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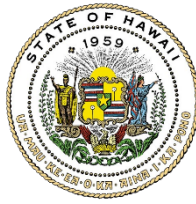
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OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

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April 2, 2026

SB2919 SD1 HD1: RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

Chair Todd, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee on Finance:

The Office of the Public Defender (OPD) **strongly supports SB2919 SD1 HD1**. This measure seeks to add a Deputy Public Defender III position to the Office of the Public Defender, provided that the position be assigned as needed to provide counsel on constitutional and related legal matters.

The OPD is a statewide agency with branches on O'ahu, Maui (servicing Maui, Lana'i and Moloka'i), Kaua'i, and Hawai'i (Kona and Hilo). The mission of the OPD is to fulfill the State's obligation to provide legal counsel for indigent persons who are charged with a criminal offense or to other persons who have been statutorily afforded counsel. The representation provided by the OPD is required by the constitution, statute and rule to be zealous and effective. Last year the OPD's 102 attorneys handled 34,363 cases – this included parole matters, involuntary civil commitment cases, appeals, traffic cases, petty misdemeanor cases, misdemeanor cases, felony cases and murder cases, an average of 337 cases per attorney.¹ In order to provide constitutionally effective representation, attorneys must be apprised of all direct and collateral legal consequences of cases. For example, many charges may have convictions which have constitutional, civil or statutory ramifications in addition to the direct legal penalties. More importantly, other cases may have

¹ The majority of cases handled by the OPD are traffic, petty misdemeanor and misdemeanor cases in the district courts. The 102 attorneys includes 9 supervisors and the Assistant Public Defender. Generally supervisors carry a lower case load due their administrative duties. The additional caveat to the per-attorney count is that this average assumes that all 102 positions are filled when, in fact, the OPD generally has vacancies which would increase the per-attorney case count.

immigration consequences which must be taken into consideration when resolving the case. Despite the fact that the OPD is a statewide office, the OPD has no attorneys who are assigned to provide assistance to attorneys statewide in immigration matters. All currently available attorney positions at the office are necessary to provide representation in trial and appellate matters. Padilla and the Hawai'i cases that followed (Najera and Araiza) were decided in a time when there was more certainty regarding the immigration consequences of convictions. Under the current federal administration, laws, regulations regarding immigration consequences and the interpretations and implementation thereof are moving targets. As it stands now, the OPD relies upon advice from outside agencies, such as the Hawai'i Immigrant Justice Center, or from the experience or research into immigration issues by other attorneys in the office, to wade through the complex area of immigration law. HB2600 would allow the OPD to dedicate a single position to focus on immigration law as it relates to the criminal cases handled by the OPD attorneys. Under Padilla, Najera and Araiza, the OPD has a "clear duty" to provide adequate and accurate advice to its clients regarding immigration consequences. SB2919 SD1 would provide an attorney position so that the OPD can fulfil the mandates of Padilla, Najera and Araiza in the course of fulfilling its constitutionally and statutorily mandated mission of providing indigent persons with representation in criminal matters

The position allocated by SB2919 SD1 HD1 will be used to provide statewide advice and assistance on all constitutional and related legal matters and collateral issues that affect the clients of the OPD, most significantly on immigration issues. The attorney filling this position will be required to keep themselves apprised of the rapidly changing legal landscape in issues that affect the clients of the OPD to ensure that attorneys statewide provide effective and competent representation.

The OPD strongly supports SB2919 SD1 HD1. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure.



HIPHI Board

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Department of Pediatrics

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University of Hawai'i at Hilo

Dina Shek, JD
Medical-Legal Partnership
For Children in Hawai'i

JoAnn Tsark, MPH
John A. Burns School of Medicine, Native
Hawaiian Research Office

Danette Wong Tomiyasu, MBA
Retired, Hawai'i State Department of
Health

HIPHI Initiatives

Coalition for a
Tobacco-Free Hawai'i

Community-Based Research &
Evaluation

Community Health
Worker Initiatives

Environmental Health

Hawai'i Climate Change and Health
Working Group

Hawai'i Drug & Alcohol-Free Coalitions

Hawai'i Immunization Coalition

Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition

Hawai'i Public Health Training Hui

Healthy Eating + Active Living

Kūpuna Collective/Healthy Aging &
Community Living

Public Health Workforce Development

Date: April 1, 2026

To: Representative David A. Tarnas, Chair
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

Re: Support for SB 2919 SD1 HD1, Relating to Law Enforcement

Hrg: April 2, 2026 at 2:00 PM in Conference Room 325

Hawai'i Public Health Institute¹ (HIPHI) supports SB 2919 SD1 HD1, which adds a deputy public defender position.

Hawai'i's Office of the Public Defender (OPD) does not have any staff dedicated to immigration matters and rely on advice from outside agencies. To ensure our residents are fully aware of the impacts of their case, it's important we provide OPD with a staff capable of providing guidance.

