



**TESTIMONY OF  
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA  
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026**

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**ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:**

S.B. NO. 2938, RELATING TO SEARCH AND RESCUE.

**BEFORE THE:**

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

**DATE:** Thursday, February 5, 2026      **TIME:** 3:01 p.m.

**LOCATION:** State Capitol, Room 225

**TESTIFIER(S):** Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or  
Ryan Endo, Deputy Attorney General

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Chair McKelvey and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

This bill adds a new chapter to the Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) that establishes the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor, and allows the coordinator to hire staff without regard to chapter 76, HRS.

Article V, section 6, of the Hawai'i State Constitution requires all executive and administrative offices to be placed within one of the principal departments of the Executive Branch, unless the offices are temporary and for special purposes. This bill may be subject to challenge on the basis that placing the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor raises concerns under article V, section 6. To address this issue, we recommend amending page 5, line 6, of the bill to place the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within one of the principal state departments listed in section 26-4, HRS.

The bill also allows the Coordinator to broadly hire staff without regard to Hawaii's civil service law, chapter 76, HRS. Section 76-16(b)(17)(A), HRS, limits the duration of any exemptions not identified in section 76-16(b) to three years, unless later extended by an act of the Legislature. If the Committee intends to make the Coordinator's staff permanently exempt from chapter 76, we recommend amending section 76-16(b), HRS, to identify the particular positions to be exempted.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.



# Oahu Search and Rescue

February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2026

RE: Strong support for SB2938

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee

My name is Ethan Pearson-Pomerantz, and I currently serve as President of the Board for Oahu Search and Rescue (OSAR). We are a nonprofit organization based on Oahu, who's dual mission is to provide hiking and wilderness safety education to our community, and to provide wilderness search and rescue resources at the request of Federal, State, or Country agencies, or friends and family of the missing.

Thankfully, due to an increase in hiking safety education, as well as the Honolulu Fire Department's rapid and thorough responses, the number of long term (more than 4 hours) missing hikers has had a downward trend on Oahu. However, there are still cases where a hiker goes missing and is not found during the initial search. In these cases, sometimes more resources are needed to bring the search to a successful outcome. Additionally, with a growing Kapuna population, instances of dementia driven walk aways are becoming more prevalent, with many of these cases require the same response that a missing hiker would.

There are many resources available at the Federal, State, County, and Volunteer Organization levels that can assist in situations like these should the need arise. While all the organizations have a desire and skillset to assist, having a singular point of collection of organizations, standards, organization, and skills and qualifications, is essential to achieving a positive outcome in a missing person case, specifically in the wilderness environment, but in other areas as well.

This is why Oahu Search and Rescue supports SB2938 and its companion House bill. A State Search and Rescue Coordinator would have the authority, funding, and jurisdiction to ensure all organizations and agencies within the state are available to be utilized when the need arises. This position is a standard one in almost all other States, and years of historical data show that having a robust and interconnected network of independent Search and Rescue resources, overseen by a single entity for standards and mutual aid requests, consistently leads to better search outcomes.

Thank you.

Ethan Pearson-Pomerantz  
President of the Board  
Oahu Search and Rescue

"May they always come home"



HAWAI'I WING HEADQUARTERS  
CIVIL AIR PATROL  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE AUXILIARY  
419 Lele St.  
Honolulu, HI 96819



4 February 2026

**TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2938  
RELATING TO SEARCH AND RESCUE**

**TESTIMONY TO:  
SENATOR ANGUS MCKELVEY, CHAIR  
SENATOR MIKE GABBARD, VICE CHAIR  
MEMBERS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

**BY:  
COLONEL DANA MCLAUGHLIN  
COMMANDER, HAWAI'I WING, CIVIL AIR PATROL**

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Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT** of SB 2938, Relating to Search and Rescue.

For over 80 years, the Civil Air Patrol ("CAP"), an auxiliary of the United State Air Force, has provided critical services to the State of Hawai'i in times of emergencies. The Hawai'i Wing has worked closely with emergency management agencies in all four counties and with the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency and has conducted missions including, but not limited to: Search and rescue, damage assessments, aerial photographs of impacted areas, alerts and notifications, and transportation of supplies.

