

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 7:43:33 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Robin Fasciano	Testifying for Hawaii Fire Department Ocean Safety Bureau	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Lifeguards literally are *the first responders* in most ocean related accidents or injuries at both our guarded beaches, and offshore waters using our rescue watercraft. We are the first on scene & are incorporated in the incident command system. Our lifeguards instruct and certify the firefighters in their aquatic competency certification. We utilize response vehicles with lights and sirens, enter life threatening conditions to perform rescues at higher trained levels than any civilian agency in the country.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 9:10:34 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kekaulike Kealoha	Testifying for Ocean safety Hawaii fire department	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong Support for Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

Aloha Chair Wakai and Chair Fukunaga and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, I write in strong and unequivocal support of the resolution recognizing open water lifeguards, Ocean Safety Officers and Water Safety Officers, as first responders in the State of Hawai‘i.

This resolution represents more than a symbolic designation. It is a necessary and overdue acknowledgment of the reality that open water lifeguards are an integral component of Hawai‘i’s frontline emergency response system.

Hawai‘i faces one of the most significant drowning risks in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for keiki ages 1–15, the leading cause of death among visitors, and Hawai‘i ranks second in the country for drowning rates. These risks are further elevated by the State’s high volume of visitors, many of whom are unfamiliar with local ocean conditions and hazards. In this high-risk environment, open water lifeguards serve as a critical frontline defense, performing more than 2 million preventative actions each year. These interventions, combined with rapid emergency response by highly trained professionals, represent countless lives saved and tragedies averted across our state.

Every day, these professionals operate in some of the most dynamic and hazardous environments in public safety. They are routinely the first to arrive at critical incidents, providing immediate, life-saving intervention in situations where seconds determine outcomes. Their scope of responsibility extends far beyond ocean rescue to include cardiac events, traumatic injuries, missing persons, and multi-agency emergency responses occurring across beaches, parks, and adjacent public spaces.

Open water lifeguards meet—and in many cases exceed—the functional definition of first responders. They are trained to assess, stabilize, and manage emergencies; they protect life while also safeguarding property, preserving evidence, and protecting the environment; and they do so while assuming significant personal risk.

Despite this, they have not been consistently or formally recognized within the same framework as other first responders. This gap in recognition has real consequences. It can limit access to critical training resources, interagency alignment, funding opportunities, and the professional recognition necessary to sustain and strengthen this workforce.

Formal recognition through this resolution will:

- Align policy with the operational reality of emergency response in Hawai‘i;
- Strengthen coordination across public safety agencies;
- Support recruitment, retention, and professional development of highly trained personnel; and
- Affirm the State’s commitment to protecting both its residents and the millions of visitors who depend on safe ocean and shoreline environments.

Hawai‘i’s ocean is central to our identity, our economy, and our way of life. The individuals who stand watch over it—and who respond without hesitation when emergencies arise—deserve to be recognized accordingly.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Legislature to adopt this resolution and formally recognize open water lifeguards as first responders.

Mahalo for your leadership and your continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,  
Kekaulike Kealoha  
Ocean Safety Officer  
Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 2:17:39 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bradley Young	Testifying for Hawai'i Fire Department, Ocean Safety Division	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for [SR54 and SCR56 / HR42 and HCR46], the resolutions recognizing **open water lifeguards as first responders** in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai'i.

Open water lifeguards perform a critical public safety function, protecting countless residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai'i's dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments. In the course of their duties, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—designated as **ocean safety officers or water safety officers**, depending on the county—are frequently **among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes**, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive. Their responsibilities extend well beyond ocean rescues and include responding to **cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle collisions** occurring on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo **rigorous and continuous training**, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the **professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect** afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai'i's ocean, shoreline, and public environments.

I respectfully ask that you **support these resolutions and ensure they receive a timely hearing.**

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,  
Bradley Young

Ocean Safety Division Battalion Chief  
Hilo, Hawai'i

# HONOLULU OCEAN SAFETY DEPARTMENT

KA 'OIHANA KIA'I OLA KAI O HONOLULU

## CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

3823 LEAHI AVE • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96815

PHONE: (808) 723-7861 • FAX: (808) 922-0411 • WEBSITE: [oceansafety.honolulu.gov](http://oceansafety.honolulu.gov)

RICK BLANGIARDI  
MAYOR  
MEIA



KURT S. LAGER  
CHIEF  
LUNA NUI

JIMMY BARROS  
DEPUTY CHIEF  
HOPE LUNA NUI

To: Members of the Hawai'i State Legislature

Subject: Letter of Support – Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Honorable Members of the Legislature:

I write in strong support of SCR56 SC54, recognizing open water lifeguards—including Ocean Safety Officers and Water Safety Officers; as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community well-being throughout the State of Hawai'i.

Open water lifeguards stand as the frontline of defense between life and tragedy in some of the most dynamic and hazardous environments in the world. These amazing individuals put themselves at risk daily during rescues in dangerous shore breaks, rip currents, reef, large year round surf, and extreme hazards requiring exceptional skill, vigilance, and courage.

Open water lifeguards are often the first personnel at emergency scenes. They initiate lifesaving interventions, secure hazardous environments, coordinate incoming responders, and provide advanced care until other first-responders arrive. Their responsibilities extend well beyond dangerous ocean rescues; responding to cardiac arrests, spinal injuries, traumatic accidents, marine life attacks, overdoses, assaults and other emergencies occurring in beach parks, parking areas, and roadways.

Our personnel undergo rigorous and ongoing training in high-performance CPR, AED use, advanced water rescue techniques, personal watercraft operations, emergency scene management, and interagency coordination. In fulfilling their duties and considering specialized training, rapid emergency response, and lifesaving intervention — open water lifeguards already are; and always have, functioned as first responders by definition.

The Honolulu Ocean Safety Department strongly supports the proper recognition of our personnel and all open water lifeguards through the adoption of SCR56 SC54.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of SCR56 SC54.

Jimmy Barros, Deputy Chief  
Honolulu Ocean Safety Department

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 6:34:14 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kyle Foyle	Testifying for Honolulu Ocean Safety Department	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

With 20 years as an Ocean Safety officer on Oahu's North Shore, currently a District 3 Lieutenant, and also a licensed EMT, I've always served as a "first responder."

Not being recognized as a first responder is quite honestly a slap in the face, as my partners are the literal first ones to a vehicle collision on the roads; the first to respond to someone in cardiac arrest or having a medical episode of any kind in the beach parks; and always on the scene for search and rescue efforts—and often first to secure patient—for EMS, HPD, HFD or Coast Guard. On some of our busiest North Shore days, preventatives even include crowd control, de-escalation of war veterans or drug users having PTSD episodes, and a wide variety of first aid. Ask anyone that has experienced an emergency in my district who they saw "first" and I guarantee you it was someone in red and yellow.

Labeling ocean safety officers as first responders is the accurate thing to do. But it's also the pono thing to do, as there are many first responder programs out there for purchasing homes, vehicles, phone plans, etc. that offer discounts that we, as some of the lowest paid first responders, could really use to help our families.

Mahalo for your consideration and doing the right thing for some of Hawaii's most hard-working community members.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/25/2026 11:11:37 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Pahukula kalili	Testifying for Hawai'i fire department ocean safety	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:



March 25, 2026

The Honorable Senator Wakai  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga

Chair, Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

RE: Strong Support for Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

Aloha Chair Wakai and Chair Fukunaga and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, I write in strong and unequivocal support of the resolution recognizing open water lifeguards, Ocean Safety Officers and Water Safety Officers, as first responders in the State of Hawai'i.

This resolution represents more than a symbolic designation. It is a necessary and overdue acknowledgment of the reality that open water lifeguards are an integral component of Hawai'i's frontline emergency response system.

Hawai'i faces one of the most significant drowning risks in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for keiki ages 1–15, the leading cause of death among visitors, and Hawai'i ranks second in the country for drowning rates. These risks are further elevated by the State's high volume of visitors, many of whom are unfamiliar with local ocean conditions and hazards. In this high-risk environment, open water lifeguards serve as a critical frontline defense, performing more than 2 million preventative actions each year. These interventions, combined with rapid emergency response by highly trained professionals, represent countless lives saved and tragedies averted across our state.

Every day, these professionals operate in some of the most dynamic and hazardous environments in public safety. They are routinely the first to arrive at critical incidents, providing immediate, life-saving intervention in situations where seconds determine outcomes. Their scope of responsibility extends far beyond ocean rescue to include cardiac events, traumatic injuries, missing persons, and multi-agency emergency responses occurring across beaches, parks, and adjacent public spaces.

Open water lifeguards meet—and in many cases exceed—the functional definition of first responders. They are trained to assess, stabilize, and manage emergencies; they protect life while also safeguarding property, preserving evidence, and protecting the environment; and they do so while assuming significant personal risk.

Despite this, they have not been consistently or formally recognized within the same framework as other first responders. This gap in recognition has real consequences. It can limit access to critical training resources, interagency alignment, funding opportunities, and the professional recognition necessary to sustain and strengthen this workforce.

Formal recognition through this resolution will:

- Align policy with the operational reality of emergency response in Hawai‘i;
- Strengthen coordination across public safety agencies;
- Support recruitment, retention, and professional development of highly trained personnel; and
- Affirm the State’s commitment to protecting both its residents and the millions of visitors who depend on safe ocean and shoreline environments.

Hawai‘i’s ocean is central to our identity, our economy, and our way of life. The individuals who stand watch over it—and who respond without hesitation when emergencies arise—deserve to be recognized accordingly.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Legislature to adopt this resolution and formally recognize open water lifeguards as first responders.

Mahalo for your leadership and your continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely, Pahukula kalili  
Ocean safety west Hawaii.  
Ph: (808)785-6566 email: pkkalili43@gmail.com

[info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org](mailto:info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org)

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 3:41:00 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
zach edlao	Testifying for Ocean Safety Bureau Maui	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for [SR54 and SCR56 / HR42 and HCR46], the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i.

Open water lifeguards perform a critical public safety function, protecting countless residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments. In the course of their duties, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—designated as ocean safety officers or water safety officers, depending on the county—are frequently among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive. Their responsibilities extend well beyond ocean rescues and include responding to cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle collisions occurring on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo rigorous and continuous training, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai‘i’s ocean, shoreline, and public environments.

I respectfully ask that you support these resolutions and ensure they receive a timely hearing.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,

Zach Edlao

Ocean Safety Bureau Chief

County of Maui

Department of Fire & Public Safety

21 Kinipopo St. Wailuku, HI. 96793

Ph: 808-866-7163



[www.AlohaILHawaii.org](http://www.AlohaILHawaii.org)

Mar 31, 2026

#### MISSION

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) dedicated to providing independent living programs and services for persons with disabilities in Hawaii.

We work together with the community and consumers to improve the quality of life through individual choices and access to services.

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Roxanne U. Bolden

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The Honorable Glenn Wakai, Chair  
Senate Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs  
The Honorable Carol Fukunaga, Chair  
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawaii  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

**SUBJECT:** SCR56 – Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders in Acknowledgment of Their Essential Role in Emergency Response, Public Safety, and Community Wellbeing Throughout the State

Chair and Members of the Committees:

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) **supports SCR56**, recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout the State. Disabled residents and visitors use Hawaii's beaches, shorelines, and coastal parks every day, and must be able to do so safely with equal access to prompt, effective emergency response when something goes wrong. Because open water lifeguards are often the first personnel to arrive on scene for open rescues, medical events, and other emergencies in these areas, recognizing them as first responders is an important step in strengthening community-based safety for all.