Current OPD Staff Needed in Other Matters

In 2025, the 102 attorneys on staff handled 34,363 cases. That's nearly one new case per day per attorney. The increase in need around immigration cases can not be added to the existing attorneys' already full plate.

People Need to Know What's Going On

Only 2% of federal criminal cases go to trial, with 90% of defendants pleading guilty.² Therefore, it's absolutely essential that immigrants are fully aware of the potential impacts of a conviction.

Please provide our people with the necessary staff to support their civic rights.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nate Hix'.

Nate Hix
Director of Policy and Advocacy

¹ Hawai'i Public Health Institute's mission is to advance health and wellness for the people and islands of Hawai'i. We do this through expanding our understanding of what creates health of people and place, fostering partnerships, and cultivating programs to improve policies, systems, and the environments where people live, learn, work, age, and play.

² [Only 2% of federal criminal defendants went to trial in 2018, and most who did were found guilty.](#) Pew Research Center. June 11, 2019.



www.hicir.org | Instagram @hicir
hicoalitionforimmigrantrights@gmail.com

In Support of SB 2919 SD1 HD1

Hearing Date: April 2, 2026

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Liza Ryan-Gill, and I submit this testimony on behalf of the Hawai‘i Coalition for Immigrant Rights (HCIR) in **strong support of SB 2919 SD1 HD1**, which appropriates funds to the Office of the Public Defender for one full-time equivalent Deputy Public Defender III position.

HCIR is a statewide coalition dedicated to advancing the rights, dignity, and well-being of immigrants in Hawai‘i through advocacy, education, and community organizing. We co-lead the Campaign for Immigrant Justice: Defending Due Process for All alongside the ACLU of Hawai‘i and The Legal Clinic Hawai‘i. The communities we serve include immigrant and mixed-status families across every island — many of whom interact with the criminal justice system and face profound immigration consequences as a result.

WHY HCIR SUPPORTS THIS BILL

The constitutional right to counsel is only meaningful when public defenders have the capacity to provide genuinely effective representation. The Office of the Public Defender plays a critical role in ensuring that all individuals — regardless of income — have access to competent legal representation, a cornerstone of due process under both the United States and Hawai‘i State Constitutions. However, the office is currently understaffed relative to the volume and complexity of cases across Hawai‘i's judicial circuits. Public defenders are stretched thin, which leads to delays, increased pressure on attorneys, and real limitations on the time available for each client.

For immigrant defendants, the stakes extend far beyond sentencing. A conviction — or even a guilty plea — can trigger mandatory deportation, permanent bars to re-entry, and the loss of nearly all immigration relief options, resulting in the permanent separation of families. Effective representation requires adequate time for careful advisement and fully informed decision-making. That is difficult to achieve under excessive caseloads. Overburdened defenders may not have the capacity to fully advise each client of these severe and often irreversible consequences before critical decisions must be made.

Investing in one additional Deputy Public Defender III position is a practical, targeted step to strengthen the office's capacity, improve case outcomes, and uphold due process. Adequate staffing not only protects the rights of indigent defendants — who are disproportionately



www.hicir.org | Instagram @hicir
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immigrants and people of color — but also improves overall judicial efficiency by reducing delays and case backlogs. Fewer wrongful outcomes mean lower costs to the system downstream: fewer appeals, fewer post-conviction proceedings, and fewer families left without a breadwinner or caregiver.

THE FINANCE COMMITTEE'S ROLE

The policy case for this bill has already been affirmed by both the Senate and House Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs committees. The Finance Committee's role is to confirm that this is a sound and necessary appropriation — and it is. This position is modest in cost and significant in impact. The return on investment is clear: more time per client, more complete advisement on immigration consequences, stronger protection of due process rights, and a more efficient judicial system for all of Hawai'i's residents.

For these reasons, the Hawai'i Coalition for Immigrant Rights respectfully urges the Committee to pass SB 2919 SD1 HD1 and fully fund this position.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Liza Ryan-Gill

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE ON PRISONS

P.O. Box 37158, Honolulu, HI 96837-0158

Phone/E-Mail: (808) 927-1214 / kat.caphi@gmail.com

Today's Inmate; Tomorrow's Neighbor



COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Thursday, April 2, 2026

2:00 PM

Room 325 and VIDEOCONFERENCE

STRONG SUPPORT FOR SB 2919 SD1, HD1 - OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi and Members of the Committee!

My name is Kat Brady and I am the Coordinator of Community Alliance on Prisons, a community initiative promoting smart justice policies in Hawai'i for almost three decades. This testimony is respectfully offered on behalf of the 3,626 Hawai'i individuals living behind bars¹ and under the "care and custody" of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation on March 23, 2026. We are always mindful that 795 of Hawai'i's imprisoned male population are serving their sentences abroad -- thousands of miles away from their loved ones, their homes and, for the disproportionate number of incarcerated Kanaka Maoli, far, far from their ancestral lands.

