

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 12:33:56 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelle Murphy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, as proposed in **SCR55** before your committee. While the Senate has already adopted **SR53**, the Senate version, it is critical that the entire State Legislature supports the findings and recommendations of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

Hawai‘i is currently amid a **drowning crisis**. Our state has the **second-highest drowning rate in the nation**, and drowning is the **leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15** in Hawai‘i. It is also the **number one cause of injury-related death among Hawai‘i’s visitors**, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated, statewide prevention efforts.

Recent storms across the islands highlight Hawai‘i’s increasing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, including flooding and drowning, which must be addressed as a **disaster risk reduction priority**.

This crisis is also a matter of **equity**. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at approximately **1.5 times the rate** of the general population, and NHPI children drown at **three times the rate**. These disparities demonstrate that water safety is both a public safety and public health issue.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan was developed by the **Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition**, a statewide partnership of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. The plan has received national recognition, including a **Safe Kids Champion for Children Award** from Safe Kids Worldwide.

Adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan will provide a comprehensive, data-driven framework to reduce drownings, improve coordination, strengthen education and prevention, and ultimately save lives across our islands.

Mahalo for your time, leadership, and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai‘i.

Sincerely,

Kelle Murphy, Swim Safe: ASD Director, Honolulu, Oahu





STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO  
P.O. BOX 2360  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

**Date:** 04/16/2026

**Time:** 09:00 AM

**Location:** 411 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**Committee:** WAL

**Department:** Education

**Person Testifying:** Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

**Title of Bill:** SCR55, SUPPORTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HAWAII WATER SAFETY COALITION'S HAWAII WATER SAFETY PLAN.

**Purpose of Bill:** Supporting The Findings And Recommendations Of The Hawaii Water Safety Coalition's Hawaii Water Safety Plan.

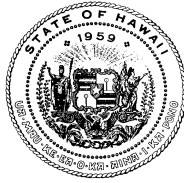
**Department's Position:**

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) supports the intent of S.C.R. No. 55, which recognizes the critical importance of the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan (HWSP) developed by the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition (HWSC) and offers comments.

The Department values its relationship with the HWSC. Demonstrating this commitment, a Department representative participated in the HWSC Annual Meeting held on May 16, 2025, at the Queen Kapi'olani Hotel in Waikiki. We look forward to continued collaboration with the HWSC to identify and implement recommendations within the HWSP that are feasible, cost-effective, and closely aligned with the Department's core priorities of student safety and wellbeing.

The Department is committed to reviewing these recommendations to determine how they can be integrated into our existing frameworks while addressing practical considerations such as liability, transportation, and funding. We remain a dedicated partner in the collective effort to improve water safety in Hawai'i.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
P. O. Box 3378  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

WRITTEN  
TESTIMONY ONLY

**Testimony COMMENTING on SCR 55  
SUPPORTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HAWAII'Ī WATER SAFETY  
COALITION'S HAWAII'Ī WATER SAFETY PLAN  
REPRESENTATIVE MARK J. HASHEM, CHAIR  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND**

Thursday April 16, 2026, 9:00AM | Room Number: 411

1 **Fiscal Implications:** Unknown.

2 **Department Position:** The Department of Health (“Department”) is submitting testimony in  
3 support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 55, which requests that the Legislature supports the  
4 findings and recommendations of the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition's Hawai'i Water Safety  
5 Plan.

6 **Department Testimony:** The Emergency Medical Services & Injury Prevention Systems Branch  
7 (EMSIPSB) on behalf of the Department respectfully submits this testimony in **support** of this  
8 concurrent resolution, which seeks the support of the Legislature for the Hawai'i Water Safety  
9 Plan.

10 Drowning prevention is vitally important in Hawai'i. As a state surrounded by the ocean and  
11 numerous large and small freshwater streams, ponds, and reservoirs, the risk of drowning is  
12 high. People in Hawai'i and those who visit here take part in activities both in the water and at  
13 the water's edge. It should not be all that surprising that with our prevention efforts that have  
14 so far been nominally supported in terms of funding, personnel, and policy that we are the  
15 state with the second highest rate of resident drowning in the US, where drowning is the  
16 number one cause of death for Hawai'i's children, and where drowning is the leading cause of

1 injury-related mortality among visitors. Furthermore, a recent study found that Native  
2 Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders accounted for almost 36% of drowning incidents, despite  
3 making up only about 27% of Hawai'i's population.

4 The findings and recommendations of the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition's Hawai'i Water Safety  
5 Plan are the first, yet critical, step in improving water safety in Hawai'i. They point to systemic,  
6 community, and individual solutions for our drowning crisis.

7 For too long, families who have experienced drowning tragedies have been the strongest voices  
8 in warning others, providing education and in some cases, funding for prevention of and  
9 response to drowning. Each new tragedy reminds them of their loss and causes them to think  
10 about what more they could have done. Instead, it should be policymakers undertaking such an  
11 exercise.