As counties and agencies implement this recognition and consider training and resource needs, AILH urges that disability inclusion be intentionally incorporated into planning for lifeguard roles. This includes disability-competent interaction and communication, coordination with interpreters and accessible formats, and practical skills for assisting people who use mobility devices, durable medical equipment, or other assistive technology during rescues and evacuations. In the context of increasing



[www.AlohaILHawaii.org](http://www.AlohaILHawaii.org)

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#### **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Roxanne U. Bolden

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Jennifer Hartssock

ocean hazards and coastal impacts from severe weather events, ensuring that lifeguard systems are prepared to effectively assist people with diverse disabilities will strengthen Hawaii's overall emergency response, public safety, and community resilience.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo,

Roxanne Bolden  
Executive Director

March 25, 2026

The Honorable Senator Wakai  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga  
Chair, Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs



**RE: Strong Support for Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders**

Aloha Chair Wakai and Chair Fukunaga and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, I write in strong and unequivocal support of the resolution recognizing open water lifeguards, Ocean Safety Officers and Water Safety Officers, as first responders in the State of Hawai'i.

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Mark Cunningham

This resolution represents more than a symbolic designation. It is a necessary and overdue acknowledgment of the reality that open water lifeguards are an integral component of Hawai'i's frontline emergency response system.

Hawai'i faces one of the most significant drowning risks in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for keiki ages 1–15, the leading cause of death among visitors, and Hawai'i ranks second in the country for drowning rates. These risks are further elevated by the State's high volume of visitors, many of whom are unfamiliar with local ocean conditions and hazards. In this high-risk environment, open water lifeguards serve as a critical frontline defense, performing more than 2 million preventative actions each year. These interventions, combined with rapid emergency response by highly trained professionals, represent countless lives saved and tragedies averted across our state.

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Despite this, they have not been consistently or formally recognized within the same framework as other first responders. This gap in recognition has real consequences. It can limit access to critical training resources, interagency alignment, funding opportunities, and the professional recognition necessary to sustain and strengthen this workforce.

[info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org](mailto:info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org)

Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

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

Formal recognition through this resolution will:

- Align policy with the operational reality of emergency response in Hawai'i;
- Strengthen coordination across public safety agencies;
- Support recruitment, retention, and professional development of highly trained personnel; and
- Affirm the State's commitment to protecting both its residents and the millions of visitors who depend on safe ocean and shoreline environments.

Hawai'i's ocean is central to our identity, our economy, and our way of life. The individuals who stand watch over it—and who respond without hesitation when emergencies arise—deserve to be recognized accordingly.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Legislature to adopt this resolution and formally recognize open water lifeguards as first responders.

Mahalo for your leadership and your continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,  
[Name]  
[Title]  
Hawaiian Lifeguard Association  
[Contact Information]

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 2:23:16 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Sarah Fairchild	Testifying for Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in support of SR54 recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai'i. Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. They are there for us; let's be there for them.



**March 27, 2026**

**Testimony in Support of SCR 56 / SR54 Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders**

**To:** Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs Chair: Senator Glenn Wakai Vice Chair: Senator Stanley Chang

Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs Chair: Senator Carol Fukunaga Vice Chair: Senator Chris Lee

**Aloha Chairs and Committee Members,**

My name is Lisa Dau, Injury Prevention Coordinator at Kapi‘olani Medical Center for Women & Children and a representative of the Keiki Injury Prevention Coalition (KIPC). I submit this testimony in strong **support** of SCR56 / SR54.

Open water lifeguards play a critical, life-saving role in Hawaii’s coastal communities. They serve as essential first responders — providing immediate emergency medical care, water rescues, and public safety education every day across our beaches and shorelines. Recognizing them formally as first responders acknowledges their vital contributions to emergency response, injury prevention, and community wellbeing.

This recognition is especially important for child and family safety. Lifeguards are often the first line of defense in preventing drownings and ocean-related injuries, which remain leading causes of preventable death and trauma among keiki and visitors alike. Elevating their status supports better coordination with other emergency services and highlights the need for sustained resources and training.

KIPC urges the committees to adopt SR54 to honor these dedicated professionals and strengthen public safety across the state.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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

<https://kipchawaii.org/>

March 29, 2026

The Honorable Senator Wakai  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga  
Chair, Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs



**RE: Strong Support for Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders**

Aloha Chair Wakai and Chair Fukunaga and Members of the Committee,

My name is Clark Abbey and I'm from Kaneohe Bay. I've been a lifeguard since 1984 and started with the City and County of Honolulu. My time with the city took me around every lifeguard tower around the Island of Oahu but spent most of my time on the North Shore at Waimea Bay. I was also a Federal Lifeguard at Waianae Army Rec Center and Mokuieia Army Beach. Currently the Beach Lifeguard Supervisor at Marine Corps Base Hawaii Kaneohe Bay which is where Pyramid Rock and North Beach are. It's compared to the North Shore as waves get as high as 40-foot faces. I have been approached by the USCG, Honolulu Fire Department, Fed Fire and Honolulu Ocean Safety to host a Search and Rescue Exercise to better an inter-Agency response to an Emergency. Lifeguards are the first responders to an ocean emergency. All other Agencies that respond to the aid are leaning on the first responders which are the lifeguards to be an asset to the ocean emergency. It makes total sense to include Ocean Lifeguards as First Responders. If there are any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,  
Clark Abbey  
Beach Lifeguard Supervisor  
Marine Corps Base Hawaii Kaneohe Bay  
[clark.abbey@usmc-mccs.org](mailto:clark.abbey@usmc-mccs.org)  
808-347-3347 cell

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Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

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

[info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org](mailto:info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org)



66-434 Kamehameha Hwy  
Haleiwa, HI 96712  
(808) 637-4558

[info@gonorthshore.org](mailto:info@gonorthshore.org) / [www.gonorthshore.org](http://www.gonorthshore.org)

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Bill Ward  
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Corcoran Properties

Virginia Wallace  
Administrator

Marsha Taylor  
Community Outreach  
Coordinator

**Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee  
&  
Public Safety and Military Affairs Committee**

**Hearing Date: March 31, 2026**

**Time: 3:00 PM**

**Location: Conference Room 224**

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SR54**

**Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders**

*Aloha Chair Wakai, Chair Fukunaga, and Members of the Committees,*

*On behalf of the North Shore Chamber of Commerce, I am writing in strong support of SR54, which recognizes open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout the State of Hawai'i.*

*The North Shore of O'ahu is world-renowned for its extreme ocean conditions, drawing visitors from around the globe to experience iconic surf breaks and coastal environments. These same conditions, while central to our visitor industry and local culture, also present significant and often life-threatening risks. Open water lifeguards are the frontline professionals who make it possible for residents and visitors alike to safely enjoy Hawai'i's ocean resources. Their specialized training, constant vigilance, and rapid response capabilities are critical to sustaining both public safety and the economic vitality of our communities.*

*As outlined in SR54, open water lifeguards routinely operate in dynamic and hazardous environments and are frequently among the first to arrive at emergency scenes, providing life-saving care and coordinating with other emergency personnel. Their role extends far beyond ocean rescues, encompassing medical emergencies, shoreline incidents, and public safety coordination in high-risk environments.*

**This designation is not only appropriate—it is necessary.**

*During the recent Kona Storm that devastated portions of the North Shore, including Waialua, our community witnessed firsthand the extraordinary courage and commitment of our lifeguards. In the absence of immediate formal response infrastructure in the earliest hours, North Shore lifeguards were among the very first responders who entered dangerous floodwaters to rescue trapped residents, helping to save lives under extreme and rapidly changing conditions. Their actions exemplify the very definition of a first responder.*

*The North Shore Chamber of Commerce is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization,  
Federal Tax ID# 99-0265444*



66-434 Kamehameha Hwy  
Haleiwa, HI 96712  
(808) 637-4558

[info@gonorthshore.org](mailto:info@gonorthshore.org) / [www.gonorthshore.org](http://www.gonorthshore.org)

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Carol Philips  
Vice-President  
North Shore Surf Girls

Marcia Murphy  
Treasurer  
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Darrell Whitaker  
Secretary  
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Dave Fuga  
Director  
KT Protection Systems

Erica Lehmkuhl  
Director  
Seaside Realty

Michelle Maldonado  
Director

Thomas Naylor  
Director  
Ke Nui Kitchen

Michael Sweetman  
Director  
Law Offices of  
Einwechter & Hyatt

Robert Walker  
Director  
Integral Consulting

Bill Ward  
Director  
Corcoran Properties

Virginia Wallace  
Administrator

Marsha Taylor  
Community Outreach  
Coordinator

*For the visitor industry, this recognition is especially important. Hawai'i's reputation as a safe and welcoming destination depends heavily on the presence of highly trained ocean safety professionals. Officially recognizing lifeguards as first responders reinforces the State's commitment to safety, supports workforce development and retention, and ensures these professionals receive the resources, protections, and respect commensurate with the responsibilities they carry.*

*We strongly urge the Legislature to adopt SR54 and formally recognize open water lifeguards as first responders. Doing so honors their service, strengthens our emergency response system, and supports the safety of both our residents and the millions of visitors who experience Hawai'i's shores each year.*

*Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this important measure.*

**Carol Philips,**

*Vice President*

**North Shore Chamber of Commerce**



March 29, 2026

The Honorable Senator Wakai  
Senate Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga  
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

Hawai'i State Legislature

**RE: Support for SCR56/SR54 – Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders**

Aloha Chair Wakai and Chair Fukunaga and Members of the Committees,

I write in my capacity as Coordinator of the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition (HWSC) in strong support of SCR56/SR54 recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders in the State of Hawai'i.

The Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition is a statewide partnership of ocean safety agencies, public safety professionals, healthcare providers, government agencies, visitor industry professionals, private sector stakeholders, and community organizations working collaboratively to reduce drowning and aquatic injury across our islands. From this systems-level perspective, the role of open water lifeguards as first responders is clear and well established.

Across Hawai'i, lifeguards are fully integrated into the broader emergency response landscape. They are often the first to identify risk, the first to intervene, and the first to provide medical care. Their work does not occur in isolation—it is part of a coordinated continuum that includes emergency medical services, fire, law enforcement, and public health systems.

In a state where drowning remains the leading cause of death for keiki ages 1–15 and visitors, and where environmental conditions present ongoing risk, this coordination is essential. Open water lifeguards perform more than 2 million preventative actions annually, reducing risk before incidents occur, and respond rapidly when emergencies escalate.

From a coalition perspective, formal recognition of lifeguards as first responders strengthens the entire system. It supports clearer alignment across agencies, improves integration into emergency response planning, and reinforces the shared goal of preventing injury and saving lives.

This resolution reflects the reality of how public safety is already being delivered in Hawai'i.

For these reasons, the Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition respectfully urges your support.

Mahalo for your leadership and your commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Mahalo

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



March 25, 2026

The Honorable Senator Wakai  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga  
Chair, Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

RE: Strong Support for Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

Aloha Chair Wakai and Chair Fukunaga and Members of the Committee,



**Board of Directors**

Kalani Vierra  
President

Ricky Alvarez  
Vice President

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Treasurer

Directors  
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Kekaulike Kealoha  
Luke Evslin

Kirsten Hermstad  
Executive Director

**Honorary Legends**

Ralph Goto  
Brian Keaulana  
Archie Kalepa  
Mark Cunningham

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

As President of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, I represent a statewide community of professionals who serve on the front lines of ocean and public safety every day. I write in strong support of SCR56/SR54 recognizing open water lifeguards—Ocean Safety Officers and Water Safety Officers—as first responders in the State of Hawai'i.

For our members, this designation is not aspirational—it reflects the work they are already doing.

Hawai'i presents one of the most challenging aquatic safety environments in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for keiki ages 1–15 and the leading cause of death among visitors, with the State ranking second nationally in drowning rates. These risks are intensified by high visitor volumes and widespread unfamiliarity with local ocean conditions. In response, lifeguards perform more than 2 million preventative actions each year, intervening before emergencies escalate. When incidents do occur, they respond immediately as highly trained professionals, often arriving first and determining outcomes in critical moments.

Our members routinely operate in unpredictable, high-risk conditions and respond not only to ocean emergencies, but also to cardiac events, traumatic injuries, and multi-agency incidents across public spaces. They fulfill the full scope of emergency response—protecting life, preserving safety, and coordinating with partner agencies under pressure.

Yet despite this, they are not consistently recognized within the same framework as other first responders.

This resolution is an important step toward correcting that gap. It aligns recognition with reality and affirms the essential role these professionals play in protecting our communities and visitors alike.