Community Alliance on Prisons is in **STRONG SUPPORT FOR SB 2919 SD1, HD1** that add a Deputy Public Defender III position to the Office of the Public Defender, provided that the position be assigned as needed to provide counsel on constitutional and related legal matters.

The position funded by this measure will be used to provide statewide advice and assistance on all legal and collateral issues that affect the clients of the OPD, most significantly on immigration issues. The attorney filling this position will be required to keep themselves apprised of the rapidly changing legal landscape in issues that affect their clients to ensure that attorneys statewide provide effective and competent representation.

As we witness what is happening around the continent, we need the Office of the Public Defender now more than ever. Please pass SB 2919 SD1, HD1 to support these dedicated attorneys. Mahalo for the chance for Community Alliance on Prisons to express our deep appreciation to the Office of the Public Defender and their amazing staff!

¹ DCR Weekly Population Report, March 23, 2026

[Pop-Reports-Weekly-2026-03-23.pdf](#)



**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB2919, SD1, HD1
RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER**

House Committee on Finance

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: April 2, 2026 | Letter Date: April 1, 2026

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The Legal Clinic (TLC) strongly supports SB2919, SD1, HD1 which appropriates funding to establish an additional Deputy Public Defender position within the Office of the Public Defender. TLC is a nonprofit organization that works to advance immigrant justice in Hawai'i through immigration legal services, community education, and policy advocacy. We are committed to ensuring due process and equitable access to justice for all in Hawai'i, particularly immigrant and migrant communities who often face language barriers, economic hardship, and unfamiliarity with the legal system.

SB2919, SD1, HD1 strengthens Hawai'i's public defense capacity by supporting counsel on constitutional and related legal matters, an essential safeguard for fairness and due process. Noncitizens who come into contact with the criminal legal system face unique and often severe immigration consequences, including detention, deportation, and family separation. These individuals have a constitutional right to be informed of their legal rights and options, including the potential immigration consequences of criminal proceedings. Access to qualified, timely counsel is critical to protecting constitutional rights and ensuring individuals can make informed decisions about their cases.

SB2919, SD1, HD1 strengthens the Office of the Public Defender's staffing capacity to provide timely and effective representation. This measure is an important investment in fairness, due process, and public confidence in Hawai'i's legal system, and we urge the Committee's support.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of The Legal Clinic
and Board President Amefil Agbayani,

Christina Sablan
Community & Policy Advocate



Committee: House Committee on Finance
Hearing Date/Time: Thursday, April 2, 2026, at 2:00 PM
Place: Conference Room 308 & via Videoconference
Re: **Testimony of the ACLU of Hawai'i in SUPPORT of SB2919, SD1, HD1, Relating to the Office of the Public Defender**

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The ACLU of Hawai'i (ACLU-HI) is in **support of SB2919, SD1, HD1**, which appropriates funds for an additional full-time employee at the Office of the Public Defenders: specifically, the bill would fund a full-time attorney assigned to “provide counsel on constitutional and related legal matters.”

The ACLU of HI strongly supports SB2919, SD1, HD1 because it strengthens Hawai'i's public defense capacity by supporting counsel on constitutional and related legal matters, an essential safeguard for fairness and due process. In 2010, the United State Supreme Court held in *Padilla v. Kentucky* that criminal defense attorneys have a Sixth Amendment duty to advise noncitizen defendants about the immigration consequences of their criminal convictions. 559 U.S. 356 (2010). In doing so, the Supreme Court recognized that many criminal convictions—including misdemeanors and lesser offenses—are grounds for deportation and other severe consequences under federal immigration law.

Noncitizens who live in Hawai'i and are accused of crimes therefore have the constitutional right to receive adequate counsel when navigating decisions throughout the pendency of their cases. Adding capacity to the Public Defenders' Office helps to ensure that this constitutional right is fulfilled, and that noncitizens are informed of their legal rights and options, including the potential immigration consequences of criminal proceedings.

Finally, this measure increases the Office of the Public Defender's staffing capacity to provide timely and effective representation. This measure is an important investment in fairness, due process, and public confidence in Hawai'i's legal system, and we urge the Committee's support.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Mandy Fernandes
Policy Director
ACLU of Hawai'i

With more than 4,000 Hawaii-based members, the mission of the American Civil Liberties Union of Hawai'i is to protect the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the United States and Hawai'i State Constitutions through legislative, litigation, and public education work. The ACLU of Hawai'i is a non-partisan and private non-profit organization that provides its services at no cost to the public and does not accept government funds. The ACLU of Hawai'i has been serving our communities in Hawai'i for over 60 years.

**Testimony of HAWAII FILIPINO LAWYERS ASSOCIATION (HFLA)
In SUPPORT of SB2919 SD1 HD1**

Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: April 2, 2026

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is Wilfredo Tungol, HFLA Advocacy Chair. I submit this testimony in **strong support of SB2919 SD1 HD1**, which appropriates funds to the Office of the Public Defender for one full-time equivalent Deputy Public Defender III position.

HFLA is committed to protecting the rights of our immigrants in the criminal justice system. Providing a well-qualified public defender to an immigrant charge with possible deportable crimes assures that the individual is fully informed of his/her rights under the immigration law.

The right to counsel is a constitutional guarantee — but only meaningful when public defenders have the capacity to provide genuinely effective representation. For immigrant defendants, the stakes extend far beyond sentencing: a conviction or even a guilty plea can trigger mandatory deportation, permanent bars to re-entry, and the loss of nearly all immigration relief options. Overburdened defenders may not have adequate time to fully advise each client of these severe and often irreversible consequences before critical decisions must be made. Investing in one additional Deputy Public Defender III position is a targeted, practical step toward ensuring every client receives the constitutional representation they are entitled to.

The policy case for this bill has already been affirmed by both the Senate and House Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs committees. The Finance Committee's role is to confirm that this is a sound and necessary appropriation — and it is. Reduced caseloads mean more time per client, more complete advisement on immigration consequences, stronger protection of due process rights, and fewer wrongful outcomes for Hawai'i's most vulnerable residents. This is modest in cost and significant in impact. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this bill and send it to the floor.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Committee **PASS SB2919 SD1 HD1** and fully fund the position.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Wilfredo Tungol, HFLA Chair

808-387-7412



COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Thursday, April 2, 2026 at 2:00 pm

Conference Room 308 and Via Videoconference

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2919, SD1, HD1 - RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER.

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, Rep. Miyake and Rep. Yamashita of Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Veronica Mendoza, Founding Executive Director of Roots Reborn and a founding coalition member of El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui - The People in Action Maui. Roots Reborn **strongly supports SB 2919, SD1, HD1**, Relating to the Office of the Public Defender, which appropriates funds to the Office of the Public Defender for one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) Deputy Public Defender III position.

Roots Reborn is a grassroots, immigrant-justice and disaster-response organization serving migrant and immigrant communities on Maui and across the state. Formed after the August 2023 wildfires, our team has worked alongside families through every phase of recovery by providing aid, navigating systems, and building community trust that remains the foundation of our work today. We have grown into an organization providing pro bono immigration legal services, Know Your Rights education, and rapid response coordination for immigrant residents statewide.

Our pro bono immigration legal services work has shown us that access to legal counsel, regardless of ability to pay, strengthens families, supports community, and ensures that everyone's rights under the Constitution are protected. That is why we **support SB 2919, SD1, HD1** to add legal resources where needed and to ensure the rights of all are upheld regardless of financial circumstance.

We respectfully urge your strong **support for SB 2919, SD1, HD1**.

Sinceramente,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Veronica Mendoza', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Veronica Mendoza

Maui Roots Reborn, *Founding Executive Director*

El Pueblo en Accion Maui, *Founding Coalition Member*

RE: Letter in support of Hawai'i's Legislative Measures to Advance Immigrant Justice Across the State

March 25, 2026

Dear Member,

I am writing on behalf of the Vera Institute of Justice's Safety and Fairness for Everyone (SAFE) Network—a national network of government partners, immigration legal service providers, and advocates working together to build and implement publicly funded immigrant legal defense programs at the local and state level.ⁱ In Hawaii, we work in close partnership with The Legal Clinic (TLC), a SAFE Network member since 2025. I am writing in strong support of the following bills focused on advancing immigrant justice, due process, and community stability across the state:

- **SB2919**ⁱⁱ is an appropriations bill to increase capacity at the public defender's office, ensuring that the office can advise noncitizen clients on the potential immigration consequences of criminal charges, guilty pleas, or convictions in accordance with their constitutional rights. This will have an immense impact on the lives of immigrant Hawai'i residents as it will help ensure that they have access to effective counsel, enable them to meaningfully participate in their defense by giving them the opportunity to make informed decisions, and ultimately guarantee a fair day in court. This is especially important as escalating federal immigration enforcement actions have vastly increased the number of Hawai'i residents who face family separation and detention. Evidence shows the life-changing impact of representation:
 - detained immigrants with legal representation are **up to 10.5 times more likely to win** their cases than those without counsel; and
 - nearly **two-thirds of non-detained people with lawyers win** their cases, compared to **17 percent** of those without representation.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **HB1839 (Filipino Caucus)**^{iv} **strengthens due process protections for immigrants across the state** by requiring state and county law enforcement agencies to notify individuals in custody of their rights before any interview with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. The bill also introduces new protections, transparency requirements, and public accountability rules for how Hawai'i law enforcement may interact with ICE when a person is detained.
- **HB1870 (Filipino Caucus)**^v would help to **limit cooperation with ICE** by setting statewide standards that restrict state and county agencies and recipients of state funds from participating in civil immigration enforcement in or near protected community areas ("sensitive locations"). The bill also requires agencies that operate within these protected areas to adopt and publish written policies, conduct annual staff training, and uphold data privacy protections—setting clear limits and strengthening accountability around enforcement actions.

