

SB-3191

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 11:02:20 AM

Testimony for GVO on 2/17/2026 3:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Allison Schaefer	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SB 3191

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Allison Schaefer, and I am submitting testimony in strong support of SB 3191. I serve as the lead writer of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan and as a bereaved parent volunteer with the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition. My daughter, Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer, drowned in a flooded Pearl City detention basin in 2004. Since then, I have dedicated my life to preventing other families from experiencing the same loss.

SB 3191 represents the most significant structural reform Hawai‘i has considered in decades. The 2025 Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, which contains data from the state Department of Health (DOH) and recommendations from the broad spectrum of Hawai‘i's water safety community, documents a statewide drowning crisis. Gov. Josh Green called the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan a roadmap to saving lives, and we need to save lives in Hawai‘i, which has the second-highest resident drowning rate in the nation. Drowning remains the leading cause of death for children ages one to fifteen. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children drown at three times the rate of other groups. Visitors make up the majority of drowning fatalities, placing both lives and Hawai‘i’s visitor industry at risk. These deaths are preventable, but Hawai‘i lacks the coordinated leadership, authority, and resources needed to address the problem at scale.

The Water Safety Plan’s first and most urgent recommendation is the creation of a statewide authority for drowning prevention. SB 3191 fulfills this recommendation by establishing a Department of Water Safety and Drowning Prevention with the mandate to lead statewide strategic planning, integrate programs across DOE, DOH, DLNR, counties, and community partners, restore and expand learn-to-swim and water safety education, strengthen lifeguard staffing and training pipelines, improve access to pools and aquatic facilities, reestablish and support the Water Safety Task Force, and modernize signage, risk communication, and visitor safety systems. These are the long-standing structural gaps that have contributed directly to preventable deaths.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan (HWSP) makes clear that Hawai‘i’s current system is fragmented and under-resourced. DOH’s drowning prevention work has been chronically understaffed. The Water Safety Task Force has not convened in years. DOE has not scaled in-school water safety lessons despite drowning being the leading cause of child death. Counties

lack unified standards, staffing pipelines, and shared resources. A statewide department is not redundant. It is the essential infrastructure required to save lives.

SB 3191 is the structural backbone required to implement the HWSP's 100+ recommendations and to finally reverse Hawai'i's drowning trends. SB 3191 is the mechanism Hawai'i needs to implement the Water Safety Plan, reduce preventable deaths, and build a safer future for every community in our islands. I urge you to pass this bill.

My daughter Sharkey died because basic safety measures were not in place. No agency had clear responsibility for preventing the conditions that led to her death. For twenty years, I have worked to close those gaps. SB 3191 meaningfully addresses the systemic failures that continue to put our keiki, kupuna, residents, and visitors at risk every day. This bill honors the lives lost and protects the lives ahead.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass SB 3191, which is an act of collective heroism. Mahalo for your consideration and for your commitment to saving lives. Drowning is preventable so let's save lives together.

This bill is so important that if I could testify in person, I would. Instead, I'll be joining you on Zoom from the National Drowning Prevention Alliance Conference in Colorado Springs, where I am representing Hawai'i on four panels.

Allison Schaefer, lead writer, Hawai'i Water Safety Plan, bereaved parent volunteer, Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition, and most importantly Sharkey's mom.

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SB-3191

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 7:59:48 PM

Testimony for GVO on 2/17/2026 3:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ron Bregman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Senate Bill 3191 is a critical and monumental step towards water safety and drowning prevention for the entire state of Hawai'i. I personally and professionally support this and all other efforts to mitigate this globally-recognized threat to the welfare of both residents of and visitors to our islands.

Ron Bregman

Aquatics Director and Chief Lifeguard

Marine Corps Base Hawai'i