On behalf of the men and women who serve in this capacity every day, I respectfully urge your support.

Mahalo for your leadership and your commitment to public safety in Hawai'i.

Sincerely,

*David Vierra*

Kalani Vierra  
President  
Hawaiian Lifeguard Association

info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org



March 30, 2026

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SR54, SCR56  
RELATING TO THE RECOGNITION OF OPEN WATER LIFEGUARDS AS FIRST RESPONDERS**

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 SR54, SCR56.

Open water lifeguards are a critical component of Hawai‘i’s public safety system and are often the **first to arrive** at emergency scenes. In addition to ocean rescues, they routinely respond to cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and incidents occurring on beaches, parks, and adjacent public areas—working alongside police, fire, and EMS personnel.

They are highly trained in CPR, AED use, advanced rescue techniques, and emergency scene management, and they regularly perform duties consistent with those of recognized first responders—often under hazardous ocean conditions.

This measure does not change their responsibilities; it simply recognizes the reality of the role they already perform. Formal recognition will help ensure appropriate support, coordination, and respect across our public safety system.

Through our work at The Rescue Tube Foundation, we have seen firsthand that rapid response in aquatic emergencies saves lives.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to pass these measures.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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

March 30, 2026

The Honorable Senator Wakai  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga  
Chair, Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs



**RE: Strong Support for Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders**

Aloha Chair Wakai and Chair Fukunaga and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, I write in strong and unequivocal support of the resolution recognizing open water lifeguards, Ocean Safety Officers and Water Safety Officers, as first responders in the State of Hawai'i.

Board of Directors

Kalani Vierra  
President

Ricky Alvarez  
Vice President

Bridget Velasco  
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Clark Abbey  
Kekaulike Kealoha  
Luke Evslin

Kirsten Hemstad  
Executive Director

Honorary Legends  
Ralph Goto  
Brian Keaulana  
Archie Kalepa  
Mark Cunningham

This resolution represents more than a symbolic designation. It is a necessary and overdue acknowledgment of the reality that open water lifeguards are an integral component of Hawai'i's frontline emergency response system.

Hawai'i faces one of the most significant drowning risks in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for keiki ages 1–15, the leading cause of death among visitors, and Hawai'i ranks second in the country for drowning rates. These risks are further elevated by the State's high volume of visitors, many of whom are unfamiliar with local ocean conditions and hazards. In this high-risk environment, open water lifeguards serve as a critical frontline defense, performing more than 2 million preventative actions each year. These interventions, combined with rapid emergency response by highly trained professionals, represent countless lives saved and tragedies averted across our state.

Every day, these professionals operate in some of the most dynamic and hazardous environments in public safety. They are routinely the first to arrive at critical incidents, providing immediate, life-saving intervention in situations where seconds determine outcomes. Their scope of responsibility extends far beyond ocean rescue to include cardiac events, traumatic injuries, missing persons, and multi-agency emergency responses occurring across beaches, parks, and adjacent public spaces.

Open water lifeguards meet—and in many cases exceed—the functional definition of first responders. They are trained to assess, stabilize, and manage emergencies; they protect life while also safeguarding property, preserving evidence, and protecting the environment; and they do so while assuming significant personal risk.

Despite this, they have not been consistently or formally recognized within the same framework as other first responders. This gap in recognition has real consequences. It can limit access to critical training resources, interagency alignment, funding opportunities, and the professional recognition necessary to sustain and strengthen this workforce.

[info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org](mailto:info@hawaiianlifeguardassociation.org)

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

Formal recognition through this resolution will:

- Align policy with the operational reality of emergency response in Hawai'i;
- Strengthen coordination across public safety agencies;
- Support recruitment, retention, and professional development of highly trained personnel; and
- Affirm the State's commitment to protecting both its residents and the millions of visitors who depend on safe ocean and shoreline environments.

Hawai'i's ocean is central to our identity, our economy, and our way of life. The individuals who stand watch over it—and who respond without hesitation when emergencies arise—deserve to be recognized accordingly.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Legislature to adopt this resolution and formally recognize open water lifeguards as first responders.

Mahalo for your leadership and your continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,  
Jonathan Kaneshina  
Director  
Hawaiian Lifeguard Association  
808-357-5874

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 9:55:38 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chad Listman	Testifying for HGEA UNIT 15	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As the current president of HGEA union unit 15,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for **[SR54 and SCR56 / HR42 and HCR46]**, the resolutions recognizing **open water lifeguards as first responders** in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i.

Open water lifeguards perform a critical public safety function, protecting countless residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments. In the course of their duties, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—designated as **ocean safety officers or water safety officers**, depending on the county—are frequently **among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes**, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive. Their responsibilities extend well beyond ocean rescues and include responding to **cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle collisions** occurring on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo **rigorous and continuous training**, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the **professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect** afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai‘i’s ocean, shoreline, and public environments.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,  
CHAD K LISTMAN  
HANAIEI, KAUAI, HAWAII

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 8:48:20 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
William Pigott	Testifying for Marine Core Civilian Services Water Safety	Support	In Person

Comments:

March 29, 2026

The Honorable Senator Wakai  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga  
Chair, Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

RE: Strong Support for Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

Aloha Chair Wakai, Chair Fukunaga, and Members of the Committee,

My name is William Pigott, and I am a Beach Lifeguard at Marine Corps Base Hawaii Kaneohe Bay. I moved to Oahu in 2012 with my mother and father after relocating to eight different places throughout my life due to my father's service in the United States Marine Corps.

I have been working as a beach lifeguard for two years, and before that I worked for four years at both the Marine Corps Base Hawaii pool and the University of Hawaii at Manoa pool. During my training and transition to beach lifeguarding, I learned to work directly with emergency response agencies, including Emergency Medical Services, police officers, the fire department, the Coast Guard, and hazmat teams at both the federal and city levels.

As beach lifeguards, we communicate daily with the public about ocean hazards such as rip currents, tides, waves, and shoreline rocks. Many people who come to Hawaii's beaches are unfamiliar with local ocean conditions, and we take an active role in educating them on how to stay safe. This includes giving practical guidance on what to do in dangerous situations, such as how to use incoming whitewater to help return to shore while waiting for assistance after being swept out by a current. This kind of knowledge can make a critical difference in an emergency.

We work hard to keep the public informed, monitor the water continuously, and respond immediately when danger arises. Because we are often the first on scene in ocean emergencies, open water lifeguards already serve in the role of first responders. Recognizing lifeguards as first responders would reflect the reality of the work we do and the responsibility we carry to protect lives in Hawaii's waters.

Thank you for your time, consideration and support.

Respectfully,

William Pigott  
Beach Lifeguard  
Marine Corps Base Hawaii Kaneohe Bay  
wmpigott@my.hpu.edu  
717-636-2007



## HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

RANDY PERREIRA, Executive Director • Tel: 808.543.0011 • Fax: 808.528.0922

The Thirty-Third Legislature, State of Hawaii  
The Senate  
Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs  
Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

Testimony by  
Hawaii Government Employees Association

March 31, 2026

S.C.R. 56/S.R. 54 – RECOGNIZING OPEN WATER LIFEGUARD AS  
FIRST RESPONDERS IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THEIR ESSENTIAL  
ROLE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE, PUBLIC SAFETY, AND COMMUNITY  
WELLBEING THROUGHOUT THE STATE

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO strongly supports S.C.R. 56/S.R. 54, which encourages the Senate with the House of Representatives concurring, to recognize open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgement of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout the State. Furthermore, it is encouraged that all relevant State and County agencies, departments, and governing bodies adopt this recognition and ensure that open water lifeguards are afforded the rights, resources, training support, and professional respect accorded to first responders.

Open water lifeguards, known as Ocean Safety Officers within the counties of Kauai and Maui and Water Safety Officers within the City and County of Honolulu and Hawaii County are considered the best in the world. They are trained above the standards of the United States Lifesaving Association and are the only “first responders” that must maintain certifications and pass demanding physical performance tests annually to ensure they can manage high-adrenaline and physically exhausting rescues. Many lifeguards are certified rescue watercraft (jet ski) operators, which allows them to reach victims much quicker in challenging surf. Many are also trained and certified as emergency medical technicians (EMT) which allows them to deliver advanced life support (ALS) to victims before medical professionals arrive.

Similar to other first responders (i.e. law enforcement, fire fighters, paramedics, etc.), lifeguards receive specialized training and are first to arrive and provide care or resolution at the scene of emergency. A perfect example is the recent Kona-low storm, although responding to floods are not generally within their scope of duties, lifeguards responded to assist those who were trapped in devastating conditions. The state should recognize lifeguards as first responders as they run towards dangerous situations to save lives, at the expense of risking their own lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of S.C.R. 56/S.R. 54.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira  
Executive Director

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Senator Glenn Wakai, Chair

Senator Stanley Chang, Vice Chair



COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Senator Carol Fukunaga, Chair

Senator Chris Lee, Vice Chair

March 30, 2026

RE: STRONG SUPPORT OF SR54 & SCR56 *Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders*

Aloha Chairs Wakai and Fukunaga, Vice Chairs Chang and Lee and committee members,

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony. The term "first responder" is commonly defined as an individual with **specialized training** who is among the **first to arrive at and provide assistance at the scene of an emergency**.

The Hawai'i Search and Rescue (SAR) Alliance is a collaborative effort of multiple agencies, teams, and organizations that consist of first responders, specifically those who conduct SAR operations across the State of Hawai'i. We advocate for the rights, resources, training support, and professional respect accorded to first responders. Our Alliance consists of subject matter experts—including local experts representing all relevant state agencies as well as national partners—who meet to determine best practices and support system development.

As many open water lifeguards are cross-trained in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and water rescue craft operations, we support that they be afforded the respect and recognition as first responders in the State of Hawaii.

There is a **3-3-3 survival rule**. Humans can live three weeks without food, three days without water and **THREE minutes without breath**. In the water, **seconds make the difference between life and death**. Gratefully, due to our lifeguards countless lives are saved from death or serious injury among residents and visitors throughout the State on a daily basis.

**Open water lifeguards:**

- **Meet the four defined duties of an emergency response employees:**
  - Respond/attend to emergencies
  - Treating victims
  - Assisting victims
  - Transporting victims

- **Meet the four core tenets commonly used to define a first responder:**
  - Protect human life
  - Safeguard property
  - Preserve evidence
  - Protect the environment
- **Are cross-trained in:**
  - Emergency medical response
  - Marine fire safety
  - Law enforcement support
  - Water rescue craft operations

Open water lifeguards also have training and are experienced in emergency scene management duties which have extended far beyond ocean rescues due to the **increase of extreme weather.**

The unpredictable and hazardous environments in which they operate, and the wide range of emergency situations and locations to which they respond are vast and rapidly expanding. This has been proven time and time again but **most noticeable** during and in the immediate aftermath of the **August 8th wildfires on Maui** and the most recent in the **Kona Low storms on the North Shore of Oahu**. They did not only play an essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing but **they** were the ones who **literally saved the day and hundreds of lives!**

They are trained to **jump into action** and that is what they did **for their community**. On those grounds, and their actions on a daily basis, I respectfully urge your support for **SR54 and SCR56**, the resolutions recognizing **open water lifeguards as first responders**—which they truly are.

Many other countries formally recognize open water lifeguards as emergency responders and grant them access to programs, protections, and resources afforded to first responders. Considering the necessity of them in our state, we request that this body recognizes them as first responders in the State of Hawaii. This will also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities and enhance safety across the State's ocean, shoreline, and public environments.

I will be available for questions.

Mahalo  
 Rosemarie Johnson  
 BSE, MBA, MBB, TICC, Strategist  
 Director, Hawai'i SAR Alliance  
 Director@Hawai'iSARAlliance.org

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/24/2026 6:18:11 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Julia Estigoy-Kahoonei	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Yes I support the proposal of recognizing lifeguards as first responders. That is exactly what they are and should be compensated as such

They are the ones protecting not only visitors who are unaware of the dangers of our waters but are there for our local residents, keeping us all safe.

Julia Estigoy-Kaho‘onei

Moku o Keawe

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/25/2026 9:56:23 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Niki Roderick	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong and unequivocal support of the resolution recognizing open water lifeguards, Ocean Safety Officers and Water Safety Officers, as first responders in the State of Hawai‘i.

This resolution represents more than a symbolic designation. It is a necessary and overdue acknowledgment of the reality that open water lifeguards are an integral component of Hawai‘i’s frontline emergency response system.

Hawai‘i faces one of the most significant drowning risks in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for keiki ages 1–15, the leading cause of death among visitors, and Hawai‘i ranks second in the country for drowning rates. These risks are further elevated by the State’s high volume of visitors, many of whom are unfamiliar with local ocean conditions and hazards. In this high-risk environment, open water lifeguards serve as a critical frontline defense, performing more than 2 million preventative actions each year. These interventions, combined with rapid emergency response by highly trained professionals, represent countless lives saved and tragedies averted across our state.

Every day, these professionals operate in some of the most dynamic and hazardous environments in public safety. They are routinely the first to arrive at critical incidents, providing immediate, life-saving intervention in situations where seconds determine outcomes. Their scope of responsibility extends far beyond ocean rescue to include cardiac events, traumatic injuries, missing persons, and multi-agency emergency responses occurring across beaches, parks, and adjacent public spaces.

Open water lifeguards meet—and in many cases exceed—the functional definition of first responders. They are trained to assess, stabilize, and manage emergencies; they protect life while also safeguarding property, preserving evidence, and protecting the environment; and they do so while assuming significant personal risk.

Despite this, they have not been consistently or formally recognized within the same framework as other first responders. This gap in recognition has real consequences. It can limit access to critical training resources, interagency alignment, funding opportunities, and the professional recognition necessary to sustain and strengthen this workforce.

Formal recognition through this resolution will:

- Align policy with the operational reality of emergency response in Hawai‘i;
- Strengthen coordination across public safety agencies;
- Support recruitment, retention, and professional development of highly trained personnel;  
and
- Affirm the State’s commitment to protecting both its residents and the millions of visitors who depend on safe ocean and shoreline environments.

Hawai‘i’s ocean is central to our identity, our economy, and our way of life. The individuals who stand watch over it—and who respond without hesitation when emergencies arise—deserve to be recognized accordingly.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Legislature to adopt this resolution and formally recognize open water lifeguards as first responders.

Mahalo for your leadership and your continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/25/2026 1:56:41 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Aubrie Jones-Owens	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

-Aloha Chair Wakai, Chair Fukunaga, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Aubrie, and I am an Ocean Safety Lifeguard in the State of Hawai‘i. I am writing in strong support of the resolution recognizing Open Water Lifeguards, Ocean Safety Officers and Water Safety Officers, as first responders in the State of Hawai‘i.

This recognition is not simply symbolic. It reflects the reality of the work that ocean safety lifeguards perform every day across our state.

Hawai‘i faces some of the highest drowning risks in the nation. Drowning remains the leading cause of death for keiki ages 1–15 and the leading cause of death among visitors. With millions of residents and visitors entering our ocean each year, many unfamiliar with its power and hazards, Ocean Safety lifeguards serve as the frontline of prevention and emergency response.

Every day we perform millions of preventative actions that stop emergencies before they happen. When those emergencies do occur, we are often the first on scene. We respond to drowning victims, cardiac events, traumatic injuries, missing persons, and other critical incidents along our shorelines, beaches, and parks.

As Ocean Safety lifeguards, we already function as first responders. We coordinate with fire, EMS, law enforcement, and other agencies during emergencies.

However, despite the critical role we play in Hawai‘i’s emergency response system, we have not always been formally recognized within the same framework as other first responders. This resolution helps correct that gap.

Hawai‘i’s ocean is central to the culture, identity, and economy. Those who stand watch over it and respond when lives are at risk deserve recognition for the role they already fulfill.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued commitment to the safety of our communities.

Respectfully,

Aubrie Jones-Owens

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for [SR54 and SCR56 / HR42 and HCR46], which recognize open water lifeguards as first responders. It reflects the reality of the work they already perform every day across Hawai'i.

Open water lifeguards are often the first to arrive in life-threatening situations. They respond to ocean rescues, cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and emergencies along our shorelines. They work alongside police and fire, stabilize victims, manage scenes, and take on real personal risk. By every practical definition, they are already first responders.

This issue is personal for me. In 2022, I lost my 15-year-old daughter in a surfing accident at a popular West Hawaii beach on the Big Island. In those moments, seconds matter. Immediate access to trained responders can mean the difference between life and death. When no lifeguard is present, that responsibility falls on bystanders who are not equipped to respond. That gap is where preventable tragedies happen.

Lifeguards are trained in CPR, AED use, advanced rescue, and emergency response coordination. They are positioned where emergencies actually occur. Recognizing them as first responders ensures they receive the support, resources, and recognition needed to continue saving lives.

This is about aligning policy with reality and preventing future loss. I respectfully ask that you support these resolutions and ensure they receive a timely hearing.

Mahalo for your leadership and commitment to community safety.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/26/2026 1:46:55 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leimana	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

‘Ano‘ai me ka pumehana iā kākou,

It is about time lifeguards are recognized for their service to the lāhui. The number one cause of death of young people in Hawai‘i nei is drowning. Plenty of other age groups are directly involved in the rescues ocean safety officers make each day. Lifeguards are able to be there and rescue all ages, but specifically nā keiki and nā opio while teaching them essential life lessons about our kai. Parents and teachers are not always equipping these age groups with the necessary skills to be ma‘a and kama‘āina to the ocean and its characteristics. As a Kumu of health and physical education, I am seeing a huge lack of basic swimming skills and an increase of fear when it comes to the ocean. Lifeguards are not only responsible for preventative measures, but are there first when emergencies occur on our shores. Their medical care and safety measures save lives each day. They already respond first and often stay late to help. I am in agreement that open water lifeguards should be officially recognized AS FIRST RESPONDERS IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THEIR ESSENTIAL ROLE IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE, PUBLIC SAFETY, AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING THROUGHOUT THE STATE.

Me ka ha‘aha‘a, aloha nō,

Leimana Hassett

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/26/2026 3:41:28 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

As a child at Hapuna beach I was swept out to sea in a rip current and was saved by a lifeguard. He was the only and first responder to my emergency. I would not be alive were it not for that lifeguard and the specialized training he had received and operated in.

I have grown up on the Kona coast and have seen thousands of lives saved by ocean safety officers who were the first and only people able to save them.

please pass this resolution thousands of people's lives daily are affected

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 9:11:52 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Amy L. Salvido	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Thank you for acknowledging my written testimony in support of this bill. I am in support of this Bill as Lifeguards should be recognized as first responders as they too are risking their lives to serve and protect the people of Hawaii and their visitors. They are trained physically, mentally and to a certain extent medically to provide assistance with individuals until EMS or HFD arrives on scene. I have seen first hand that their duty goes beyond Ocean Safety. During this recent Waialua flood, I have seen Lifeguards take out their surfboards and jet skis to help the people of Waialua. I did not see any other City & County personnel out there assisting the people of Waialua at Otake Camp. I believe this is a great example of an account of their earning the respect and recognition of a first responder. **THEY WERE THERE** when all other so-called first responders were NOT. Additionally, our Lifeguards' knowledge of the Hawaiian waters is incomprehensible to the average citizen. They have a keen sense of danger and are the true soldiers of the Hawaiian waters, which is almost always underestimated by the average citizen.

In closing, I believe the State of Hawaii's Lifeguards have earned the respect and should be highly recognized as first responders based on their selfless acts of duty in providing overwhelming safety that goes beyond the Ocean Safety at the Beach. They took their surfboards and jet skis to bring the people of Waialua/Otake Camp to safety. They keep the people of Hawaii as well as our cherished visitors safe in and around our Hawaiian waters. They are physically, mentally, and to an extend medically trained to provide safety to citizens near and far until EMS/HFD arrives to provide the next level of care.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 9:57:41 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Shaylan Arneho	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Shaylan Arneho, submit this testimony in support of the resolution to recognize open water lifeguards as first responders. Lifeguards play a critical role in ensuring public safety and serve as stewards of our beaches, which are among our most valuable natural resources.

Each year, thousands of people visit our beaches, and lifeguards are there every day to protect and assist those who enter the ocean. When individuals are in distress, lifeguards are expected to respond immediately and provide life-saving aid. Their responsibilities and expectations clearly align with those of first responders.

Furthermore, lifeguards are required to remain on duty during hazardous conditions, including tsunami warnings and periods of dangerous surf and weather. If we expect them to continue working under these high-risk circumstances, it is only appropriate that they be formally recognized as first responders.

For these reasons, I fully support this resolution.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 10:54:05 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lucy Dorado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Lifeguards serve as frontline emergency personnel whose primary responsibility is the preservation of human life in aquatic environments. Their role meets the widely accepted definition of a first responder: individuals who are among the first to arrive at and provide assistance during an emergency.

Unlike many emergency services that respond after an incident is reported, lifeguards operate in a proactive emergency response capacity. They continuously monitor hazardous environments, identify risks before escalation, and initiate immediate lifesaving interventions without delay.

Lifeguards are trained and certified in emergency medical response skills including:

- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)
- Automated External Defibrillator (AED) operation
- First Aid and trauma management
- Spinal injury stabilization
- Water rescue and extrication techniques
- Emergency oxygen administration
- Incident command coordination until advanced care arrives

In drowning emergencies, survival outcomes depend heavily on rapid intervention within the first minutes. Lifeguards are typically the *first trained professionals* to recognize distress, enter hazardous conditions, perform rescue operations, and begin medical care prior to the arrival of fire, EMS, or law enforcement personnel.

The **American Red Cross** defines lifeguards as trained rescuers responsible for emergency recognition, response, and care in aquatic incidents. Similarly, the **United States Lifesaving Association** recognizes lifeguards as public safety professionals who prevent incidents, perform rescues, and provide emergency medical aid as part of the emergency response system.

Operationally, lifeguards perform duties consistent with other recognized first responders:

- Immediate emergency assessment
- Hazard mitigation and scene safety control
- Patient stabilization and lifesaving care
- Activation and coordination with EMS systems

- Documentation and incident reporting

Research consistently shows that professionally staffed beaches have drowning fatality rates near zero, demonstrating that lifeguards function not merely as attendants but as active emergency responders whose presence directly saves lives.

Therefore, based on training standards, operational responsibilities, and emergency response functions, lifeguards clearly meet the criteria of first responders. They provide the earliest critical link in the chain of survival, bridging the gap between emergency onset and advanced medical care.

Lifeguards are not recreational staff; they are trained emergency professionals who prevent loss of life, deliver immediate medical intervention, and serve as essential members of the public safety and first responder community.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 11:32:09 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
John-Howard Chang Wo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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I John-Howard Chang Wo, submit this testimony in support of the resolution to recognize open water lifeguards as first responders. Lifeguards play a critical role in ensuring public safety and serve as stewards of our beaches, which are among our most valuable natural resources. Each year, thousands of people visit our beaches, and lifeguards are there every day to protect and assist those who enter the ocean. When individuals are in distress, lifeguards are expected to respond immediately and provide life-saving aid. Their responsibilities and expectations clearly align with those of first responders.

Furthermore, lifeguards are required to remain on duty during hazardous conditions, including tsunami warnings and periods of dangerous surf and weather. If we expect them to continue working under these high-risk circumstances, it is only appropriate that they be formally recognized as first responders.

For these reasons, I fully support this resolution.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 2:30:47 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Alixandra Overholser	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Open water lifeguards should be acknowledged as first responders. They are out on the front lines saving lives while putting their own lives at risk to serve and protect their community, same as Police, Fire, and EMS.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 5:58:52 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Reyna Stitely	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of recognizing lifeguards as official first responders.

