



**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**

Wednesday, April 8, 2026
1:05 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 224

In consideration of

SCR47

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

Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and members of the Committee, the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports **SCR 47**, which seeks to establish a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

A formal Sister-State partnership will strengthen the long-standing Spirit of Aloha shared between Hawai'i and Okayama and create opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration, particularly in the area of educational exchanges for our youth. These experiences build cross-cultural understanding, expand global perspectives, and forge relationships that endure for generations.

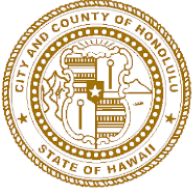
Okayama, known as the "Land of Sunshine" for its mild and dry climate, is a leading agricultural region. Hawai'i's tropical environment and multicultural society support a vibrant tourism industry that is vital to our economy. Both regions share economic similarities, with agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism contributing

significantly to their respective industries. Hawai'i and Okayama also share a commitment to sustainable agriculture, clean energy innovation, and climate resilience—areas where collaborative learning and partnership can bring meaningful benefits.

The Okayama Kenjin Kai in Hawai'i has nurtured cultural ties between our communities for many years. Hawai'i and Okayama share coastal geographies, mild climates favorable to farming, and deep historical and cultural connections through Japanese immigration. Most recently, Okayama Prefecture has expressed interest in expanding educational engagement with Hawai'i, including student exchanges, joint activities, and cross-cultural learning initiatives.

For these reasons—and for the potential to strengthen cultural understanding, foster youth development, and support economic and educational opportunities—DBEDT is pleased to support the establishment of a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL

KE KANIHELA O KE KALANA O HONOLULU

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Wednesday, April 8, 2026

Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture, and the Arts

Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 1:05 p.m.

SCR47 Testimony in Support

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

I write in support of **SCR47**, which establishes a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawai'i and the prefecture of Okayama, Japan.

The bond between Hawai'i and Okayama is not a new one, it is rooted in history dating back to 1868 with the arrival of the Gannenmono, the first group of Japanese immigrants to Hawai'i, among whom a significant contingent from Okayama settled on Maui. That shared heritage has grown over generations into lasting cultural ties that continue to this day.

Formalizing this relationship through a sister-state designation is a natural and meaningful next step. The Hawai'i Sister-State and International Partnerships Commissions has already reviewed and recommended this partnership, and I agree that it holds great potential in expanding tourism, strengthening cultural bonds, and advancing our shared values of international peace and cooperation.

Hawai'i has maintained sister-state relationships since 1981 as a reflection of our State's deep commitment to international engagement. A partnership with Okayama is a worthy addition to that tradition.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SCR47.

Aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tyler Dos Santos-Tam". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tyler Dos Santos-Tam
Councilmember, District 6
Honolulu City Council

**TESTIMONY
SCR 47**

Members of the Committee, my name is Roberta Yorita and I am currently serving as president of Hawaii's Okayama Kenjin Kai. The Hawaii Okayama Kenjin Kai supports HCR 36, which seeks to establish a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture. A formal Sister-State partnership will strengthen the long-standing Spirit of Aloha shared between Hawai'i and Okayama and create opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration. As a sister state, the student exchange program may also be available. Here, students from Japan live and attend school with their host family. I am currently employed as a substitute teacher (retired teacher) in the DOE school setting, and have had the pleasure of having exchange students from Japan as students this semester. I have witnessed the interaction amongst the "locals" and Japan students working in groups to solve the assignments given. Even though there are language and cultural differences, the task gets completed working as a team. These students are our future leaders of tomorrow. Even with barriers and language differences, they have the opportunity to collaborate and work together effectively. We need this to give our keiki's a chance to expand their learning and experiences to have a better tomorrow.

The Okayama Kenjin Kai in Hawai'i has nurtured cultural ties between our communities for many years. Okayama Prefecture has expressed interest in expanding engagements with Hawai'i, including educational, economic and cultural exchanges.