12 The recent storms in Hawai'i serve as a reminder that Hawai'i is vulnerable to the impacts of  
13 climate change, including drowning, which must become a disaster reduction priority.

14 The disparities in drowning rates make clear that water safety is not only a public safety issue,  
15 but also a matter of health equity.

16 Adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan would provide a comprehensive, data-driven  
17 framework to reduce drownings, improve coordination, strengthen education and prevention,  
18 and ultimately save lives across our islands.

19 **Offered Amendments: None**

20 Mahalo for your consideration and your commitment to public health and protecting people in  
21 Hawai'i from drowning injuries.

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/13/2026 6:15:24 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alissa Magrum	National Drowning Prevention Alliance	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing on behalf of the National Drowning Prevention Alliance to respectfully urge your support for adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan, as proposed in **SCR55** before your committee. While the Senate has already adopted **SR53**, the Senate version, it is critical that the entire State Legislature supports the findings and recommendations of the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan.

Hawai'i is currently amid a **drowning crisis**. Our state has the **second-highest drowning rate in the nation**, and drowning is the **leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15** in Hawai'i. It is also the **number one cause of injury-related death among Hawai'i's visitors**, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated, statewide prevention efforts.

Recent storms across the islands highlight Hawai'i's increasing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, including flooding and drowning, which must be addressed as a **disaster risk reduction priority**.

This crisis is also a matter of **equity**. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at approximately **1.5 times the rate** of the general population, and NHPI children drown at **three times the rate**. These disparities demonstrate that water safety is both a public safety and public health issue.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan was developed by the **Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition**, a statewide partnership of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. The plan has received national recognition, including a **Safe Kids Champion for Children Award** from Safe Kids Worldwide.

Adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan will provide a comprehensive, data-driven framework to reduce drownings, improve coordination, strengthen education and prevention, and ultimately save lives across our islands.

Mahalo for your time, leadership, and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai'i.

Sincerely,  
Alissa Magrum

National Drowning Prevention Alliance





## Testimony in Strong Support of SCR 55 – Advancing the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan

Dear Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of FreediveSafe! Hawai‘i, a leading community-driven initiative advancing spearfishing and breath-hold diving safety across our islands, to respectfully urge your support for adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, as proposed in the resolution (SCR55) before your committee.

Every day, we work directly with ocean users—particularly young spearfishers and freedivers—who are deeply connected to Hawai‘i’s waters. Through this work, we see firsthand that Hawai‘i is in the midst of a drowning crisis. Our state has one of the highest drowning rates in the nation, and drowning remains the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 in Hawai‘i.

FreediveSafe! Hawai‘i was founded to address preventable tragedies in the ocean related to shallow water blackout and other breath-hold diving risks—issues that are often under-recognized in broader water safety conversations. Through community trainings, safety education, and partnerships with schools and local leaders, we are actively building a culture of preparedness, accountability, and mālama for one another in the water.

We also recognize that this crisis is not experienced equally. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are disproportionately impacted, with significantly higher drowning rates—especially among youth. As an organization rooted in community and cultural practices like subsistence fishing, we strongly believe that water safety must be approached through the lenses of equity, access, and cultural relevance.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, developed by the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition, represents an important step forward. By adopting this plan, Hawai‘i can strengthen coordination across agencies and communities, expand education and prevention efforts, and support initiatives like ours that are working to reach high-risk populations in meaningful ways. **Equally important, the coalition itself plays a critical role in uniting partners, strengthening water safety efforts across the state, and, in turn, protecting our communities—work that requires the continued support and commitment of the State.**

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,  
Niki Roderick  
Freedive Safe! Hawai‘i  
75-5737 Kuakini Highway, #202  
Kailua-Kona, Hawai‘i 96740  
[www.freedivesafe.org](http://www.freedivesafe.org)

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 11:25:40 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessamy Town Hornor	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. I am writing in strong support of SCR 55 SUPPORTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HAWAI'I WATER SAFETY COALITION'S HAWAI'I WATER SAFETY PLAN. I submit this testimony as an individual, noting my experience as Co-Founder of the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition and as an Executive Editor of the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan. Last year I also worked at DOH's EMS & Injury Prevention Systems Branch in a temporary capacity to restart the 'Public Health Educator in Drowning and Aquatic Injury Prevention' position which had been vacant since Covid.

However, first and foremost I am testifying as a bereaved family member, and I will share my family's story as an example of the need for a policy-led, cohesive, inter-agency solution to drowning prevention. In 2016 I lost my husband Mark and my youngest daughter Mina, age 6, to a sudden storm surge at the Makapu'u Tidepools which originated from Hurricane Celia, a hurricane that was far offshore and not visible from the Lighthouse trail or from the tidepools themselves. The tidepools are accessed via an unofficial trail from the main Lighthouse access road but the destination is very popular. That day when the tide shifted the little tidal shelf on the edge of the Ka Iwi Channel became a death trap. My husband and three daughters were in the inner tidepools closer to the cliff, but the first wave that arrived was so massive that Mina was washed out to sea immediately, and Mark jumped in after her before the next wave hit. Neither survived the extreme conditions and long response time from Sandy Beach. A good Samaritan was able to pull my two other daughters to safety from the tidepools as they had been pushed towards the cliffs by the wave. Mark and Mina were found via the one jetski launched from Sandy Beach, one after the other on two separate recovery trips. Once on the beach resuscitation was attempted and they were taken via EMS to two different hospitals where they were finally declared.