Lifeguards are the first ones there when there are emergencies—before paramedics, firefighters, or police arrive. They are trained to assess critical situations within seconds, perform rescues in dangerous conditions, administer CPR, use AEDs, and provide life-saving care under intense pressure. Despite this, they are not always given the recognition, support, or compensation that reflects the reality of their responsibilities.

My boyfriend is a lifeguard, and through him I’ve come to understand the level of trauma lifeguards are exposed to. They regularly respond to drowning victims, injuries, and life-threatening situations. These are not routine tasks—they are high-stakes, deeply human emergencies that can leave lasting emotional impacts. Lifeguards are expected to remain calm, make split-second decisions, and carry the weight of those experiences, often without the same mental health support systems afforded to other first responders.

It is frustrating that they are not already recognized as first responders. This lack of recognition can also affect their access to proper funding, training resources, and support services.

Passing legislation to classify lifeguards as first responders is not just about a title—it is about acknowledging the essential, life-saving role they play in our communities. It is about ensuring they receive the respect, resources, and protections they deserve.

I strongly urge you to support this bill and stand behind the people who stand on the front lines to protect others every single day.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Aloha,

My name is Nora and I am French.

I am writing this testimony to express my experience on the beaches of O'ahu!

The Hawaiian archipelago!!! ...

Names that make you dream, these islands that we've only seen in movies...

So, we envision the trip of a lifetime, making a dream come true, daring to travel all those kilometers, to cross several huge airports with so many people, noises, and movements...

In May 2025, I arrive (alone) in Honolulu!!! It's very late, I'm exhausted and so excited to be in Honolulu!

The trip went very well.

For me, this is the first time I've ever flown on a plane, it's my first trip!

My first contact with the Hawaiian archipelago was the warm welcome from the Hawaiians: their smiles, their relaxed attitude, their kindness!!

I have a feeling my stay will be unforgettable!!!

To thank life for this wonderful event, I decided to dedicate some of my vacation time to volunteering. a few days during a surfing competition for athletes with disabilities.

I've planned visits, walks, tastings, and an incredible visit to a tattoo artist.

Gift shopping for family and friends... ...but the first question is: where to go swimming???

What is functional is that the lifeguard towers are very visible near the beaches.

This raises the question of swimming safety and the belongings left on the beach.

when you don't know the public environment!

← Répondre

→ Transférer



**To: Hawaii State Senate**

**Re: Senate Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders**

**Position: Strong Support**

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ethan Alley, and I am an open water lifeguard currently serving as a "Beach Rescue Responder" for the Panama City Beach Fire Department's Division of Beach Safety in Panama City Beach, Florida. I am writing in strong support of the Senate Resolution recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout the State of Hawaii.

Open water lifeguards are often the first and only emergency personnel on scene when life-threatening incidents occur in coastal environments. Every day, ocean lifeguards respond to drowning victims, cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, spinal injuries, and environmental emergencies in dynamic and hazardous conditions. These responses require rapid decision-making, advanced rescue skills, emergency medical care, and coordination with EMS, fire, and law enforcement. In many cases, lifeguards initiate lifesaving care long before traditional emergency responders arrive.

The work of an open water lifeguard goes far beyond water rescues. Lifeguards regularly respond to medical emergencies on land, including cardiac arrests, heat-related illness, traumatic injuries, and vehicle accidents near beaches and parks. We secure scenes, provide patient care, operate rescue equipment, communicate with dispatch, and assist incoming emergency units. These responsibilities align directly with the widely accepted definition of a first responder.

The ocean environment presents unique and unpredictable dangers that require specialized training and a high level of operational readiness. Surf conditions, rip currents, marine hazards, weather, and remote beach access all increase the risk to both victims and rescuers. Lifeguards routinely place themselves in hazardous situations to protect the public, often entering dangerous surf or unstable environments to save lives. This level of risk and responsibility is consistent with other recognized first responder professions.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders is an important step toward ensuring they receive appropriate professional recognition, training support, resources, and protections. This recognition acknowledges the reality that lifeguards are an integral part of the emergency response system and play a critical role in public safety across coastal communities.

Hawaii's ocean safety professionals protect both residents and millions of visitors each year. Their work directly reduces drowning deaths, improves emergency response times, and strengthens community safety. Formal recognition of open water lifeguards as first responders reflects the essential service they provide and the risks they take to protect human life.

I respectfully urge the Hawaii State Senate to adopt this resolution and formally recognize open water lifeguards as first responders.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Ethan Alley

(434)944-7495

hartleyalley@gmail.com

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 5:44:22 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tina Y Parker	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

## Testimony in Support of SCR56 / SR54

Recognizing Lifeguards as First Responders in the State of Hawai‘i

Submitted by:

Tina Parker

Honolulu, Hawai‘i

*I am submitting this testimony in my personal capacity. The views expressed are my own and do not represent the City and County of Honolulu or my employer.*

---

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of SCR56/SR54, recognizing lifeguards as first responders in the State of Hawai‘i.

In Hawai‘i, the emergency environment lifeguards operate in is overwhelmingly ocean-based—dynamic, unpredictable, and often unforgiving.

Every day across our shorelines, lifeguards are the first—and often only—line of defense between life and death in open water emergencies.

The scale and urgency of this work are clear:

- On O‘ahu alone, lifeguards perform approximately 2,600 to 2,800 ocean rescues annually
- During high surf events, lifeguards may conduct dozens—even over 100 rescues in a single day
- Over the past decade, nearly 800 people have drowned in Hawai‘i’s ocean waters

These are not controlled environments. Ocean rescues involve rip currents, powerful surf, shore break, and rapidly changing conditions—situations where seconds matter and conditions can deteriorate instantly.

Unlike traditional emergency services that are dispatched after a call is placed, lifeguards are uniquely positioned as on-scene emergency responders.

They are already in the environment where emergencies occur. They identify distress early, initiate rescue within seconds, and begin life-saving care immediately.

In many cases, lifeguards are the first point of contact, providing CPR, AED use, and trauma stabilization before any dispatched unit can arrive.

This distinction is critical.

Recognizing lifeguards as first responders does not expand the definition broadly—it clarifies it. Lifeguards operate in a uniquely time-critical environment where proximity, hazard exposure, and immediate intervention define emergency response.

In a state where the ocean is central to daily life, recreation, and tourism, this role is foundational to public safety.

Formal recognition would:

- Align policy with the operational reality of ocean-based emergency response in Hawai‘i
- Strengthen coordination with EMS, fire, and law enforcement
- Support recruitment and retention of highly trained personnel
- Reinforce the importance of prevention alongside rapid response

This measure reflects function, not future mandate. It acknowledges what lifeguards are already doing every day—serving as first responders in one of the most hazardous and time-sensitive environments in our state.

In Hawai‘i, the difference between life and death in the ocean is often measured in seconds—and the person who answers in those seconds is a lifeguard.

I respectfully urge this committee to adopt SCR56/SR54 and formally recognize lifeguards as first responders in the State of Hawai‘i.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your commitment to the safety of our communities.

Respectfully submitted,  
Tina Parker

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 6:02:36 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jude Parker	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

## Testimony in Support of SCR56 / SR54

Recognizing Lifeguards as First Responders in the State of Hawai'i

Submitted by:

Jude Parker

Honolulu, Hawai'i

I am submitting this testimony in my personal capacity. The views expressed are my own and do not represent the City and County of Honolulu or my employer.

---

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I strongly support SCR56/SR54.

I've worked in ocean safety for 30 years, but I've been in the ocean my whole life. I've seen what happens when things go bad in the water. It doesn't start with a call. It starts in the ocean—and it happens fast.

Someone gets pulled out in a rip. Someone takes a wave wrong and goes down. Someone disappears between sets. You don't have minutes to figure it out. You have seconds.

I'm already there.

I'm watching the water. I'm scanning faces, body language, currents. When something shifts, I move. No dispatch. No delay.

I'm in the water within seconds. I reach the victim. I get them breathing—or I start trying to. I stabilize what I can and hold the scene until help gets there.

On O‘ahu alone, there are thousands of ocean rescues every year. On heavy days, it can be dozens—sometimes more than 100. These aren’t minor incidents. It’s rip currents, heavy surf, shore break, spinal, near drownings.

This is real-time emergency response in a hazardous environment.

The difference is, I’m not responding from somewhere else. I’m already on scene. I’m the first contact. The first intervention. The first chance someone has.

That’s what a first responder is.

Recognizing lifeguards as first responders doesn’t change the job. It reflects what’s already happening every day on our beaches.

In Hawai‘i, the ocean is part of daily life. That means these emergencies are, too. And the response has to be immediate.

When seconds matter in the ocean, there is no time to wait for a response—because I’m already there.

I urge you to support SCR56/SR54.

Mahalo for your time and your commitment to public safety.

Respectfully submitted,  
Jude Parker

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 9:27:47 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Allison Schaefer	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

**Subject: Strong Support for SR54 and SCR56 – Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders**

My name is **Allison Schaefer**, and I am writing in strong support for **SR54 and SCR56**, the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i.

I write as a **bereaved parent**, a **volunteer with the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition**, and the **writer of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan**. While my child did **not** drown in the ocean, losing a child to a fatal drowning fundamentally changed my life. Through my subsequent volunteer work with the Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition, now a program of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, and with the national drowning prevention advocacy group, Families United, I have come to know many families across Hawai‘i and the nation who have lost beloved ohana members to **ocean drownings**. Walking alongside these families has given me a deep and personal understanding of the life-and-death stakes of ocean safety, as well as the profound emotional toll these tragedies place not only on families, but also on the first responders who respond to them.

Through this work and lived experience, I have seen firsthand the indispensable role open water lifeguards play in protecting lives across our state’s shoreline and ocean environments. Open water lifeguards perform a critical public safety function, protecting residents and visitors alike in Hawai‘i’s uniquely dynamic and hazardous coastal conditions. In the course of their duties, they routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to rescue swimmers in distress, respond to serious medical emergencies, and prevent loss of life.

Across Hawai‘i, lifeguards—known as ocean safety officers or water safety officers depending on the county—are frequently among the first personnel on scene during emergencies. They work in close coordination with police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical services to secure scenes and protect life until additional responders arrive. Their responsibilities extend far beyond ocean rescues and regularly include responses to cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle collisions occurring on or near beaches, parks, and adjacent roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo rigorous and ongoing training in high-performance CPR, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, and emergency scene management. Many are also cross-trained in emergency medical response, marine fire safety,

law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. In practice, they routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—clearly meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder.

Formally recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the life-saving work they already perform every day. It would also acknowledge the emotional burden they carry when responding to fatalities—especially those involving children and families—and help ensure appropriate professional recognition, training support, and parity in pay and other benefits with other emergency response personnel. This recognition would further strengthen interagency collaboration across Hawai‘i’s public safety system.

Mahalo for your continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of Hawai‘i’s communities.

Respectfully,

**Allison Schaefer**

Bereaved Family Volunteer, Hawai‘i Water Safety Coalition

Writer, Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 9:34:48 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
joshua schaefer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Subject: Support for SR54 and SCR56 – Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders**

My name is Joshua Schaefer, and I am writing to support **SR54 and SCR56**, which recognize open water lifeguards as first responders.

I lost my sister to a fatal drowning. This loss has shaped my understanding of how important water safety and emergency response truly are. My mother, Allison Schaefer, is the lead writer of the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, and through her work—and through meeting many families who have lost loved ones to ocean drownings—I have learned how vital open water lifeguards are to keeping people safe.

Across Hawai‘i, open water lifeguards are often the first people to respond during emergencies. They rescue swimmers, give CPR, use AEDs, and help people suffering from serious injuries or medical emergencies. They regularly work alongside police, firefighters, and paramedics to save lives.

Lifeguards train extensively and put themselves at risk to protect both residents and visitors. The work they do clearly matches what we expect from first responders.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders reflects the reality of the life-saving work they already do every day. It is an important step in honoring their role and supporting public safety in Hawai‘i.

Mahalo for your consideration and for your commitment to protecting our communities.

Respectfully,

Joshua Schaefer

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 9:51:13 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

**Testifying in strong support of SR54 and SCR56:**

I lost my granddaughter Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer to a fatal drowning. Charlotte’s death was the result of a rescue attempt—what is often called a secondary or rescue drowning—and tragically, people who attempt rescues are often at even greater risk than the person they are trying to save. Our ohana’s loss has given us a deep understanding of how important water safety and emergency response truly are.

Through my daughter Allison Schaefer’s work on the Hawai‘i Water Safety Plan, and through meeting many families who have lost loved ones to ocean drownings, we have seen how often tragedy happens near the water—and how much depends on the people who respond first.

Lifeguards regularly put themselves in harm’s way to protect others. In Hawai‘i, ocean lifeguards are often the first on scene during emergencies. They make rescues, provide CPR, use AEDs, and give emergency medical care in rough surf, strong currents, and dangerous conditions, often before other responders can reach the water.

For these reasons, ocean lifeguards should be recognized as first responders. They are trained emergency professionals who make critical, life-saving decisions in some of the most challenging environments we have. Their work clearly reflects the responsibility, risk, and skill we associate with first responders.

What happened to my granddaughter shows how quickly a rescue situation can become dangerous. Lifeguards are trained to assess these risks and intervene safely, but strong systems, clear planning, and proper recognition are essential to support the work they do.

Water safety planning, prevention, and coordination save lives. They help prevent emergencies and protect both the public and the responders who step in when something goes wrong.

I support efforts that improve water safety, recognize the vital role lifeguards play, and work to prevent avoidable tragedies. My hope is that fewer families will experience a loss like ours.

Mahalo for your time and for considering the importance of water safety in our communities.

Sincerely,

Pamela Ramsay

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 9:46:35 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leslie Leibbrandt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for [SR54 and SCR56 / HR42 and HCR46], the resolutions recognizing **open water lifeguards as first responders** in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i.

Open water lifeguards perform a critical public safety function, protecting countless residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments. In the course of their duties, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—designated as **ocean safety officers or water safety officers**, depending on the county—are frequently **among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes**, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive. Their responsibilities extend well beyond ocean rescues and include responding to **cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle collisions** occurring on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways.

Open water lifeguards undergo **rigorous and continuous training**, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the **professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect** afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai‘i’s ocean, shoreline, and public environments.

I respectfully ask that you **support these resolutions and ensure they receive a timely hearing**.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,  
Leslie

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 9:51:56 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karl "Buddy" Bohn	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Senate and State Legislature,

I am writing in strong support of designating Hawaii’s lifeguards and ocean safety professionals as First Responders.

My name is Karl “Buddy” Bohn, I live on the big Island and am a retired Lifeguard Section Chief with the Los Angeles County Fire Department, where I served for 38 years. Throughout my career, I witnessed firsthand the critical role lifeguards play as the *true first line of response* in a variety of emergencies.

Lifeguards are often the very first to recognize danger and take action. They do not wait to be dispatched—they self-deploy the moment a life-threatening situation unfolds. Whether responding to a drowning victim, performing a rescue in hazardous surf, or providing immediate medical care, lifeguards consistently place themselves in harm’s way to protect the public.

This proposed designation is not symbolic—it is a necessary and appropriate recognition of the reality of their work. Similar legislation has already been enacted in California, acknowledging what those in emergency services have long known: lifeguards are first responders in every sense of the term. They deserve and have earned the benefits that come with such a designation.

Granting this status in Hawaii is both justified and overdue. It affirms the professionalism, training, and daily risk these individuals undertake to keep residents and visitors safe in one of the most dynamic and challenging ocean environments in the world.

I respectfully urge you to support this measure and formally recognize Hawaii’s lifeguards for the essential role they already fulfill.

Do the right thing—elevate and honor these dedicated professionals.

Sincerely,  
Karl “Buddy” Bohn  
Retired Lifeguard Section Chief  
Los Angeles County Fire Department  
Past President, Los Angeles County Ocean Lifeguard Association



**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 11:13:19 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
glenn pang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senator/Representative

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan, as proposed in the resolutions ([SR54 & SCR56]; [HR42 & HCR46]; [SCR55 and SR53]; [HCR155 and HR147]) before your committee.

As you may know, 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 for Hawai'i's visitors, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated prevention efforts.

As a formal water safety educator with the Windward Community College Professional Development program and a Water Safety/Lifeguard Instructor Trainer with the American Red Cross, I ask for your support for these two very important sets of resolutions to continue building blocks to strengthen our statewide water safety plan.

Mahalo

Glenn R Pang  
[naia82904@gmail.com](mailto:naia82904@gmail.com)  
(808)-829-0010 (c)

#be smart, become water safe, and enjoy our beautiful beaches and pools  
[#hoea96744.com](http://hoea96744.com) [#HiOceanSafety.com](http://HiOceanSafety.com) [#HawaiiWaterSafetyCoalition.com](http://HawaiiWaterSafetyCoalition.com)  
[#thesurfprofessor.com](http://thesurfprofessor.com)  
[#bwrag.com](http://bwrag.com) [#hawaiilifeguardassociation](http://hawaiilifeguardassociation.com) [#aoap.com](http://aoap.com)  
website:  
<https://hoea96744.weebly.com>

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 12:38:47 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Mike town	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Recognizing open water lifeguards as key first responders. I am a life long water man and life saver coach. Over 60 years as first responder. Mike Town (retired) . Strong supporter.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 1:29:24 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ezgi Green	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Ezgi, and I am a mother and a resident of Hawai'i. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of 56 SCR and its companion measure SR 54, which recognize open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgement of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout our state.

The ocean is central to life in Hawaii — and so is the danger it carries. Drowning is the leading cause of death for visitors to our state and the fifth leading cause of fatal injury for residents, with Hawaii holding the second-highest per-capita rate of resident drownings in the country. Every time I bring my children to the beach, the lifeguard in that tower is not a comfort — they are a necessity.

Our open water lifeguards are cross-trained in emergency medical response, CPR, water rescue, and first aid. They are part of the island-wide 911 emergency system, responding to and coordinating with EMS, fire, and police. They respond to victims, treat victims, assist victims, and transport victims — meeting every legal definition of a first responder. And yet, they have not been formally recognized as one.

56 SCR and SR 54 correct that. Formal recognition matters — not just as a title, but for how these professionals are supported, compensated, and protected in the work they do every day to keep our families safe.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass both 56 SCR and SR 54. Our lifeguards have earned this recognition.

Mahalo,  
Ezgi Green  
Waialua, O'ahu

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 1:52:32 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brandon Treloar	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 the resolutions (**SCR55 and SR53 or HCR155 and HR147**) before your committee.

Hawai'i is currently 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 for Hawai'i's visitors**, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated prevention efforts.

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

This crisis is **not equitable**. **Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders drown at approximately 1.5 times the rate of Hawai'i's general population**, and **NHPI children drown at three times the rate of the general population**. These disparities make clear that water safety is not only a public safety issue, but also a matter of health equity.

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 Hawai'i Water Safety Plan has been **recognized nationally** with a **Safe Kids Champion for Children Award from Safe Kids Worldwide**.

Adopting the Hawai'i Water Safety Plan would 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,  
Brandon Treloar

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 1:56:29 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

In support.

Ocean lifeguards are not simply public safety personnel—they are highly trained **first responders** who serve as the first line of defense between life and death along Hawai‘i’s shorelines and highways. Every day, they perform dangerous water rescues, administer CPR, treat spinal injuries, respond to shark incidents, and coordinate with EMS, fire, and police—all often before any other emergency service can arrive. Their work environment is uniquely dangerous and unpredictable, requiring split-second decision-making in powerful surf, strong currents, and remote locations where immediate action is critical.

Despite these responsibilities, ocean lifeguards are often not formally recognized with the same status as other first responders. This lack of recognition affects funding, training resources, benefits, and public awareness—ultimately impacting safety for both residents and visitors.

Passing resolutions HCR 155, HCR 46, HR 42, SCR 56, and SC 54 is a necessary step to formally acknowledge what is already true in practice: ocean lifeguards are essential first responders. These measures will strengthen support, improve recruitment and retention, and ensure that Hawai‘i continues to provide the highest standard of ocean safety in the world.

Supporting these resolutions is about protecting lives, honoring those who risk their own safety daily, and reinforcing Hawai‘i’s commitment to public safety in its most iconic and high-risk environment—the ocean.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 5:13:57 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Testimony in strong support of SCR56 and SR54

**Aloha, my name is Nick Dubovsky.**

Ocean lifeguards should be formally recognized as first responders because they perform the same essential functions under some of the most dangerous conditions any responder faces. They are trained emergency professionals who routinely arrive first at the scene of water emergencies, conduct rescues in hazardous environments, provide emergency medical care, and make critical, time-sensitive decisions while exposed to significant personal risk.

Lifeguards operate in strong surf, fast-moving currents, and flood conditions that are often inaccessible to other emergency services. Their role requires specialized training, judgment, and a willingness to enter life-threatening situations to protect the public. Recognition as first responders accurately reflects the responsibilities they carry and the risks they assume.

Strong water safety systems and prevention efforts help reduce emergencies, but when incidents do occur, trained lifeguards are essential to effective response and to minimizing harm for both victims and rescuers.

This issue is personal for my family. My stepdaughter, Charlotte “Sharkey” Schaefer, was five years old when she died in what is known as a *rescue drowning*. She entered a flooded detention pond attempting to help another child and was overcome by the conditions herself. She did not understand how powerful or dangerous the water was, or how quickly a rescue attempt can turn fatal. Her death was preventable.

Rescue drownings like Sharkey’s demonstrate how quickly water emergencies escalate and why trained responders—and systems that support them—are so critical. Recognizing ocean lifeguards as first responders is an important step toward acknowledging their role, supporting their safety, and preventing avoidable loss of life.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mahalo.

Nick Dubovsky



### 3.29.26

#### **Support for Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders [SR54 & SCR56] or [HR42 & HCR46]**

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai'i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

Here on the North Shore, they perform a critical public safety function, protecting countless residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai'i's dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments, but also by providing life-saving CPR and stabilizing measures in other first responder situations that arise on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways, like vehicular collisions, traumatic injuries, and cardiac arrests. In the course of their duties, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—designated as ocean safety officers or water safety officers, depending on the county—are frequently among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive.

Open water/ocean safety lifeguards undergo rigorous and continuous training, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder. They are also the only emergency personnel that have to test and requalify for their jobs annually, proving they're in top shape mentally and physically.

Recognizing open water/ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai'i's communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,

Ivy Ghercovici

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 6:42:16 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jay Vieira	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

Here on the North Shore, they perform a critical public safety function, protecting countless residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments, but also by providing life-saving CPR and stabilizing measures in other first responder situations that arise on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways, like vehicular collisions, traumatic injuries, and cardiac arrests. In the course of their duties, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—designated as ocean safety officers or water safety officers, depending on the county—are frequently among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive.

Open water/ocean safety lifeguards undergo rigorous and continuous training, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder. They are also the only emergency personnel that have to test and requalify for their jobs annually, proving they're in top shape mentally and physically.

Recognizing open water/ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai‘i’s communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,  
Jay Vieira

Waiialua, Hawaii 96791

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 6:47:28 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Tiffany Hervey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please recognize the hard-working men and women of Ocean Safety as first responders. They are the first on the scene always in our island community, and not being given the respect and support of "first responder" is actually hurting many families. While Ocean Safety lifeguards are categorically underpaid, they cannot benefit from "first responder" discounts for home loans, vehicle purchases, phone plans, travel, and products. This is one more way that ocean safety families are hindered instead of helped as we fight not to be priced out of paradise. I've watched my husband, a lifeguard of 20 years, be literally FIRST on the scene for everything from car crashes, heart attacks in the park, mental health episodes endangering public safety, dead body recovery, and search and rescue in the dark. Each Ocean Safety officer on this island is a first responder in every sense of the term. It's time to catch up and recongize them as such.

Mahalo for your time!

