makers. Supporting locally grown and assembled lei strengthens our floriculture industry, sustains family farms, and reinforces the cultural and economic value of Hawai'i-grown products.

HFB appreciates the Committee's transition of this measure to a working group model. A collaborative, data-driven approach will help ensure that any future policy recommendations reflect production capacity, seasonality, labor availability, and overall market realities. Bringing together growers, lei makers, retailers, and other stakeholders allows for thoughtful development of practical solutions that strengthen local agriculture while remaining workable for businesses across the supply chain.

HFB looks forward to participating in this effort and working collaboratively to support Hawai'i's floriculture industry in a sustainable and economically viable manner.

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

SB-2781-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 3:49:24 AM

Testimony for CPN on 3/3/2026 10:16:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leimomi Khan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I respectfully submit testimony in strong support of S.B. No. 2781, S.D. 1, relating to lei.

For me, this measure is not abstract policy—it is deeply personal. Like many families in Hawai‘i, mine marks life’s milestones with lei. Graduations, birthdays, retirements, welcoming loved ones home—each occasion is made more meaningful by the giving and receiving of lei. It is how we show aloha, pride, and connection.

In recent years, however, I have personally felt the rising cost of lei. Graduation season, in particular, has become financially stressful for many families. The price of fresh, locally made lei has increased significantly, reflecting higher costs for land, labor, water, transportation, and imported inputs. At the same time, imported or manufactured alternatives—often marketed with Hawaiian names and imagery—are widely available and sometimes less expensive. Families are left choosing between affordability and authenticity.

This dynamic places strain not only on consumers, but on the cultural practice itself. Lei are not meant to become luxury items accessible only to those who can afford premium prices. When locally grown lei become scarce or cost-prohibitive, and imported or artificial products fill the gap, we risk eroding the connection between lei and the ‘āina from which they come. That connection is foundational to Native Hawaiian cultural practice.

The lei is more than a product; it is a living expression of ‘ike passed down through generations—knowledge of plants, seasons, places, and protocol. If local growers cannot remain viable, and if lei makers cannot reliably access locally grown materials, we risk losing not only farms and small businesses but also cultural knowledge that cannot be easily restored.

S.B. No. 2781 SD1 offers a thoughtful and necessary first step. By directing the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to convene a working group and conduct a comprehensive study of the State’s floriculture industry, the Legislature is recognizing that we need clear, accurate data before crafting further policy solutions. We must understand:

- How many flower and lei-material farms remain and where they are located;
- Whether local production can meet public and private demand;
- What barriers are driving up costs for growers; and

- What resources, incentives, and infrastructure are needed to sustain this sector.

The inclusion of stakeholders from the Department, the University of Hawaii at Manoa College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience, the Hawaii Farm Bureau, the Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association, and representatives of the florist and lei-making industries ensures that this effort will be informed by those directly experiencing these challenges.

From a personal standpoint, I want my children—and future generations—to grow up in a Hawai‘i where giving a lei made from locally grown flowers remains a normal, accessible, and culturally grounded practice. I do not want lei to become detached from the land, reduced to imported materials packaged with Hawaiian branding but lacking local roots.

By studying our floriculture industry and identifying barriers and opportunities, this bill lays the groundwork for policies that can stabilize supply, support local growers, improve transparency in sourcing, and ultimately help keep locally made lei both available and affordable.

Lei are woven from more than flowers; they are woven from identity, memory, and place. Protecting the systems that sustain them is essential to protecting Native Hawaiian cultural practice itself.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to pass S.B. No. 2781, S.D. 1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

SB-2781-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 11:12:10 PM

Testimony for CPN on 3/3/2026 10:16:00 AM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Comment 2781 SB RELATING TO LEI.

UHM STUDENTS UNDERTAKE SB 2781?