***How is this tragic story relevant to a policy level Resolution?*** I believe that the incident was the result of a **lack of inter-agency coordination** in an acute weather event when the risks of the tidepool area were well known to state and county officials, including DLNR which manages the site. Given the offshore hurricane, this was a grave oversight as the area had become more popular since the parking lot renovation and posts on social media, and Honolulu Ocean Safety lifeguards and the Fire Department had made many rescues and recoveries from that location over the years. Also, the DLNR's "Task Force on Beach and Water Safety" required by Act 190

had not met for many years prior to review signage and other ways more updated ways to communicate known risks. Standard Operating Guidelines (SOGs) for these weather conditions were not in place or activated that day. For instance, there could have been a text alert and a site closure via caution tape and even DOT light-up signs given the level of risk to the public. Current discussions include live-condition updates on a Tourism App and videos via on-site QR codes.

The impact of this loss on my family has been profound; we struggle to make our way every day almost 10 years later. After the incident, I tried to understand the systems that could have prevented it. My takeaway was that the agencies were siloed and opportunities for an intervention had been missed. **To initiate inter-agency collaboration there needs to be a leadership-level goal to reduce drowning in Hawai‘i, as well as a dedicated funding stream for drowning prevention.** At this time DOH EMS & IPSB has funding for the Public Health Educator position (a big step forward) and a small allocation from the Trauma Fund. The DOH Drowning and Aquatic Injury Prevention Advisory Committee has been difficult to convene consistently as it is not required at the leadership level and has no budget. A one-time allocation was made for a DOH water safety media campaign that is in the works, but consistent funding is needed to keep it going to make an impact over time.

The collective cost of drowning in Hawai‘i has not yet been documented but needs to be. According to the National Drowning Prevention Alliance, drowning in the United States costs over \$53 billion annually, accounting for both fatal and non-fatal incidents. A single pediatric drowning can exceed \$250,000 in immediate medical care, with total societal costs for a single death estimated at over \$4 million. According to the NIH, the average cost associated with a fatal drowning event (including direct/indirect costs) can range between \$370,000 and over \$600,000, with the engagement of lifeguard and emergency services, medical care, autopsy and investigations, reports etc. The impact on a family's financial, mental, and physical health should also be calculated over the long term, just as we are starting to do for those who lost loved ones and were impacted by the Lahaina fire. In the field of injury prevention, the term 'accident' is not used because unintentional injuries and deaths are understood to be preventable, and drowning is in fact preventable with the implementation of evidence-based interventions and appropriate funding.

The fact is that our current drowning data in Hawai‘i is a policy level choice - and we can leave it as is, or implement systems-level solutions to reduce it. And solutions do work; we are seeing reduced ocean drowning data in some counties which are likely the result of an increase in lifeguard towers and hours. We are seeing that rescue tubes have reduced ocean drownings on Kauai and other locations where they are installed. We know from other states and countries that making free water safety and swim lessons widely available reduces drowning data among children and gives them critical lifesaving skills over a lifetime. The CDC shared that mandatory residential pool fences reduce drownings among young children **immediately**, and more lifejacket use on open water reduces drownings as well.

Drowning is a collective, chronic trauma in Hawai‘i, and yet it has been accepted as the norm, and its costs have been invisible for too long. I am here to share the very real impact of one preventable incident and to put faces behind the anonymous data points. This Resolution will

facilitate high-level prioritization at the relevant departments, more inter-agency coordination, and encourage funding pathways to reduce Hawai'i's drowning data. With the Coalition's support and active community networks, with the Plan in hand, and with guidance from national experts such as the US National Water Safety Action Plan committee, the National Drowning Prevention Alliance, and the CDC Foundation, we are well positioned to move forward. I share this testimony in memory of Mark and Mina and all those lost to drowning in Hawai'i who should still be here with us today.

Mahalo for your time,

Jessamy Town Hornor



April 14, 2026

**TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT SCR 55**

**SUPPORTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HAWAI'I WATER SAFETY COALITION'S HAWAI'I WATER SAFETY PLAN**

**To:** House Committee on Water & Land Rep. Mark J. Hashem, Chair Rep. Dee Morikawa, Vice Chair

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and Members of the Committee,

The **Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition (KIPC)** strongly supports **SCR 55**.

KIPC is a statewide organization dedicated to preventing injuries to Hawai'i's children and youth. We proudly served as the fiscal sponsor for the development of the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan: *I Palekana Kākou Ma Ka Wai* ("Let Us Be Safe in the Water").

