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**Testimony of
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
Acting Chairperson**

**Before the House Committee on
WATER AND LAND**

**Thursday, April 16, 2026
9:00 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 411**

**In consideration of
SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 129
RELATING TO URBAN TREE CANOPY**

Senate Concurrent Resolution 129 reaffirms support for expanding programs and projects that increase tree canopy coverage and plant shade trees in urban areas to help reduce the effects of urban heat islands across the state. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) strongly supports this resolution.**

Urban heat is an escalating problem caused by widespread pavement, roads, concrete structures, and other surfaces that absorb heat. It disproportionately affects kūpuna, keiki, and communities with minimal tree cover. Currently, Hawai'i faces more frequent extreme heat and intense rainfall, which puts additional pressure on our infrastructure.

Urban trees represent a proven, cost-effective infrastructure solution that tackles these issues. Tree canopies help lower temperatures, enhance air quality, and promote public health. Trees and healthy soils are crucial for stormwater management—they catch and slow rainfall, increase infiltration, and reduce runoff that can overwhelm drainage systems and carry pollutants to nearshore waters. These benefits are vital in mauka areas, where erosion conditions directly affect reefs, fisheries, and coastal resources.

The State has already demonstrated leadership in this area. Department programs, including the Kaulunani Urban and Community Forestry Program and its pilot projects, Shade Trees for Schools and Community Coconut, provide successful models for coordinated investment, community partnerships, and long-term stewardship of urban forests. Expanding these efforts is essential to addressing gaps in tree canopy coverage.

This work reflects Hawai'i's traditional ahupua'a system, which managed water and resources from mauka to makai through living systems that slowed, absorbed, and filtered rainfall. Reinvesting in tree canopy and healthy soils is a modern application of these principles.

The Department promotes coordinated statewide efforts to evaluate heat and canopy conditions, identify high-need areas, and incorporate tree planting and green infrastructure into planning and capital improvements.

We also highlight the significance of "right tree, right place, right care" to promote long-term advantages and reduce risks. Treating trees and healthy soils as infrastructure requires planning, funding, and maintaining them in tandem with traditional stormwater systems.

Recent storms have demonstrated that areas with many impermeable surfaces tend to face more flooding and water quality problems. Green infrastructure can help lower these risks. Increasing tree canopy coverage is not only an effective way to reduce heat but also an essential part of building climate resilience.

The Department is prepared to collaborate with partners to promote these efforts statewide.

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



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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 14, 2026

To: Representative Mark J. Hashem, Chair
Representative Dee Morikawa, Vice Chair
Members of the House Committee on Water and Land

Re: Support for SCR 129, Affirming Support for the Expansion of Programs and
Projects That Increase Tree Canopy Coverage and Install Shade Trees in
Urban Areas to Mitigate the Effects of Urban Heat Islands Across the State

Hrg: April 16, 2026, 9:00 AM, Conference Room 411

Hawai'i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)¹ and the Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL)² are in **support of SCR 129**, which affirms support for the expansion of tree canopy programs to address urban heat islands across Hawai'i.

Hawai'i is experiencing hotter days and nights, with urban areas such as Honolulu, Kahului, and parts of the leeward coasts bearing the brunt of rising temperatures due to the urban heat island effect. Dense development, dark pavement, and limited vegetation cause these areas to heat up more during the day and cool down less at night, increasing the risk of heat stress, especially for kūpuna, keiki, outdoor workers, and low-income households without access to air conditioning. Expanding urban tree canopies is a proven, cost-effective method of cooling neighborhoods, improving health, and supporting climate resilience.³

SCR 129/SR 121 advances the Hawai'i Physical Activity and Nutrition (PAN) Plan 2030, which calls for policy, systems, and environmental changes to support active living and health equity.⁴ Objective 6 of the plan is to "increase by 50 miles the total miles of low-stress pedestrian infrastructure including, but not limited to, sidewalks and trails," and one of the identified strategies is to "develop policies to encourage shade tree planting, to increase canopy cover, on high-volume

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 The Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) Coalition, formerly known as the Obesity Prevention Task Force, was created by the legislature in 2012 and is comprised of over 60 statewide organizations. The HEAL Coalition works to make recommendations to reshape Hawai'i's school, work, community, and health care environments, making healthier lifestyles obtainable for all Hawai'i residents.

³ ["Urban tree canopy has greater cooling effects in socially vulnerable communities in the US"](#), Weiqi Zhou, 2021.

⁴ [Hawai'i Physical Activity and Nutrition \(PAN\) Plan 2030](#).



pedestrian corridors and trails.” By expanding shade tree programs in urban areas, this resolution operationalizes that objective.

From a public health and built environment perspective, shaded, tree-lined streets and parks encourage physical activity by making it more comfortable to walk, bike, and play outside. People are more likely to choose active transportation to get to school, work, or transit when routes are pleasant, shaded, and perceived as safe, which contributes to lower rates of chronic disease and supports mental well-being.⁵

By affirming strong support for urban tree canopy expansion, the legislature can send a clear signal that trees are not just amenities, but vital infrastructure to address a warming future in Hawai‘i. This resolution will support community-based organizations, schools, and neighborhood groups already working on the ground to plant and care for trees, while positioning the state to develop interagency partnerships to establish tree canopies in heat-stressed areas to bolster our efforts to strengthen climate regulation and heat mitigation.⁶

For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to adopt this resolution. Expanding tree canopies and shade trees in urban areas is a practical way to reduce urban heat islands, protect public health, and build climate resilience for all residents of Hawai‘i.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kris Coffield".

Kris Coffield
Policy and Advocacy Associate

⁵ [“Street-level neighborhood greenery linked to active transportation: A case study in Milwaukee and Green Bay”](#), WI, USA, Wei-Lun Tsai, Landscape and Urban Planning, Vol. 191, 2019.

⁶ [“The Effects of Historical Housing Policies on Resident Exposure to Intra-Urban Heat: A Study of 108 US Urban Areas”](#), Jeremy Hoffman, Climate, 2020.

SCR-129

Submitted on: 4/13/2026 4:38:59 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/16/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ted Bohlen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT!