



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**

KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI  
A HO'OMĀKA'IKAI

**BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT DIVISION**

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Statement of  
**Dennis T. Ling**  
Administrator

Business Development and Support Division  
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism  
before the

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS**

Monday, March 30, 2026  
1:00 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 224

In consideration of

**SCR169**

**ESTABLISHING A SISTER-STATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE OF  
HAWAII, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE PREFECTURE OF  
YAMAGATA, JAPAN.**

Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee. The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports **SCR 169**, which seeks to establish the Hawai'i–Yamagata Sister-State relationship.

Yamagata Prefecture and the State of Hawai'i share many similarities in agriculture, food production, manufacturing, sustainability, and rural revitalization. Our regions also share core economic development priorities, including sustainable tourism, workforce development, food security, clean energy and climate resilience, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

From an economic perspective, a formal sister-state relationship would create new opportunities for bilateral collaboration. Expanded engagement with Yamagata Prefecture can strengthen Hawai'i's economy through increased visitor travel, business and educational exchanges, and cultural tourism. Sister-state partnerships often support sector-specific trade and investment, including agricultural exports, food product

innovation, and joint research initiatives—areas where both Hawai'i and Yamagata have complementary strengths. Enhanced government-to-government and business-to-business cooperation can also facilitate workforce training partnerships, exchange programs, and innovation in sustainability and clean energy technologies.

The Hawai'i Yamagata Kenjin Kai has been instrumental in laying the foundation for this relationship, maintaining longstanding engagement through cultural exchanges, programs, and reciprocal visits that consistently generate community, cultural, and economic benefits.

DBEDT welcomes the opportunity to explore expanded collaborative activities with the Yamagata Prefectural Government and the local Kenjin Kai to advance shared economic goals and strengthen ties between our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

YAMAGATA PREFECTURE

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山形県

Dear Mr. Josh Green,  
The Governor of the State of Hawaii

I hope this letter finds you well and that all your affairs are prospering during this time.

On behalf of Yamagata Prefectural Government, I would like to respectfully express thankfulness for the conclusion of the agreement between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture.

Over the years, exchanges in the fields of education and academia have been carried out between institutions in Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture. Building upon this foundation, in 2015 we conducted our first full-scale promotional campaign in Hawaii for our premium rice brand, Tsuyahime. Since then, we have steadily strengthened our ties not only with members of the Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai, but also with local distributors and consumers.

In 2025, we proudly marked the 10th anniversary of the launch of Tsuyahime sales in Hawaii. To commemorate this significant milestone, we held the anniversary reception in Hawaii, where many distinguished guests joined us in reflecting upon the progress achieved over the past decade. We were also honored to welcome President Ronald D. Kouchi of the Hawaii State Senate and representatives of Leeward Community College to Yamagata. During their visit, they experienced our prefecture's rich culinary culture and natural environment, and engaged in meaningful exchanges with local farmers, chefs, and residents.

Furthermore, in November of last year, Shonai Town in Yamagata Prefecture officially signed a friendship city agreement with the City and County of Honolulu, reflecting the steady expansion of exchanges between our communities.

In this context, I am sincerely grateful for the support expressed by residents of Hawaii who have long supported Yamagata Prefecture and whom look forward to the conclusion of a formal agreement between our two governments. I would be most pleased to express my endorsement for such an initiative.

Looking ahead, we hope to further strengthen the relationship we have cultivated with the State of Hawaii and expand our exchanges across a wide range of fields, including tourism, culture, and education.

I respectfully ask for your continued understanding and valued support in advancing the relationship between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture.

March 2026

YOSHIMURA Mieko  
The Governor of Yamagata Prefecture

山形県知事 吉村 美栄子

State of Hawaii  
Senate  
Committee on Economic Development & Tourism

Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and members of the Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts.

As the current secretary and treasurer of the Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai I am pleased to support Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 169 and Senate Resolution No. 160, calling for the establishment of a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture.

The Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai began in 1967 when Yamagata Governor Abiko traveled to Hawaii to meet with Hawaii residents with family roots in Yamagata Prefecture. We are proud to be one of the oldest Japanese community organizations in Hawaii and our members are active in nurturing our close ties to the Yamagata Prefectural Government and Prefectural Assembly and in perpetuating cultural activities including the annual imoni kai and the upbeat Hanagasa dance. Yamagata is well known for its premium rice, sake, fresh and processed agricultural products and its rustic cuisine.

The Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai has hosted numerous government, educational and trade delegations from Yamagata and this concurrent resolution would help to strengthen and elevate the ties between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture. We urge this committee and its esteemed members to vote in favor of the establishment of a sister-state/sister-prefecture relationship between the State of Hawaii and the Yamagata Prefecture.