Drowning remains the **leading cause of death** for children ages 1–15 in Hawai'i. In recent years, 26 keiki drowned, with the majority occurring in swimming pools. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children face disproportionately higher risks, and fewer than 2% of second graders possess basic water safety skills to avoid or recover from drowning.

These tragedies are preventable. The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan provides a practical, locally tailored roadmap that includes:

- Integrating water safety and swim education into school curricula
- Expanding affordable swim lessons for underserved communities
- Strengthening adult supervision tools and pool safety standards
- Developing culturally grounded programs rooted in Hawaiian values

We urge the Committee to support SCR 55 so that the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan becomes the guiding document for statewide action to protect our keiki and all who enjoy Hawai'i's waters.

Mahalo and we stand ready to assist with implementation.

**Sincerely,**

**Lisa Dau, RN, Injury Prevention Coordinator**  
**Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition**

<https://kipchawaii.org/>

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 8:59:24 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Sarah Fairchild	Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation	Support	In Person

Comments:

The Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation submits this testimony in strong support of the resolutions before your committee calling for the adoption of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

As an organization rooted in the legacy of Duke Kahanamoku — a celebrated waterman, Olympic champion, and lifelong ambassador of aloha — water safety is not simply a policy priority for us. It is central to our mission and to the values Duke embodied throughout his life.

The data before us is sobering. Hawai‘i has the second-highest drowning rate in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 in our state, and the number one cause of injury-related death among visitors to our islands.

This crisis strikes at the heart of communities whose identities are inseparably linked to the ocean. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) drown at approximately 1.5 times the rate of the general population, and NHPI children drown at three times that rate. Duke Kahanamoku shared the gift of the ocean with the world without exception; we have a responsibility to ensure that gift is accessible and safe for all, particularly for the communities most deeply connected to these waters.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan provides a drowning prevention framework developed from community-based participatory research to prevent drownings and save lives.

The Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation respectfully urges this committee to adopt the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan. In doing so, you will honor the spirit of Duke Kahanamoku and help ensure that Hawai‘i’s waters remain a source of life, culture, and joy — not tragedy.



April 15, 2026

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SCR55  
RELATING TO THE ADOPTION OF THE HAWAI‘I WATER SAFETY PLAN**

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Branch Lotspeich, and I am the Executive Director of The Rescue Tube Foundation. I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support** of SCR55.

I respectfully urge your support for adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, as proposed in SCR55 before your committee. While the Senate has already adopted SR53, it is essential that the full Legislature act to advance the Plan’s findings and recommendations.

Hawai‘i is in the midst of a drowning crisis. Our state has the second-highest drowning rate in the nation, and drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 in Hawai‘i. It is also the number one cause of injury-related death among Hawai‘i’s visitors—underscoring the urgent need for coordinated, statewide prevention.

Recent storms highlight Hawai‘i’s increasing vulnerability to climate-related hazards, including flooding and drowning, which must be addressed as a disaster risk reduction priority.

This crisis is also a matter of equity. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at approximately 1.5 times the rate of the general population, and NHPI children at three times the rate—making water safety both a public safety and public health imperative.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, developed by the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition, is a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy that has received national recognition, including a Safe Kids Champion for Children Award from Safe Kids Worldwide. The Rescue Tube Foundation strongly supports this plan and its coordinated, data-driven approach to reducing drownings and saving lives across our islands.

I respectfully ask for your support of SCR55 and your leadership in advancing this critical, life-saving initiative.

Mahalo for your time and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai‘i.

Sincerely,

Branch Lotspeich  
Executive Director  
The Rescue Tube Foundation

**Rescue Tubes Save Lives!**

Rescue Tube Foundation, Inc.  
4350 Kahili Makai St., Kilauea, HI 96754  
501 (c)(3) Federal Tax Identification #27-4350046

April 15, 2026



Representative Hashem  
House Committee on Water and Land

Hawai'i State Legislature

RE: Support for SCR55 Hawai'i Water Safety Plan

**Board of Directors**

Kalani Vierra  
President

Ricky Alvarez  
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Kurt Lager  
Clark Abbey  
Kekaulike Kealoha  
Luke Evslin

Kirsten Hermstad  
Executive Director

**Honorary Legends**

Ralph Goto  
Brian Keaulana  
Archie Kalepa  
Mark Cunningham

On behalf of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, I write in support of recognizing the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan as the State's leading framework for drowning and aquatic injury prevention.

Across Hawai'i, there are many dedicated individuals and organizations working to improve water safety. Lifeguards, educators, public agencies, and community partners all contribute to this effort. What has been less consistent is how those efforts are connected.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan provides a way to bring that work together.

It establishes a shared direction for prevention, education, and response. It helps ensure that efforts are not duplicated or working at cross purposes but instead are aligned toward common goals.

From a field perspective, this kind of coordination matters. Prevention messaging becomes more consistent, resources can be used more effectively, and the overall system becomes stronger and more predictable.