When emergencies occur, efficiency is paramount to ensure the expediency of our response. To accomplish this, it is our experience that pre-planned coordination between agencies is required. For this reason, we support the intent of this bill which would create a coordinator position within the Office of the Governor, who would facilitate inter-agency emergency response and rescue efforts. This is especially relevant in situations where local emergency responders are overwhelmed and require additional resources from other counties, and specialized support from the state, including the Civil Air Patrol.

The duties of the SAR coordinator within the Office of the Governor should focus on pre-planning efforts with a systematic approach to identifying hazards, assessing risks, and developing actionable response strategies across and between agencies, prior to an emergency.

However we respectfully offer a critical clarification to ensure this bill creates an effective office. The proposed role of the SAR Coordinator, as currently described, risks becoming an operation bottleneck by conflating coordination with operational command and training oversight. A more effective, proven model, is to define the State SAR Coordinator as a strategic administrator and

force multiplier, not an operational section chief, or responsible for conducting training in any jurisdiction. The core responsibilities should be:

1. **Maintain a Statewide SAR Resource and Certification Database:** The Coordinators's primary tool should be a real-time directory of currently certified SAR resources across counties and agencies. The coordinator should understand the specific capabilities, limitation and certification types in order to enable intelligent resource deployment.
2. **Authorize Mutual-aid and Inter-agency Response:** The Coordinator's main action role should be to facilitate the swift movement of resources across jurisdictions. Their deep knowledge of the database allows them to advise: "For this missing hiker on O'ahu's steep terrain, Team A from Maui has the relevant advanced technical certification, while Team B has a general wilderness certification." This approach ensures that the requesting agency gets the right type of assistance.
3. **Understand Pre-Plans and Anticipate Interactions:** The Coordinator in the Office of the Governor should be the central repository for geographic and scenario-specific response pre-plans. This creates institutional memory across agencies and is invaluable for improving future response.

On the Critical Issue of Training: Training standards and certifications must remain the responsibility of the individual counties, agencies and departments. The SAR Coordinators office should be a consumer of that data, not the entity delivering that training. This preserves local control, acknowledges existing expertise, and allows the state office to focus on it's core mission: knowing who has what, and getting them where they are needed most efficiently.

In summary, we strongly recommend amending the bill to remove the responsibility of training and reframing the role to a coordinating administrator and intelligence hub. Mahalo for your consideration, we stand react to support the creation of an effective SAR coordination system that truly serves all of Hawai'i.

Thank you,

[Col. Dana McLaughlin](#)  
Hawaii Wing Commander

**Civil Air Patrol, U.S. Air Force Auxiliary**



**SB-2938**

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 3:25:29 PM

Testimony for GVO on 2/5/2026 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rosemarie Johnson	Testifying for Hawaii SAR Alliance	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit comments and testimony.

I am speaking today on behalf of the Hawai‘i SAR Alliance, a collaborative effort that for the past five years has brought together multiple agencies, teams, and organizations that conduct Search and Rescue across the State of Hawai‘i.

On August 2, 2024, more than one hundred Search and Rescue professionals and national subject-matter experts participated in a virtual symposium focused on best practices and SAR system development. Local experts representing all relevant state agencies were in attendance.

Through that process, participants identified systemic gaps, defined the challenges facing Hawai‘i’s SAR system, and began working toward coordinated, solution-focused approaches tailored to the unique needs of our state.

Today, we stand in stornq support of SB2938 as written.

With respect to the brief “quick reference” description displayed on the bill’s overview page in the Capitol portal, the third sentence, as currently written, has prompted questions from agency partners—specifically regarding the use of the word “designates,” which may be interpreted as assigning authority rather than facilitating coordination.

To help avoid confusion and to ensure the intent of the bill is clearly reflected, we respectfully request consideration of a minor wording clarification to the third sentence. Specifically, we suggest:

- Using the phrase “coordinates inter-agency”
- Removing “designates participating agencies and their duties”
- Including reference to mutual aid response

For clarity, the suggested language would read:

*Establishes the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor. Provides for the authority and duties of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator. **Coordinates inter-agency search and rescue communications, operations, mutual aid response, and training.** Establishes the*

*Search and Rescue Special Fund. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.*

Rather than:

*Establishes the Office of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator within the Office of the Governor. Provides for the authority and duties of the State Search and Rescue Coordinator. **Designates participating agencies and their duties with regard to state search and rescue operations and training.** Establishes the Search and Rescue Special Fund. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.*