With warm regards and Aloha,

Milton Kwock

Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai

Subject: Letter of Support for the establishment of a Sister-State Relationship between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture (SCR169/SR160)

Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye and Members of the Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts,

I am writing to express my full and enthusiastic support Senate Concurrent Resolution 169 and Senate Resolution 160 which calls for the establishment of a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii and Yamagata Prefecture.

Yamagata possesses a unique cultural and spiritual depth that resonates deeply with Hawaii's values of sustainability and cultural preservation. I believe this partnership will bring transformative benefits to both communities in the following ways:

1. **Craftsmanship (Monozukuri):** Yamagata is renowned for its people's dedicated approach to high quality craftsmanship. This "artisan spirit" is the driving force behind their world-class crafts industry, offering a strong foundation for the traditional arts and crafts Yamagata is well known for.
2. **Globally Recognized Cultural Heritage and Gastronomy:** The Yamagata is home to Tsuruoka City, the first city in Japan designated as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy. This recognition honors the city's connection to food, preserved through more than 60 varieties of heirloom crops and the sacred "Shojin-ryori" (devotional cuisine) of the Three Mountains of Dewa (Dewa Sanzan). This philosophy of spiritual rebirth through nature aligns beautifully with the healing essence of the Aloha Spirit.
3. **Food Self-Sufficiency and Agricultural Know-how:** Yamagata is one of Japan's leading agricultural prefectures, with a food self-sufficiency rate (on a calorie basis) reaching 82%. By learning from Yamagata's centuries of agricultural knowledge and world-class rice cultivation techniques, epitomized by their premier brand "Tsuyahime", Hawaii can gain invaluable insights into its own path to food self-sufficiency. I envision a future where, through this exchange, the children of Hawaii can enjoy delicious, locally-grown rice, fostering a healthier and more resilient next generation. I am confident that combining Yamagata's meticulous craftsmanship and rich traditions with Hawaii's world-class culture is an invaluable investment in our shared future. This affiliation will undoubtedly strengthen the resilience and well-being of both our people across the Pacific.

Sincerely,  
Naomi Satake, Vice President  
Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai

To: Rep. Greggor Ilagan, Chair and Rep. Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair  
RE: SUPPORT for SCR 169/SR 160

Dear Representative Greggor Ilagan and Representative Ikaika Hussey,

My name is Iris Taniguchi and I am an officer and former President of the Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai. I am writing in support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 169 and Senate Resolution 160, which calls for a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii and the prefecture of Yamagata, Japan.

My mother Miyoko Mabel Watanabe was one of the founding members of the Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai with Governor Tokichi Abiko of Yamagata. The group was founded in 1968 and continues to support and nurture close ties to Yamagata Prefecture. I joined the organization wanting to continue our strong relationship with Yamagata through its people, products, and culture. Our Kenjinkai has hosted numerous government, education, and trade delegations from Yamagata. We are proud of our long lasting relationship with the Yamagata Prefecture.

I ask that you vote YES on this bill. Thank you for your leadership on this issue and your service to our community.

Sincerely,  
Iris Taniguchi  
Hawaii Yamagata Kenjinkai  
35 Wood Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96817  
808.371.6850  
iris.tani10@gmail.com

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture and the Arts  
Senator Chris Lee, Chair  
Senator Lorraine R. Inouye, Vice Chair**

**Monday, March 30, 2026, at 1:00PM  
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference**

**RE: SCR169/SR160 ESTABLISHING A SISTER-STATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE OF HAWAII,  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE PREFECTURE OF YAMAGATA, JAPAN.**

Aloha e Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports SCR169/SR160, which establishes a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Yamagata Prefecture in Japan.

SCR169/SR160 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Economic Action. This resolution offers an encouraging opportunity to deepen Hawaii's trade relationships and support diplomatic progress at a time when international economic engagement in the Asia-Pacific is increasingly important. Sister-state partnerships provide a structured pathway to facilitate business-to-business connections, expand export opportunities for local producers, and support the development of long-term trade relationships. With Hawaii's small businesses and value-added producers facing significant economic pressure, these partnerships can serve as an important mechanism to access overseas markets and build consistent export channels for the State. In all, these benefits improve Hawaii's economic security.

Decreasing Hawaii's import reliance is one of the states most important priorities. Institutionalizing international trade relations through sister-state declarations supports Hawaii's stimulates small businesses activity and generates crucial tax revenue while improving Hawaii's trade deficit. Furthermore, expanding market access for small businesses helps these businesses more easily achieve economies of scale, making their products are more affordable for residents and further improving Hawaii's trade deficit.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is the state's leading business advocacy organization, dedicated to improving Hawaii's economy and securing Hawaii's future for growth and opportunity. Our mission is to foster a vibrant economic climate. As such, we support initiatives and policies that align with the 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii that create opportunities to strengthen overall competitiveness, improve the quantity and skills of available workforce, diversify the economy, and build greater local wealth.

We respectfully ask to pass SCR169/SR160. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.