- **HB1886**^{vi} prohibits public employees from assisting in federal immigration enforcement and requires both state and federal law enforcement to display visible identification during public interactions, restricts the use of facial coverings,² and establishes criminal offenses for violations. It also prohibits public employees from cooperating with, assisting, or expending resources on federal immigration enforcement—helping to protect Hawai’i’s communities from attacks by faceless agents while strengthening transparency, trust, and accountability.

Especially as federal attacks against the state’s immigrant communities escalate, these legislative measures are critical to protecting the dignity, safety, and due process of all residents of Hawai’i—regardless of their immigration status. Hawai’i is **home to more than 258,800 immigrants (18 percent of the total population)**, who form an essential part of the state’s communities, culture, workforce, and overall economy. An estimated **82,000 children (92 percent)** were born in the United States. Immigrants are also foundational to Hawai’i’s workforce and overall economic strength: immigrants make up **22 percent of the state’s workforce** and contributed **\$91.3 million in combined state and local taxes** in 2023.^{vii} When immigrants thrive, Hawai’i thrives.

Yet immigrant Hawaiians’ right to due process and other fundamental constitutional protections is in significant danger. Federal enforcement actions have intensified, while cuts to federal funding have halted critical legal services for immigrant children, families, and communities.^{viii}

As of February 2026, more than 1,400 people in Hawai’i are facing deportation in immigration — people in 12 percent of those cases lack access to an attorney and are left with the near-impossible task of navigating our complex immigration system alone.^{ix} Even more people are facing fast-tracked deportations outside of the immigration court system. It is more important than ever for state and local governments to bridge these gaps through legislative measures that safeguard due process and the safety of immigrant Hawai’i residents by expanding access to immigration legal services and limiting cooperation with ICE.

The legislative measures above would protect families from permanent separation from their loved ones and communities, support workforce stability, and uphold Hawai’i’s commitment to fairness and justice. As federal attacks on immigrant communities intensify, this is a defining moment for Hawai’i. States across the country are passing similar measures, and by doing so, Hawaii would help lead the country towards a safer, fairer future.^x

By supporting these legislative measures, Hawai’i has an opportunity to become a national leader in ensuring due process, dignity, and justice for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Arisel Garcia, Senior Program Associate
Advancing Universal Representation Initiative
Vera Institute of Justice
agarcia@vera.org

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- ⁱ For more information, see Vera Institute of Justice, “The Safety & Fairness for Everyone (SAFE) Network,” <https://www.vera.org/ending-mass-incarceration/reducing-incarceration/detention-of-immigrants/advancing-universal-representation-initiative/safe-network>.
- ⁱⁱ Hawaii State Legislature (2026), SB 2919 SD1: Relating to the Office of the Public Defender, https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/measure_indiv.aspx?billtype=SB&billnumber=2919&year=2026
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ingrid V. Eagly and Steven Shafer, “A National Study of Access to Counsel in Immigration Court,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 164, no. 1 (2015), 9, <https://perma.cc/7J65-CZCM>.
- ^{iv} Hawaii State Legislature (2026), HB 1839 HD2: Relating to immigration, https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/measure_indiv.aspx?billtype=HB&billnumber=1839&year=2026
- ^v Hawaii State Legislature (2026), HB 1870: Relating to protected community locations, https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/measure_indiv.aspx?billtype=HB&billnumber=1870&year=2026
- ^{vi} Hawaii State Legislature (2026), HB 1886: Relating to government operations, https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/measure_indiv.aspx?billtype=HB&billnumber=1886&year=2026
- ^{vii} Vera, *Profile of immigrants in Hawaii* (New York: Vera, 2025), https://vera-institute.files.svcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/HI_Immigrant_Population_Profile.pdf?dm=1748632954.
- ^{viii} Laura Romero, “DOJ Orders Federally Funded Legal Service Providers to Stop Providing Support at Immigration Courts,” ABC News, January 23, 2025, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/doj-orders-federally-funded-legal-service-providers-stop/story?id=118027656>.
- ^{ix} Vera, “Immigration Court Legal Representation Dashboard,” database (New York: Vera, accessed March 5, 2026), <https://www.vera.org/ending-mass-incarceration/reducing-incarceration/detention-of-immigrants/advancing-universal-representation-initiative/immigration-court-legal-representation-dashboard>.
- ^x For example, see David Chen, “As Minneapolis Rages, Legislators Move to Restrict ICE in Their States,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/28/us/politics/minneapolis-ice-states.html>.