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 7:24:05 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Chelsie Harmon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

Here on the North Shore, they perform a critical public safety function, protecting countless residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments, but also by providing life-saving CPR and stabilizing measures in other first responder situations that arise on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways, like vehicular collisions, traumatic injuries, and cardiac arrests. In the course of their duties, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—designated as ocean safety officers or water safety officers, depending on the county—are frequently among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive.

Open water/ocean safety lifeguards undergo rigorous and continuous training, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder. They are also the only emergency personnel that have to test and requalify for their jobs annually, proving they're in top shape mentally and physically.

Recognizing open water/ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai‘i’s communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,  
Chelsie Harmon

North Shore, Oahu

## **Support for Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders**

[SR54 & SCR56] or [HR42 & HCR46]

Aloha,

I am writing in strong support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety officers) as first responders, in acknowledgment of the vital role they play in emergency response, public safety, and the wellbeing of communities throughout Hawai'i.

On the North Shore, lifeguards are consistently the first to respond not only to ocean-related emergencies, but also to incidents on nearby highways, bike paths, beach parks, and surrounding areas. Their rapid response is especially critical in regions where other emergency services may take longer to arrive. Most notably, during the recent flooding in Waialua and Hale'iwa, North Shore lifeguards acted as first responders in the absence of police and National Guard presence. They stepped in without hesitation, putting themselves at risk to assist and protect the community during a time of urgent need.

These professionals perform an essential public safety function, safeguarding both residents and visitors from serious injury and loss of life in Hawai'i's dynamic and often hazardous ocean and shoreline environments. Beyond water rescues, they provide life-saving care, including CPR, stabilization, and emergency support, in situations such as vehicular accidents, traumatic injuries, and cardiac events on or near beaches, parks, and roadways.

Across the state, lifeguards—referred to as ocean safety or water safety officers depending on the county—are frequently among the first to arrive at emergency scenes. They work alongside police, firefighters, and other responders to protect lives, secure scenes, and maintain public safety until additional support arrives. Their role is not supplementary; it is foundational.

Open water lifeguards undergo rigorous and ongoing training, including high-performance CPR, AED use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in medical response, marine safety, and rescue operations. They routinely assess, treat, assist, and transport individuals in crisis, fulfilling the responsibilities commonly associated with first responders. Notably, they are also required to requalify annually, maintaining peak physical and mental readiness to perform under the most demanding conditions.

Recognizing ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would formally acknowledge the work they already perform every day. It would also help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, and support afforded to other emergency personnel, while strengthening interagency coordination to enhance emergency response across Hawai'i.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and well-being of our communities.

Sincerely,  
Hana McMullin

Kahuku, O'ahu, Hawaii

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 7:49:51 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Rodney Ellis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards, also known as ocean safety guards, as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. On the North Shore, lifeguards are often the first to respond not only to ocean emergencies but also to incidents on nearby highways, bike paths, beach parks, and surrounding areas.

They perform a critical public safety function, protecting both residents and visitors from serious injury and loss of life in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and often hazardous ocean and shoreline environments. Their role extends beyond the water. They provide lifesaving CPR and stabilization in a wide range of emergencies, including vehicle collisions, traumatic injuries, and cardiac events occurring on or near beaches, parks, and roadways. In doing so, they regularly place themselves at significant personal risk to save others.

Across the state, lifeguards, referred to as ocean safety officers or water safety officers depending on the county, are frequently among the first to arrive at emergency scenes. They work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect lives, secure scenes, and maintain public safety until additional responders arrive.

Open water lifeguards undergo rigorous and ongoing training, including high performance CPR, use of automated external defibrillators, advanced rescue techniques, and emergency scene management. Many also receive cross training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely treat, assist, and transport victims, fulfilling the responsibilities of emergency response personnel and aligning with the widely accepted definition of a first responder. They are also the only emergency

personnel required to test and requalify annually, demonstrating both physical and mental readiness for the demands of the role.

Recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day. It would also help ensure they receive the recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency personnel. This recognition would further strengthen collaboration among public safety agencies and enhance emergency response capabilities across Hawai'i's communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Regards,

Rodney Ellis

Haleiwa, Oahu

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 8:24:39 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Lorrin Pihana Duarte	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Lorrin Duarte and I am 13 years old. I attended Junior Lifeguards for the past two years and last year participated the entire summer learning from some of the best lifeguards in the State. Their leadership and example inspired me to one day want to be a lifeguard myself.

The entire program was dedicated to training us how to be a first responder when someone needs help. Our lifeguards are always the **FIRST** to respond in these situations and deserve to be recognized for the courage they have to be putting their own lives on the line and their expertise in saving lives daily- in and out of the water.

Mahalo,

Lorrin Duarte

Jr Lifeguard

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 10:50:30 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heather Hall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

Here on the North Shore, they perform a critical public safety function, protecting countless residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments, but also by providing life-saving CPR and stabilizing measures in other first responder situations that arise on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways, like vehicular collisions, traumatic injuries, and cardiac arrests. In the course of their duties, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—designated as ocean safety officers or water safety officers, depending on the county—are frequently among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive.

Open water/ocean safety lifeguards undergo rigorous and continuous training, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder. They are also the only emergency personnel that have to test and requalify for their jobs annually, proving they're in top shape mentally and physically.

Recognizing open water/ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they

receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai'i's communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,  
Heather Hall

Haleiwa, HI

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 11:13:49 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
kyra hall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

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Across the state, lifeguards—designated as ocean safety officers or water safety officers, depending on the county—are frequently among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive.

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Recognizing open water/ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they

receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai'i's communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,  
Kyra Hall  
Pupukea, Oahu

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 11:16:04 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kai Hall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

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Across the state, lifeguards—designated as ocean safety officers or water safety officers, depending on the county—are frequently among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive.

Open water/ocean safety lifeguards undergo rigorous and continuous training, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder. They are also the only emergency personnel that have to test and requalify for their jobs annually, proving they're in top shape mentally and physically.

Recognizing open water/ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai‘i’s communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Kai Hall

wso2

City And County Of Honolulu

ocean safety 1

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 11:18:21 PM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Paulo Dias	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

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Recognizing open water/ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai‘i’s communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,  
Paulo Dias  
Waiialua, Oahu

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 4:31:40 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda KREUTZER	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support for Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

[SR54 & SCR56] or [HR42 & HCR46]

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

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Recognizing open water/ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition,

resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai'i's communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,

Amanda Kreutzer

Kapolei/Oahu

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 6:29:33 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Emanuel Pangilinan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

Here on the North Shore, they perform a critical public safety function, protecting countless residents and visitors from serious injury and death in Hawai‘i’s dynamic and hazardous ocean and shoreline environments, but also by providing life-saving CPR and stabilizing measures in other first responder situations that arise on or near beaches, parks, and public roadways, like vehicular collisions, traumatic injuries, and cardiac arrests. In the course of their duties, lifeguards routinely place themselves at significant personal risk to save lives.

Across the state, lifeguards—designated as ocean safety officers or water safety officers, depending on the county—are frequently among the first personnel to arrive at emergency scenes, where they work alongside police officers and firefighters to protect life, secure scenes, and preserve public safety until additional responders arrive.

Open water/ocean safety lifeguards undergo rigorous and continuous training, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder. They are also the only emergency personnel that have to test and requalify for their jobs annually, proving they're in top shape mentally and physically.

Recognizing open water/ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai‘i’s communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,  
Emanuel Pangilinan

Honolulu, HI

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 6:57:55 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kiele Muraco	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha ,

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Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Kiele Muraco

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 7:53:55 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jackie Pontes	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Support for Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders  
[SR54 & SCR56] or [HR42 & HCR46]**

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

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encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai'i's communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,  
jacqueline pontes

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 7:57:25 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Andrea Ventim	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing in strong support of recognizing open water lifeguards as first responders.

Here on the North Shore, our lifeguards are often the first on scene—not just for ocean rescues, but for car accidents, medical emergencies, and life-threatening situations along our beaches and roads. They don't hesitate. They run toward danger when everyone else is running away.

My husband is a North Shore lifeguard, and every day he goes to work knowing he may be putting his life on the line to save someone else's. He willingly accepts that reality. That fact is something our family carries with us daily. This isn't just a job—it's a calling that requires courage, sacrifice, and an unwavering commitment to others.

These men and women perform life-saving CPR, respond to traumatic injuries, participate in search and rescue, and make critical decisions in moments that truly mean life or death. They are highly trained, constantly tested, and show up, again and again, for our community way beyond their job description.

Recognizing them as first responders isn't giving them something extra—it's finally honoring what they already are.

Mahalo for your time, your leadership, and for standing behind those who protect and serve our communities every day.

**Sincerely,**

Andrea Ventim

Oahu

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 8:48:44 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Annemarie Maile King	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

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Open water/ocean safety lifeguards undergo rigorous and continuous training, including high-performance cardiopulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillator use, advanced rescue techniques, emergency scene management, and, in many cases, cross-training in emergency medical response, marine fire safety, law enforcement support, and rescue craft operations. They routinely attend to, treat, assist, and transport victims—fulfilling the defined duties of emergency response employees and meeting the commonly accepted definition of a first responder. They are also the only emergency personnel that have to test and requalify for their jobs annually, proving they're in top shape mentally and physically.

Recognizing open water/ocean safety lifeguards as first responders would accurately reflect the work they already perform every day and help ensure they receive the professional recognition, resources, training support, and respect afforded to other emergency responders. It would also encourage continued collaboration among public safety agencies to strengthen emergency response capabilities across Hawai‘i’s communities.

Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,  
Annemarie King

Oahu, Haleiwa

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 9:26:08 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Steven Marliave	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

March 30, 2026

The Honorable Senator Wakai  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga  
Chair, Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

RE: Strong Support for Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

Aloha Chair Wakai and Chair Fukunaga and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, I write in strong and unequivocal support of the resolution recognizing open water lifeguards, Ocean Safety Officers and Water Safety Officers, as first responders in the State of Hawai‘i.

This resolution represents more than a symbolic designation. It is a necessary and overdue acknowledgment of the reality that open water lifeguards are an integral component of Hawai‘i’s frontline emergency response system.

Hawai‘i faces one of the most significant drowning risks in the nation. Drowning is the leading cause of death for keiki ages 1–15, the leading cause of death among visitors, and Hawai‘i ranks second in the country for drowning rates. These risks are further elevated by the State’s high volume of visitors, many of whom are unfamiliar with local ocean conditions and hazards. In this high-risk environment, open water lifeguards serve as a critical frontline defense, performing more than 2 million preventative actions each year. These interventions, combined with rapid emergency response by highly trained professionals, represent countless lives saved and tragedies averted across our state.

Every day, these professionals operate in some of the most dynamic and hazardous environments in public safety. They are routinely the first to arrive at critical incidents, providing immediate, life-saving intervention in situations where seconds determine outcomes. Their scope of responsibility extends far beyond ocean rescue to include cardiac events, traumatic injuries,

missing persons, and multi-agency emergency responses occurring across beaches, parks, and adjacent public spaces.

Open water lifeguards meet—and in many cases exceed—the functional definition of first responders. They are trained to assess, stabilize, and manage emergencies; they protect life while also safeguarding property, preserving evidence, and protecting the environment; and they do so while assuming significant personal risk.

Despite this, they have not been consistently or formally recognized within the same framework as other first responders. This gap in recognition has real consequences. It can limit access to critical training resources, interagency alignment, funding opportunities, and the professional recognition necessary to sustain and strengthen this workforce.

Formal recognition through this resolution will:

- Align policy with the operational reality of emergency response in Hawai‘i;
- Strengthen coordination across public safety agencies;
- Support recruitment, retention, and professional development of highly trained personnel; and
- Affirm the State’s commitment to protecting both its residents and the millions of visitors who depend on safe ocean and shoreline environments.

Hawai‘i’s ocean is central to our identity, our economy, and our way of life. The individuals who stand watch over it—and who respond without hesitation when emergencies arise—deserve to be recognized accordingly.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Legislature to adopt this resolution and formally recognize open water lifeguards as first responders.