The Okayama Kenjin Kai is pleased to support the establishment of a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

To: Senator Chris Lee and members of the Committee

From: Debora I Lum, Okayama Kenjin-kai Member

Date: Friday, March 27, 2026

Re: Testimony in **Strong Support** of SCR 47, relating to the establishment of a sister-state relationship with Okayama, Japan.

Senator Lee and members of the Committee, my name is Debora Lum. As a member of Hawaii's Okayama Kenjin-kai, I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 47, relating to the establishment of a sister-state relationship with Okayama, Japan.

A partnership with Okayama would provide strong cultural and educational connections for the people of Hawaii. Many of us grew up with the story and song of Momotaro. It wasn't until visiting this prefecture that I learned the story originated in Okayama as well as its connection to the area's history. In addition to this, the prefecture's castle, known as the Crow Castle is an educational and engaging museum of Japanese history. It provides hands-on experiences like kimono dressing, weaponry, measuring up to a samurai, and so many other activities and exhibits. Unlike other castles and museums, it goes beyond the guided read and look displays of artifacts.

In conclusion, I urge Senator Lee and the Committee to support Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 47, relating to the establishment of a sister-state relationship with Okayama, Japan. This partnership would encourage a cultural and educational exchange of possibilities for making literature and history come alive.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide this testimony and for your time kind consideration.

Testimony
Okayama Kenjin Kai
SCR 47

I am writing in strong support of Bill SCR 47 to establish a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawaii and Okayama Prefecture, Japan.

My support for this measure is rooted in both ancestral history and a personal commitment to the future of our international relations. As a Sansei whose maternal great-grandparents emigrated from Okayama to Hawaii, I have always been moved by their determination to build a new life here while maintaining the values of their homeland.

In 2015, I had the distinct honor of journeying to Okayama Prefecture, where I met with Governor Ibaraki. During our meeting, we discussed the profound cultural threads that connect Hawaii to Okayama. It was a revelation to the Governor and his staff to hear firsthand accounts of how Okayama's heritage has evolved and thrived in Hawaii over the generations.

Establishing this formal sister-state bond is more than a symbolic gesture; it is a vital step in: Cultural Preservation by honoring the stories of the original emigrants and ensuring their history is not lost to time. Identity Discovery by providing a pathway for younger generations in both Hawaii and Japan to explore their roots and forge new identities. Finally, Economic and Educational exchange by fostering a modern environment where ideas, tourism, and innovation can flow freely between our two regions.

By approving Bill SCR 47, the legislature will help close the gap between past and future generations, ensuring that the courage of our ancestors continues to inspire cultural sharing and mutual growth.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure.

Sincerely,
Diane Sueda Nako

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

**Wednesday, April 8, 2026, at 1:05PM
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference**

**RE: SCR47/SR46 ESTABLISHING A SISTER-STATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE OF HAWAII,
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE PREFECTURE OF OKAYAMA, 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 SCR47/SR46, which establishes a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii and the Okayama Prefecture in Japan.

SCR47/SR46 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 SCR47/SR46. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

LATE

**TESTIMONY
SCR 47**

Members of the Committee, my name is Roberta Yorita and I am currently serving as president of Hawaii's Okayama Kenjin Kai. The Hawaii Okayama Kenjin Kai supports HCR 36, which seeks to establish a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture. A formal Sister-State partnership will strengthen the long-standing Spirit of Aloha shared between Hawai'i and Okayama and create opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration. As a sister state, the student exchange program may also be available. Here, students from Japan live and attend school with their host family. I am currently employed as a substitute teacher (retired teacher) in the DOE school setting, and have had the pleasure of having exchange students from Japan as students this semester. I have witnessed the interaction amongst the "locals" and Japan students working in groups to solve the assignments given. Even though there are language and cultural differences, the task gets completed working as a team. These students are our future leaders of tomorrow. Even with barriers and language differences, they have the opportunity to collaborate and work together effectively. We need this to give our keiki's a chance to expand their learning and experiences to have a better tomorrow.

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The Okayama Kenjin Kai is pleased to support the establishment of a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.