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April 1, 2026

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Committee on Finance
House of Representatives
33rd Legislature, State of Hawai'i

via: <http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov>

Dear Honorable Committee leadership and members,

Re: **SUPPORT FOR SB2919, SD1 HD1 RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF
THE PUBLIC DEFENDER**

DATE: Thursday, April 2, 2026
TIME: 2:00 pm
PLACE: Conference Room 308 & Videoconference
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

The purpose of this bill is to fund a new OPD III position that “shall be assigned as needed to provide counsel on constitutional and related legal matters.” Previous testimony submitted by OPD in support of this bill and its House companion further inform why this legislative action is compelling and urgent (emphasis in original):

Despite the fact that the OPD is a statewide office, the OPD has no attorneys who are assigned to provide assistance to attorneys statewide in immigration matters. All currently available attorney positions at the office are necessary to provide representation in trial and appellate matters. . . . As it stands now, the OPD relies upon advice from outside agencies, such as the Hawai'i Immigrant Justice Center, or from the experience or research into immigration issues by other attorneys in the office, to wade through the complex area of immigration law.

Please restore this bill to its original SB2919 form, including an effective date of July 1, 2026, and consider that the proposed amount of funding in SB2919 is the present budgeted annual salary only of the OPD III position. If the funding amount needs to be adjusted to account for health insurance and other benefits, please make it. SB 2919 provides (*emphasis added*):

SECTION 1. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$125,004 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) deputy public defender III position within the office of the public defender (BUF151); provided that the deputy public defender III shall be assigned as needed to provide counsel on constitutional and related legal matters.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the office of the public defender for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 2. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. Aloha.

/s/ Georgette A. Yaindl
GEORGETTE ANNE YAINDL

Law Office of Georgette A. Yaindl, LLLC
Georgette Anne Yaindl 8940
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April 1, 2026

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Committee on Finance
House of Representatives
33rd Legislature, State of Hawai'i

via: <http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov>

Dear Honorable Committee leadership and members,

Re: **SUPPORT FOR SB2919, SD1 HD1 RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF
THE PUBLIC DEFENDER**

DATE: Thursday, April 2, 2026
TIME: 2:00 pm
PLACE: Conference Room 308 & Videoconference
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

The purpose of this bill is to fund a new OPD III position that “shall be assigned as needed to provide counsel on constitutional and related legal matters.” Previous testimony submitted by OPD in support of this bill and its House companion further inform why this legislative action is compelling and urgent (emphasis in original):

Despite the fact that the OPD is a statewide office, the OPD has no attorneys who are assigned to provide assistance to attorneys statewide in immigration matters. All currently available attorney positions at the office are necessary to provide representation in trial and appellate matters. . . . As it stands now, the OPD relies upon advice from outside agencies, such as the Hawai'i Immigrant Justice Center, or from the experience or research into immigration issues by other attorneys in the office, to wade through the complex area of immigration law.

Please restore this bill to its original SB2919 form, including an effective date of July 1, 2026, and consider that the proposed amount of funding in SB2919 is the present budgeted annual salary only of the OPD III position. If the funding amount needs to be adjusted to account for health insurance and other benefits, please make it. SB 2919 provides (*emphasis added*):

SECTION 1. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$125,004 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) deputy public defender III position within the office of the public defender (BUF151); provided that the deputy public defender III shall be assigned as needed to provide counsel on constitutional and related legal matters.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the office of the public defender for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 2. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. Aloha.

/s/ Georgette A. Yaindl
GEORGETTE ANNE YAINDL

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 3:15:35 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christine L. Andrews, J.D.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I respectfully request your support of this measure.

Mahalo

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 9:37:49 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Lum	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I respectfully request that the Committee PASS SB2919 SD1 HD1 and fully fund the position.

The right to counsel is a constitutional guarantee — but only meaningful when public defenders have the capacity to provide genuinely effective representation. For immigrant defendants, the stakes extend far beyond sentencing: a conviction or even a guilty plea can trigger mandatory deportation, permanent bars to re-entry, and the loss of nearly all immigration relief options. Overburdened defenders may not have adequate time to fully advise each client of these severe and often irreversible consequences before critical decisions must be made. Investing in one additional Deputy Public Defender III position is a targeted, practical step toward ensuring every client receives the constitutional representation they are entitled to.

The policy case for this bill has already been affirmed by both the Senate and House Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs committees. The Finance Committee’s role is to confirm that this is a sound and necessary appropriation — and it is. Reduced caseloads mean more time per client, more complete advisement on immigration consequences, stronger protection of due process rights, and fewer wrongful outcomes for Hawai‘i’s most vulnerable residents. This is modest in cost and significant in impact. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this bill and send it to the floor.

Mahalo

Jen Lum, 'Ewa Beach

Testimony in SUPPORT of SB2919 SD1 HD1

Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: April 2, 2026

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is Jeremiah Brown, and I submit this testimony in **support of SB2919 SD1 HD1**, which appropriates funds to the Office of the Public Defender for one full-time equivalent Deputy Public Defender III position.

I work closely with the immigrant community and have seen the detrimental effects of a guilty plea to even the smallest of offenses. This wasn't the case under previous presidential administrations. A non-citizen with legal status who has any kind of record is often not allowed to reenter the country if they go abroad. Many times, defendants are encouraged by overburdened public defenders to take a plea deal when facing charges. It might seem like the best option at the time, but that guilty plea can effectively ban them from re-entering the country, separating families and causing unnecessary suffering. A well-staffed public defender office may help avoid such unfortunate events.