Mahalo for your leadership and your continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Sincerely,  
Steven Marliave  
808-436-7850

Beach Lifeguard, Marine Corps Base Hawaii Kaneohe Bay

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 9:36:53 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing to voice my support of SR54/SCR56. Ocean Safety Officers (or Water Safety Officers depending on the county) are the first individuals on the scene of emergency situations in, on, and around aquatic environments. I believe it is both appropriate and necessary to recognize them as first responders.

Mahalo.

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 9:43:53 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

March 29, 2026

The Honorable Senator Wakai  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga

Chair, Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

RE: Strong Support for Resolution Recognizing Open Water Lifeguards as First Responders

Aloha Chair Wakai and Chair Fukunaga and Members of the Committee,

My name is Justin San Nicolas, born and raised on the windward side of Oahu in Kaneohe. I've been an Ocean Lifeguard from November 2010 till the present and a Rescue Water Craft Operator since January 2018, aboard Kaneohe Marine Corps Base Hawaii beaches. Working for the military has taught me that there is a continuous need for ocean lifeguards because of the reality of the mindset of most military members is that "if they can dodge a bullet, they can go out in unruly conditions!" But that is never the case as our ocean conditions compare to the north shore of Oahu and is one of the roughest military coastlines in the nation. I've worked alongside multi-agency rescue teams from Honolulu Fire Department, to Ocean Safety, United States Coast Guard and the first thing that happens is we (the ocean lifeguards) in any ocean response are the first on scene to perform rescues, and/or assist in any need necessary before the other agencies arrive to provide support. Therefore Ocean Lifeguards are the First responders to an ocean emergency and that's that. It makes complete sense to include Ocean Lifeguards as First Responders as we already are certified as such and perform the duties of a first responder.

Respectfully,

Justin San Nicolas

Beach Lifeguard/Rescue Water Craft Operator

Marine Corps Base Hawaii Kaneohe Bay

[Jjsn777@gmail.com](mailto:Jjsn777@gmail.com)

8084605818

March 29, 2026

The Honorable Senator Wakai  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga  
Chair, Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

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Respectfully,

Justin San Nicolas

Beach Lifeguard/Rescue Water Craft Operator

Marine Corps Base Hawaii Kaneohe Bay

[Jjsn777@gmail.com](mailto:Jjsn777@gmail.com)

8084605818

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 10:04:02 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I am a former Federal Ocean Lifeguard Manager, former Ocean Safety Chief of Maui County, and, former Ocean Safety Administrator for Oahu. I am currently a Branch Chief for DLNR Enforcement. Two of my sons are fourth generation Ocean Lifeguards. After 40 years of public safety /First Responder experience, I wholeheartedly and enthusiastically support this measure. Ocean Lifeguards are already First Responders by the very nature of their job and the services they perform. They are often the first on scene to perform dangerous rescues and administer initial emergency life support to our citizens and visitors in need. They are often at the actual scene of an incident as it happens in real time when most others like Fire, Police and EMS are often reactive after being summoned.

It is a NO BRAINER that they deserve the official title and recognition.

MAHALO, John Silberstein

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 11:08:15 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Justin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha ,

I am in support of the resolutions recognizing open water lifeguards (ocean safety guards) as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout Hawai‘i. Our North Shore lifeguards are first to respond to ocean emergencies, but also accidents on the highway, bike path, beach park, or any other nearby emergency.

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Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,  
Justin Riddleberger  
Waiialua, Oahu

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 11:19:50 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Rylin Hall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha ,

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Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our home.

Sincerely,  
Rylin Hall  
Honolulu/Oahu

**SCR-56**

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 11:32:15 AM

Testimony for EIG on 3/31/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Paul Giles	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SCR56

Paul Giles

From a young age, we were all taught the basics: don't talk to strangers, look both ways before crossing the road, and don't run with scissors. Our parents and teachers closely watched over us to ensure that we were being safe. And if we were taught correctly, we would eventually carry these general rules and guidelines with us into adulthood. It is common knowledge to know how to be safe on land... but what about in the water?

Here in Hawai'i, we are not only surrounded by the ocean, but we are also home to some of the most famous and dangerous surf breaks in the world. So, it is surprising to know how many locals and visiting tourists have seemingly zero knowledge pertaining to basic ocean safety procedures. It is also disheartening the lack of recognition that our Ocean Safety Responders receive.

The history of Ocean Safety Responders in Hawai'i can be traced all the way back to some of our first, and beloved watermen; Duke Kahanamoku, Eddie Aikau, and Buffalo Keaulana. Ocean safety is a part of Hawai'i's history and culture. During his career at Waimea Bay, Eddie Aikau managed to rescue and save the lives of over 500 people. He has also been recognized as a local legend after risking his life to seek help for his fellow crew members of the Hokule'a after it capsized on their way to Tahiti. The heart that Aikau and the rest of these men had for the safety of the people of Hawai'i is what has left a long-lasting effect on us.

After speaking with, and hearing stories told by a few local heroes who work as Ocean Safety Responders for the City and County of Honolulu, it has become clear that they are a few of many first responders who don't receive the recognition or *respect* that they deserve.

My husband, Ocean Safety Dispatcher Colby Ogata, has been working as a lifeguard for the last seven years. Throughout his time in Ocean Safety, I have watched him work tirelessly to assist with rescues of both local residents and visiting tourists. He has performed countless rescues during his time working on the beach. He has witnessed extremely traumatic cases as well as unfortunate loss of life. I have personally witnessed him perform a rescue while off duty. Lifeguards carry the weight of our community on their shoulders, both while on duty and off. Many Ocean Safety Responders may suffer from PTSD, as they carry the faces of those who didn't make it in their hearts. My husband struggles to even speak of some of the cases that he has witnessed. I say all of this to share much needed perspective.

Our Ocean Safety Lifeguards work directly alongside Honolulu EMS, the Honolulu Fire Department, the Honolulu Police Department, and for some cases, with The Coast Guard as well. So, why are lifeguards not considered first responders along with the rest? Lifeguards also work during holidays, pandemics, state emergencies, and inclement weather. They are essential workers, and many lives would be lost without their hard work and dedication to our community.

One of the first responders on the North Shore during and following the Kona Low Storm and floods was Ocean Safety Jet Ski Operator, Joey Cadiz. He performed rescues by riding the jet ski up to people's homes and taxiing them out to dry land. There are many other Ocean Safety responders who have a heart like Joey's, who would be the first to reach out a helping hand in a time of crisis. For these reasons, I am testifying in full support for SCR54 and SCR546. It is

about time that Ocean Safety Responders receive the recognition that they deserve from our state.

# Letter of Support for SR 54 and SCR 56

March 30, 2026

To the Authors of SR 54 and SCR 56:

Senators,

I am writing as a private citizen in strong support of Senate Resolution 54 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 56, which recognize open water lifeguards as first responders in acknowledgment of their essential role in emergency response, public safety, and community wellbeing throughout the State of Hawai'i.

I was honestly shocked to learn that, all this time, our open water lifeguards have not been formally regarded as first responders under State law. Given that they routinely arrive first on scene, operate alongside police officers and firefighters, and protect both residents and visitors from death or serious injury in highly dynamic and hazardous shoreline and ocean conditions, it is disgraceful and shameful that their legal and professional status has lagged so far behind the reality of their duties.

As your measures correctly note, these lifeguards, whether designated as ocean safety officers in Kaua'i and Maui counties or water safety officers in the City and County of Honolulu and Hawai'i County, carry out an extensive range of responsibilities far beyond what the general public assumes. They respond to incidents on land and sea, including cardiac arrests, traumatic injuries, and motor vehicle collisions near beaches, parks, and roadways; they perform high-performance CPR, use AEDs, conduct advanced rescue operations, manage emergency scenes, safeguard property, preserve evidence, and protect the environment, all hallmarks of true first responders.

In addition to these duties while on duty, many lifeguards continue to act as first responders even when they are off duty, as seen recently with the Ocean Safety guard who stepped in to help elderly and disabled people stranded during the Waialua flood on O'ahu, exemplifying the selfless, around-the-clock commitment that lifeguards provide to our communities.

I fully support the resolutions' core recognition that open water lifeguards meet the commonly understood definition of first responder: individuals with specialized training who are among the first to arrive and aid at emergencies. I also strongly agree with the call for state and county agencies, departments, and governing bodies to adopt this recognition and to ensure lifeguards receive the rights, resources, training support, and professional respect accorded to other first responders.

However, formal recognition alone is not enough. In addition to designating open water lifeguards as first responders, they should also receive pay that is commensurate with other first responder professions such as emergency medical technicians, police officers, and firefighters. Their training, risk exposure, and real-world responsibilities clearly align with these professions, and fair compensation is both a matter of justice and a practical necessity for recruiting and retaining highly skilled personnel who regularly save lives and strengthen Hawai'i's emergency response system.

Many other countries already recognize lifeguards as emergency responders and provide access to the programs, protections, and resources appropriate to that role. Hawai'i, as an island state whose identity, economy, and daily life are inseparable from the ocean, should be a leader in honoring and properly supporting these critical public servants.

Mahalo for introducing these important measures and for your continued efforts to protect the safety and wellbeing of our communities and visitors. I respectfully urge you to pass SR 54 and SCR 56 and

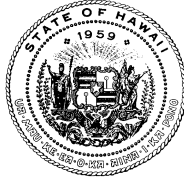
to continue working toward full pay and benefits parity for open water lifeguards with our other first responders.

Sincerely,

R. Kana'i Gomes

Email: [rkgomes@gmail.com](mailto:rkgomes@gmail.com)

Phone: 808-348-4074



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



**Testimony in SUPPORT of (SCR56/SR54)  
RECOGNIZING OPEN WATER LIFEGUARD AS FIRST RESPONDERS IN THE STATE OF HAWAII**

SENATOR GLENN WAKAI, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

SENATOR CAROL FUKUNAGA, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILIATARY AFFAIRS

Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 3:00 PM | Room Number: 224

- 1 **Fiscal Implications:** None.
- 2 **Department Position:** The Department of Health (“Department”) is submitting testimony in
- 3 support of Senate Concurrent Resolution 56 and Senate Resolution 54, which recognize
- 4 Hawaii’s open water lifeguards as first responders, and provides comments.
- 5 **Department Testimony:** The Emergency Medical Services & Injury Prevention Systems Branch
- 6 (EMSIPSB), on behalf of the Department, respectfully submits this testimony in **support** of this
- 7 concurrent resolution, and provides **comments**.
- 8 It is important to understand that “First Responders” are defined at a local and state level.
- 9 “Emergency Medical Responders” (EMRs) are defined at a national level, and hold a national
- 10 certification through the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians.
- 11 Hawaii’s open water lifeguards are essential to the safety and wellbeing of residents and
- 12 visitors statewide. Every day, they provide rapid, skilled, and lifesaving interventions in
- 13 dynamic, high-risk environments prior to the arrival of emergency medical services personnel.

1 These responsibilities align with the modern statutory direction for defining first responder  
2 personnel.

3 The EMS modernization legislation currently advancing through the Legislature (SB3134 and  
4 HB2314) updates HRS §321-222 to define first responder personnel to “a person who provides  
5 initial assistance until emergency medical services personnel arrive.” This modernized definition  
6 reflects contemporary emergency response practice and aligns directly with the lifesaving role  
7 Hawaii’s open water lifeguards perform every day.

8 It is important to note that “first responder personnel” is distinct from “emergency medical  
9 responder” and “emergency medical services personnel,” which are also defined in SB3134 and  
10 HB2314.

11 • **Emergency medical responders (EMRs)** are individuals who hold national certification  
12 through the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians.

13 • **Emergency medical services personnel** include emergency medical technicians,  
14 advanced emergency medical technicians, paramedics, and other health care workers  
15 who are licensed or certified by the State of Hawaii.

16 These distinctions ensure clarity about training, certification pathways, and roles within the  
17 statewide Emergency Medical Systems, while also supporting appropriate recognition of  
18 Hawaii’s open water lifeguards as first responder personnel.

19 **Offered Amendments: None**

20 Mahalo for your consideration and for your commitment to public safety.