This resolution recognizes the importance of having a clear, unified framework to guide water safety efforts across the State.

After multiple hearings and continued engagement, we believe this represents an important step toward a more coordinated and effective approach to reducing drowning and aquatic injury in Hawai'i.

Mahalo for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Kalani Vierra*

Kalani Vierra  
President  
Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

Hawaiian Lifeguard Association  
P.O. Box 844  
Kapa'a, Hawaii 96746  
Tax Id 99-0308213



April 15, 2026

The Honorable Representative Hashem  
House Committee on Water and Land

RE: Support for SCR55 Water Safety Plan Recognition

Aloha Chair Hashem and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition, I write in support of recognizing the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan as the leading document guiding drowning and aquatic injury prevention in our state.

The value of this plan lies in its ability to bring structure to a complex and multi-sector issue.

Drowning prevention in Hawai'i involves a wide range of stakeholders, including ocean safety agencies, public health professionals, educators, emergency responders, and community organizations. Each contributes important work, but without a shared framework, these efforts can become fragmented.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan addresses that challenge by establishing common priorities, supporting data-informed strategies, and creating a foundation for coordinated action.

Importantly, it also provides continuity. It allows efforts to build over time, rather than restarting or shifting direction without a clear reference point.

From a systems perspective, this kind of alignment improves effectiveness, supports better use of resources, and strengthens collaboration across sectors.

This resolution affirms the importance of that coordination and recognizes the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan as the guiding framework for this work moving forward.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Hermstad  
Coordinator, Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition  
Executive Director, Hawaiian Lifeguard Association



*Testimony of  
Mufi Hannemann  
President & CEO  
Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association*

*Committee on Water and Land  
Thursday, April 16, 2026*

SCR 55 – SUPPORTING THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HAWAI'I WATER SAFETY COALITION'S HAWAI'I WATER SAFETY PLAN.

Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association (HLTA) **strongly supports SCR 55**, which endorses the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan developed by the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition.

As the state's largest private sector tourism organization, representing nearly 50,000 hotel rooms and 40,000 lodging employees, HLTA recognizes that visitor and resident safety is foundational to Hawai'i's success as a global destination. Drowning remains the leading cause of injury-related death among visitors to Hawai'i, and highly publicized incidents can have lasting impacts on visitor confidence and the State's reputation.

From a tourism industry perspective, water safety is a destination management priority. Hawai'i's natural environment, particularly its beaches and ocean resources, is central to the visitor experience. However, many visitors are unfamiliar with local ocean conditions, hazards such as strong currents, and even non-ocean water risks, including pools and water features. This underscores the need for clear, consistent, and culturally appropriate safety education and infrastructure statewide.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan provides a comprehensive, data-driven framework to address these challenges. As outlined in SCR 55, the plan emphasizes coordinated leadership, expanded water safety education, improved data collection, strengthened safety infrastructure, and increased access to swim instruction, particularly for children and underserved communities.

Importantly, the plan also aligns with broader efforts to promote sustainable and responsible tourism, ensuring that both residents and visitors can safely enjoy Hawai'i's natural resources. Investments in prevention such as lifeguard services, signage, and public awareness will help reduce incidents before they occur, benefiting communities and the visitor industry alike.

HLTA also recognizes that drowning incidents disproportionately impact certain communities and that addressing these disparities is essential to building a safer and more equitable Hawai'i. A coordinated statewide approach, as proposed in the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan, is critical to achieving these outcomes.

For these reasons, HLTA respectfully urges the Committee to **adopt SCR 55 and support the implementation of the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan.**

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Mufi Hannemann  
President & CEO  
Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/13/2026 9:16:50 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Louis Erteschik	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 7:51:41 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
John Clark	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I respectfully urge your support for adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, as proposed in SCR55 before your committee. While the Senate has already adopted SR53, it is essential that the full State Legislature support the findings and recommendations of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

Hawai‘i is currently facing a drowning crisis. Our state has the second-highest drowning rate in the nation, and drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15. It is also the leading cause of injury-related death among visitors to Hawai‘i, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated, statewide prevention efforts.

Recent storms across the islands further highlight Hawai‘i’s growing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, including increased risks of flooding and drowning. These hazards must be addressed as a disaster risk reduction priority.

This crisis is also an issue of equity. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders experience drowning rates approximately 1.5 times higher than the general population, while NHPI children face rates three times higher. These disparities make clear that water safety is both a public safety and public health priority.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan was developed by the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition, a statewide partnership of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. The plan has received national recognition, including the Safe Kids Champion for Children Award from Safe Kids Worldwide.

Adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan will provide a comprehensive, data-driven framework to reduce drownings, strengthen coordination, expand education and prevention efforts, and ultimately save lives across our islands.

Mahalo for your time, leadership, and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai‘i.

Sincerely,

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 9:34:49 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Allison Schaefer	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

My name is Allison Schaefer. I am a bereaved parent volunteer with the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition and the lead writer of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan. I strongly support SCR55 which endorses the findings and recommendations of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan was developed by the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition, a statewide partnership of more than 200 members, including government agencies, first responders, lifeguards, watermen and waterwomen, medical professionals, researchers, nonprofits, and community and cultural leaders. I donated my professional writing and project management skills to synthesize their expertise and data into an inclusive, easy-to-read plan designed to inspire our communities to move toward a Hawai‘i where everyone is safe on, in, and around the water. The state Department of Health provided much of the core data, and coalition member Nā Kama Kai underwrote the cost of having DTL, a Hawaiian Strategy Studio, provide graphic design and cultural guidance. It was a massive endeavor, reflecting the scale and seriousness of the problem we are trying to solve.

We are now a program of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, but the co-founders of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition, Jessamy Town Hornor and Sarah Fairchild, began this work under the fiscal sponsorship of the Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition, which remains one of our core partners.

The breadth of the coalition's partners underscores both the credibility of the work and the sustained concern about drowning across a variety of sectors in our island state.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan has been recognized nationally with a Safe Kids Champion for Children Award, presented at the Safe Kids Worldwide Annual Childhood Injury Prevention Convention. This award honors outstanding contributions to child injury prevention and underscores the plan’s credibility as a rigorous, evidence-based framework.

Torine Creppy, president of Safe Kids Worldwide, said in a statement, “It has been so gratifying to see what an enormous difference the coalition has been able to make. Efforts like this truly save lives—and we are honored to recognize this amazing team for its immeasurable contributions to the field of water safety.”

Hawai‘i is only the second state in the nation, after California, to release a statewide water safety plan in response to the U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan. While aligned with national evidence-informed actions, Hawai‘i’s plan is specifically tailored to the unique realities of our

islands, counties, cultures, and communities—because drowning risk here is different, and the consequences are severe.

Despite our deep cultural and economic connection to the ocean, Hawai‘i is facing a worsening and unacceptable drowning crisis. In 2023, Hawai‘i’s drowning rate reached 3.34 deaths per 100,000—**the second highest in the nation**. Drowning remains the **leading cause of death for Hawai‘i’s children ages 1 to 15**, and the **leading cause of injury-related death among visitors**. These are not rare or random tragedies. They happen with disturbing regularity, year after year, and they are largely preventable. Yet without a coordinated, statewide strategy, lives continue to be lost.

The impact of drowning is measured not only in lives cut short, but in staggering economic cost borne by the entire state. Using CDC methodology that combines direct medical expenses with the statistical value of a life, the 475 drowning deaths in Hawai‘i between 2019 and 2013 carried an estimated cost of **\$4.75 billion**. Each drowning death represents an average loss of **\$10 million**. These figures still underestimate the true burden, as they do not fully capture the lifelong costs of nonfatal drownings, which can result in permanent brain injury, chronic health conditions, prolonged hospitalizations, and decades of ongoing care.

This crisis is also profoundly inequitable. **Children with autism are 160× more likely to die from drowning** than their neurotypical peers.

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities in Hawai‘i experience drowning at approximately **1.5 times the rate of the general population**, and NHPI children drown at **3 times the rate** of other children. Addressing drowning is therefore not only about public safety—it is a matter of health equity and justice.

Hawai‘i once provided swimming instruction in public schools, but that ended in the late 1980s. Today, fewer than **2% of Hawai‘i’s second graders** have the basic skills needed to keep themselves from drowning. This gap leaves children vulnerable during the years when drowning risk is highest. Expanding access to water safety education and swim instruction is a central recommendation of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

While most drowning deaths in Hawai‘i occur in the ocean, **children 5 years old and under are far more likely to drown in pools, ponds, and other inland waters**. In 2004, my five-year-old daughter, Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer, drowned in an improperly maintained and flooded detention pond. Her death was preventable. That loss is why this work is personal for me, and why I remain committed to making sure other families do not endure the same devastation.

**Recent Kona-low storms further demonstrate why drowning prevention must be integrated into disaster preparedness and climate resilience planning.** Flooding, extreme rainfall, and storm events dramatically increase drowning risk. The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan explicitly addresses drowning hazards during floods, storms, and extreme weather—conditions that are becoming more frequent and severe.

**Legislative endorsement of this plan is both warranted and urgent.** SR53, the single-chamber version of the resolution, already has passed the Senate, but we feel very strongly that the plan also needs the endorsement of the House.

Endorsement affirms that the Legislature recognizes drowning as a preventable public health crisis with profound human, economic, and equity implications. It establishes a shared, evidence-based roadmap; strengthens cross-agency coordination; supports future funding and grant opportunities; and ensures continuity beyond individual programs or administrations. Most importantly, it signals to communities across the state that water safety is a statewide priority and a shared responsibility.

By endorsing the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, you can help prevent needless drowning deaths and the devastation of nonfatal drowning injuries, reduce long-term costs, advance equity, and strengthen Hawai‘i’s resilience in a changing climate.