The constitutional right to counsel is only meaningful when public defenders have the capacity to provide genuinely effective representation. For immigrant defendants, the stakes of criminal cases go beyond sentencing, a conviction or even a guilty plea can trigger deportation, bars to re-entry, or loss of legal status. Overburdened public defenders may not have the time to fully advise each client of these severe and often irreversible immigration consequences before critical decisions must be made. Investing in one additional Deputy Public Defender III position is a practical, targeted step toward ensuring every client gets the representation they are constitutionally entitled to. SB2919 SD1 HD1 also reflects Hawai'i's broader commitment to equal justice. Low-income defendants, who are disproportionately immigrants and people of color, deserve the same quality of legal defense as those who can afford private counsel. Adequate staffing leads to better outcomes: more time per case, more complete advisement, and stronger protection of due process rights. The Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs is the right place to champion this investment in access to justice for all.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee **PASS SB2919 SD1 HD1** and fully fund the position. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Jeremiah Brown
Waialua, Oahu

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2026 9:37:49 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Lum	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I respectfully request that the Committee PASS SB2919 SD1 HD1 and fully fund the position.

The right to counsel is a constitutional guarantee — but only meaningful when public defenders have the capacity to provide genuinely effective representation. For immigrant defendants, the stakes extend far beyond sentencing: a conviction or even a guilty plea can trigger mandatory deportation, permanent bars to re-entry, and the loss of nearly all immigration relief options. Overburdened defenders may not have adequate time to fully advise each client of these severe and often irreversible consequences before critical decisions must be made. Investing in one additional Deputy Public Defender III position is a targeted, practical step toward ensuring every client receives the constitutional representation they are entitled to.

The policy case for this bill has already been affirmed by both the Senate and House Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs committees. The Finance Committee’s role is to confirm that this is a sound and necessary appropriation — and it is. Reduced caseloads mean more time per client, more complete advisement on immigration consequences, stronger protection of due process rights, and fewer wrongful outcomes for Hawai‘i’s most vulnerable residents. This is modest in cost and significant in impact. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this bill and send it to the floor.

Mahalo

Jen Lum, 'Ewa Beach

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 4/1/2026 9:22:25 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Thaddeus Pham	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and FIN Committee members,

As a local taxpayer concerned with public safety, I write in strong **support of SB2919 SD1 HD1**, which appropriates funds to the Office of the Public Defender for one full-time equivalent Deputy Public Defender III position.

Investing in one additional Deputy Public Defender III position is a targeted, practical step toward ensuring every client receives the constitutional representation they are entitled to. Overburdened defenders may not have adequate time to fully advise each client of these severe and often irreversible consequences before critical decisions must be made.

Reduced caseloads mean more time per client, more complete advisement on immigration consequences, stronger protection of due process rights, and fewer wrongful outcomes for Hawai'i's most vulnerable residents. This is modest in cost and significant in impact.

Please pass this bill and send it to the floor.

Mahalo,

Thaddeus Pham (he/him)

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 4/1/2026 8:18:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Judith Mura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I STRONGLY SUPPORT SB2919 SD1 HD1

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 4/1/2026 10:51:23 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Hatcher	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Representative Todd and Representative Takenouchi of the Committee on Finance,

I am writing to provide testimony IN SUPPORT of SB2919, SD1, HD1, which would appropriate funds to the Office of the Public Defender (hereafter OPD) for one full-time equivalent Deputy Public Defender III position. The OPD serves a critical role in the legal system by providing legal representation to individuals of limited means. The OPD is tasked with educating their clients on their legal rights, including the immigration consequences of the criminal proceedings they face.

As a previous immigration defense attorney, I can speak firsthand on the complicated nature of this area of law. The consequences for criminal cases are oftentimes severe and irreversible – including loss of immigration status and deportation. The attorneys of OPD would greatly benefit from an additional staff member who is knowledgeable in immigration law so they can better support their clients. The attorneys of OPD work tirelessly to represent their clients and have suffered from staffing shortages for some time now. I can think of no downside to approving these additional funds for OPD to hire another staff attorney.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony IN SUPPORT of SB2919, SD1, HD1.

Jessica Hatcher

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 4/1/2026 8:18:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Judith Mura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I STRONGLY SUPPORT SB2919 SD1 HD1

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 4/1/2026 11:47:03 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christian Marquez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is Christian Marquez, and I submit this testimony in support of SB2919 SD1 HD1, which appropriates funds to the Office of the Public Defender for one full-time equivalent Deputy Public Defender III position.

The right to counsel is a constitutional guarantee — but only meaningful when public defenders have the capacity to provide genuinely effective representation. For immigrant defendants, the stakes extend far beyond sentencing: a conviction or even a guilty plea can trigger mandatory deportation, permanent bars to re-entry, and the loss of nearly all immigration relief options. Overburdened defenders may not have adequate time to fully advise each client of these severe and often irreversible consequences before critical decisions must be made. Investing in one additional Deputy Public Defender III position is a targeted, practical step toward ensuring every client receives the constitutional representation they are entitled to.

The policy case for this bill has already been affirmed by both the Senate and House Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs committees. The Finance Committee’s role is to confirm that this is a sound and necessary appropriation — and it is. Reduced caseloads mean more time per client, more complete advisement on immigration consequences, stronger protection of due process rights, and fewer wrongful outcomes for Hawai‘i’s most vulnerable residents. This is modest in cost and significant in impact. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this bill and send it to the floor.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee PASS SB2919 SD1 HD1 and fully fund the position.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Christian Marquez

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 4/1/2026 2:22:33 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Bellamy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill because:

- For immigrant defendants, a conviction or guilty plea, even without jail time can trigger mandatory deportation. Thorough public defender counsel is a matter of immigration survival.
- Reduced caseloads mean more time per client resulting in better outcomes, fuller advisement on immigration consequences of pleas, and stronger due process protections.
- Equal justice for low-income defendants, disproportionately, immigrants and communities of color who deserve the same quality of defense as those who can afford private counsel.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 4/1/2026 2:22:33 PM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Bellamy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill because:

- For immigrant defendants, a conviction or guilty plea, even without jail time can trigger mandatory deportation. Thorough public defender counsel is a matter of immigration survival.
- Reduced caseloads mean more time per client resulting in better outcomes, fuller advisement on immigration consequences of pleas, and stronger due process protections.
- Equal justice for low-income defendants, disproportionately, immigrants and communities of color who deserve the same quality of defense as those who can afford private counsel.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2026 9:43:40 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Winternitz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Elizabeth Winternitz

In SUPPORT of SB2919 SD1 HD1

Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: April 2, 2026

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is Elizabeth Winternitz, and I submit this testimony in support of SB2919 SD1 HD1, which appropriates funds to the Office of the Public Defender for one full-time equivalent Deputy Public Defender III position.

I am lifelong Hawaii resident who cares deeply about justice, and am testifying as an individual.

The right to counsel is a constitutional guarantee — but only meaningful when public defenders have the capacity to provide genuinely effective representation. For immigrant defendants, the stakes extend far beyond sentencing: a conviction or even a guilty plea can trigger mandatory deportation, permanent bars to re-entry, and the loss of nearly all immigration relief options. Overburdened defenders may not have adequate time to fully advise each client of these severe and often irreversible consequences before critical decisions must be made. Investing in one additional Deputy Public Defender III position is a targeted, practical step toward ensuring every client receives the constitutional representation they are entitled to.

The policy case for this bill has already been affirmed by both the Senate and House Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs committees. The Finance Committee's role is to confirm that this is a sound and necessary appropriation — and it is. Reduced caseloads mean more time per client, more complete advisement on immigration consequences, stronger protection of due process rights, and fewer wrongful outcomes for Hawai'i's most vulnerable residents. This is modest in cost and significant in impact. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this bill and send it to the floor.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee PASS SB2919 SD1 HD1 and fully fund the position.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Winternitz

Kula Maui

ewinrus@gmail.com

SB-2919-HD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2026 11:33:03 AM

Testimony for FIN on 4/2/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dianne Deauna	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of DIANNE DEAUNA

In SUPPORT of SB2919 SD1 HD1

Committee on Finance

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: April 2, 2026

Dear Chair Chris Todd, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi, and members of the Committee on Finance,

My name is Dianne Deauna, and I submit this testimony in **support of SB2919 SD1 HD1**, which appropriates funds to the Office of the Public Defender for one full-time equivalent Deputy Public Defender III position.

I am testifying as an individual who was worked in community organizing and as an immigrant.

The right to counsel is a constitutional guarantee — but only meaningful when public defenders have the capacity to provide genuinely effective representation. For immigrant defendants, the stakes extend far beyond sentencing: a conviction or even a guilty plea can trigger mandatory deportation, permanent bars to re-entry, and the loss of nearly all immigration relief options. Overburdened defenders may not have adequate time to fully advise each client of these severe and often irreversible consequences before critical decisions must be made. Investing in one

additional Deputy Public Defender III position is a targeted, practical step toward ensuring every client receives the constitutional representation they are entitled to.

The policy case for this bill has already been affirmed by both the Senate and House Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs committees. The Finance Committee's role is to confirm that this is a sound and necessary appropriation — and it is. Reduced caseloads mean more time per client, more complete advisement on immigration consequences, stronger protection of due process rights, and fewer wrongful outcomes for Hawai'i's most vulnerable residents. This is modest in cost and significant in impact. I respectfully urge the Committee to pass this bill and send it to the floor.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the Committee **PASS SB2919 SD1 HD1** and fully fund the position.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Dianne Deauna

Hawai'i Filipinos for Truth, Justice and Democracy