Mahalo for your leadership and for your commitment to protecting Hawai‘i’s children, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

**Allison Schaefer**

Bereaved Parent Volunteer, Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition  
Lead Writer, Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 9:44:37 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pamela Louise Ramsay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony in Support of SCR55:**

My name is Pamela Ramsay, and I am the grandmother of Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer, who drowned on February 28, 2004. It has been 22 years, but there is not a day that passes without thinking of her.

Charlotte could swim like a fish and had the courage of a lion. Her heart was so big that she jumped into a dirty, poorly maintained retention pond to save a younger friend who could not swim. She pushed him to safety, but she did not make it out herself. My granddaughter died a hero.

Of all my grandchildren, Sharkey was the one most like me—the way she walked, turned her head, rolled her eyes, and smiled with that dimpled grin. Her “I can do it” spirit, her sweet laughter, and her grandma kisses are unforgettable. My only comfort is knowing she loved God, and I believe she is waiting to welcome me with open arms.

Hawai‘i continues to lose far too many children to drowning. The state has the second highest drowning rates in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for Hawai‘i’s children ages 1 to 15, and these deaths happen year after year. The fatal drowning rate is so very sad, because drowning is preventable.

The Senate already has passed **SR53**, the single chamber version of this resolution. But its important that the House also support it through **SCR55**. The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, which is designed to ensure that everyone in Hawai‘i is safe on, in and around the water. Please take action to support this roadmap of drowning prevention so that other grandmothers are not deprived of the hugs, laughter, and love that were taken from me.

Mahalo for protecting Hawai‘i’s keiki and families.

**Pamela Ramsay**

Grandmother of Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 9:50:06 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sheila Hill	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony in Support of SCR55:**

My name is Sheila Hill, and I am a high school classmate of Allison Schaefer Dubovsky. I submit this testimony in strong support of SCR55.

Allison and I grew up together, and I have watched her turn unimaginable personal loss into tireless advocacy to protect others. The death of her daughter, Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer, changed her life—and through her work, it is now helping change Hawai‘i for the better.

Hawai‘i has one of the highest drowning rates in the nation, and drowning remains the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15. These are not random accidents. They are preventable tragedies that continue year after year without a coordinated response.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan reflects deep collaboration among lifeguards, first responders, health professionals, educators, and community leaders. It is grounded in evidence, shaped by lived experience, and tailored to Hawai‘i’s unique waters and communities. I have seen firsthand the care, integrity, and purpose that went into this work.

Endorsing this plan is an important step toward saving lives and protecting keiki, families, and visitors. The Senate already has adopted SR53, the single chamber version of this resolution. But I urge the House to also support this measure through SCR55. Adoption will help ensure that fewer families endure the kind of loss that shaped my classmate’s life forever.

Mahalo for your leadership and commitment to water safety in Hawai‘i.

Sheila Hill  
High School Classmate of Allison Schaefer Dubovsky

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 9:52:30 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
joshua schaefer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Testimony in Strong Support of SCR55**

My name is Joshua Schaefer. I am the brother of Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer, who drowned in Hawai‘i while trying to save a child who did not know how to swim from a flooded and poorly maintained detention pond. I strongly support SCR55. which endorses the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

Drowning is a serious and preventable public health crisis in Hawai‘i. Our state has one of the highest drowning rates in the nation. It is the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15 and a leading cause of injury-related death among visitors. These tragedies happen far too often, and they do not have to.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan provides a coordinated, evidence-based roadmap to reduce drownings through education, prevention, and collaboration across agencies and communities. It reflects Hawai‘i’s unique ocean conditions, cultures, and risks.

My ohana’s loss is permanent. No ohana should have to experience this kind of grief. Endorsing this plan is an important step toward saving lives and protecting our keiki and communities.

The Senate already has adopted SR53, the single chamber version of this resolution. It is critical that the House also support the resolution through SCR55. Mahalo for your consideration and for taking action to make Hawai‘i safer.

Sincerely,

Joshua Schaefer

Subject: Urgent: Please Schedule SCR 55 Hawai'i Water Safety Plan

Aloha Chair Hashem and Vice Chair Morikawa,

I am writing to respectfully urge you to schedule a hearing for SCR 55, the concurrent resolution adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan.

The Senate has already adopted SR53, and SCR 55 is now the final opportunity for House and Senate alignment on this critical public safety issue.

Hawai'i continues to face a drowning crisis, with disproportionately high impacts on Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children. The Hawai'i Water Safety Plan provides a coordinated, data-driven framework to reduce drownings and has received national recognition.

Because SCR 55 is double-referred, it must be heard in the Water & Land Committee by April 17, 2026, to remain viable. I respectfully ask that you schedule a hearing as soon as possible.

Mahalo for your leadership and service.

Sincerely,  
Margaret Wright  
Princeville Kauai

**Testimony of Robert Toyofuku in support of  
SCR No. 55 Supporting the Findings and Recommendations of the Hawaii Water Safety  
Coalition's Hawaii Water Safety Plan.**

April 16, 2026

To: Chairman Mark Hashem and Members of the House Committee on Water and Land:

My name is Bob Toyofuku and I am submitting this testimony as an individual in support of SCR No. 55. As a former government affairs consultant, I have been involved in ocean and water safety issues since 1996. From 2001 to 2017, there was a lot of activity on ocean and beach safety issues at the legislature. Many issues that were raised in the Legislature over the years included the need for more lifeguard services, and that warning signs were needed on beaches to prevent serious injuries and drownings. One result was that the head lifeguard, Ralph Goto, helped to design pictorial warning signs that proved to be effective, and which undoubtedly resulted in saving lives and preventing serious injuries.

This Resolution provides that the Legislature supports the findings and recommendations of the Hawaii Water Safety Coalition's Hawaii Safety Plan. It is good state policy to support this Resolution, and I urge the members of this committee to pass SCR 55 and for the House to move this resolution forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/14/2026 9:31:43 PM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Dan Worden	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and members of the Committee,

I am writing in support of SR 53 and its companion measures, which call on the Legislature to adopt the findings and recommendations of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition's Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

Hawai‘i has the second-highest drowning rate in the nation, and drowning remains the leading cause of death for children ages one to fifteen in our state. Non-fatal drowning incidents, which occur at more than twice the rate of fatal drownings, frequently result in permanent injury and lasting hardship for families. These are preventable outcomes, and the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan provides a comprehensive, evidence-informed framework for preventing them, one that is aligned with the U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan and international best practices.

The plan's recommendations address the issue from multiple angles: expanding funding for the Department of Health to prioritize drowning prevention; requiring appropriate safety equipment at pools and aquatic environments; supporting lifeguard services statewide; ensuring access to free water safety and swimming instruction for children, including through school curricula; building and maintaining aquatic facilities in underserved communities; bringing public and private pools into compliance with the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act; and reconvening the DLNR's beach and water safety task force. I urge the Legislature to support this resolution and to call on the relevant state agencies and counties to collaborate with the HWSC on its implementation.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion, and I appreciate your time and consideration of this resolution.

Dan Worden

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/15/2026 1:53:36 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nick Dubovsky	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, as proposed in **SCR55** before your committee. While the Senate has already adopted **SR53**, the Senate version, it is critical that the entire State Legislature supports the findings and recommendations of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

Hawai‘i is currently amid a **drowning crisis**. Our state has the **second-highest drowning rate in the nation**, and drowning is the **leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 15** in Hawai‘i. It is also the **number one cause of injury-related death among Hawai‘i’s visitors**, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated, statewide prevention efforts.

Recent storms across the islands highlight Hawai‘i’s increasing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, including flooding and drowning, which must be addressed as a **disaster risk reduction priority**.

This crisis is also a matter of **equity**. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at approximately **1.5 times the rate** of the general population, and NHPI children drown at **three times the rate**. These disparities demonstrate that water safety is both a public safety and public health issue.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan was developed by the **Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition**, a statewide partnership of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. The plan has received national recognition, including a **Safe Kids Champion for Children Award** from Safe Kids Worldwide.

Adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan will provide a comprehensive, data-driven framework to reduce drownings, improve coordination, strengthen education and prevention, and ultimately save lives across our islands.

Mahalo for your time, leadership, and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai‘i.

Sincerely,

Nick Dubovsky



**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/15/2026 4:56:00 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Leslie Leibbrandt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for adopting the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, as proposed in SCR55 before your committee. While the Senate has already adopted SR53, its companion resolution, it is vital that the entire State Legislature endorses the findings and recommendations of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan.

Hawai‘i is facing a drowning crisis. Our state currently has the second-highest drowning rate in the nation, and drowning is the leading cause of death among children ages 1 to 15. It is also the number one cause of injury-related death for Hawai‘i’s visitors, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated, statewide prevention efforts.

Recent storms across the islands have further highlighted Hawai‘i’s vulnerability to climate impacts such as flooding and drowning, which must be prioritized within our disaster risk reduction strategies.

This crisis also reflects deep inequities. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at roughly 1.5 times the rate of the general population, and NHPI children drown at three times the rate. These disparities make clear that water safety is not only a public safety issue, but also a public health and equity challenge.

The Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan was developed by the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition—a statewide collaboration of government agencies, first responders, medical professionals, nonprofits, and community leaders. The plan has received national recognition, including a Safe Kids Champion for Children Award from Safe Kids Worldwide.

Adopting this plan will establish a comprehensive, data-informed framework to reduce drownings, enhance coordination, strengthen education and prevention efforts, and ultimately save lives across our islands.

Mahalo for your time, leadership, and commitment to protecting the people of Hawai‘i.

Sincerely,  
Leslie Leibbrandt

**SCR-55**

Submitted on: 4/16/2026 6:59:28 AM

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

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
David Norris	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in strong support of this resolution. Our Ocean safety teams need all the support they can get please consider increase in pay as well they are the lowest paid first responders

thank you