



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Water and Land
Thursday, April 23, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.

By

Denise Eby Konan, Dean
College of Social Sciences

and

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and

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SCR 94 – ENDORSING WAIKIKI AS A WORLD SURFING RESERVE

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

The College of Social Sciences (CSS) and Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) strongly support the intent of SCR 94, which recognizes Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve.

Waikīkī is not only an iconic cultural and recreational landscape, but also a cornerstone of Hawai'i's visitor economy. Its world-renowned surf breaks, beaches and coastal ecosystems are intrinsically linked to the economic vitality of the region. The health of these natural resources directly underpins the livelihoods of local businesses, supports employment and sustains the broader economic resilience of the State. As such, there is a clear and compelling social, cultural and economic rationale for protecting and stewarding the environmental systems that make Waikīkī both unique and globally significant.

Designation as a World Surfing Reserve would formally acknowledge Waikīkī's exceptional environmental, cultural and recreational value while elevating public awareness of the growing threats facing its coastal resources. These include coastal erosion, sea level rise, increased storm impacts and ongoing pressures from urban development and heavy use. Recognizing Waikīkī through this designation provides an important platform to highlight these challenges and to promote proactive, science-informed management strategies. Our understanding is that designation as a Reserve does not necessarily trigger new environmental or commercial regulations but instead requires the formation of a stewardship committee and subsequent community-based management plan.

Equally important, this recognition would help strengthen and formalize community-based stewardship. It offers a mechanism to enhance collaboration among local stakeholders, practitioners, cultural leaders and resource managers, fostering a shared commitment to protecting Waikīkī's natural and cultural heritage. By aligning conservation efforts with community values and local knowledge, this initiative can support more effective, inclusive and adaptive management approaches.

CSS has formed a research- and advisory-based Surf Culture and Heritage Hui (Surf Hui), which supports surfing heritage initiatives in Hawai'i. These initiatives include legislative, cultural and historical impacts, and policy work connected to surfing as a Native Hawaiian cultural practice.

This Surf Hui will give CSS a formal platform to organize research, community engagement and strategic advising around surfing as culture and heritage. As this resolution formerly endorses recognition of Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve, the Surf Hui could complement the effort by advancing the historical, cultural, social and policy research aspects needed to support national and international recognition of surfing in Hawai'i.

Work has already begun on producing a small set of visible, useful products that establish credibility and support future funding or legislative collaboration. These objectives include:

Phase 1: Developing the organization and framework. To build membership, refine the scope and prepare a foundational background brief on the history and culture of surfing in Hawai'i.

Phase 2: Researching and consultation. To convene practitioner and community conversations, review archival and scholarly sources, and identify major themes, risks and heritage documentation priorities.

Phase 3: Obtaining public products and policy support. To deliver a white paper or issue a brief, policy memo for state leadership, and roadmap for future heritage-oriented research, documentation and advisory work. Potential deliverables include a surfing heritage background report, a bibliography and archive map, one or more community-engagement roundtables, testimony or policy support materials as requested, and a strategic short memo outlining future opportunities for cultural heritage, research and public engagement.

Housing the Surf Hui in CSS would be a natural fit. The College could provide an interdisciplinary home for the historical, cultural, policy and community dimensions of surfing, while serving as a bridge to other UH units. CSS brings institutional credibility, research infrastructure and public-facing policy orientation for a group that is both scholarly and applied.

In practice, CSS would provide administrative coordination, meeting support, communications assistance and a platform for collaborative grant development. The College would help ensure that the Surfing Hui's work products are useful beyond the university to legislators, cultural organizations, schools, local communities and the broader public. By convening the proposed team and engaging additional community voices as needed, the Surfing Hui can become a credible institutional home for research and advisory work related to surfing as one of Hawai'i's most visible and culturally significant practices.

Hawai'i Sea Grant is a formidable partner in this endeavor. Its mission is to provide integrated research, extension and educational activities that increase understanding and use of ocean and coastal resources of the Hawaiian and Pacific Islands, and support the informed personal, policy and management decisions that are integral to realizing this vision. Hawai'i Sea Grant is part of a national network of 34 university-based programs associated with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that promote better understanding, conversation and use of coastal resources.

In summary, this resolution represents a meaningful step toward safeguarding the environmental integrity, cultural significance and economic sustainability of Waikīkī for future generations. CSS and Hawai'i Sea Grant respectfully ask for your support.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

SCR-94

Submitted on: 4/20/2026 5:01:25 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/23/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Godfrey Akaka	The Native Hawaiian Gathering Rights Association	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This bill infringes on Native Hawaiian Gathering Rights and prevents necessary balance and proper management of ocean resources. This is clearly an antifishing bill and therefore is anti Hawaiian and anti traditional customary practice. The state continues to entertain antifishing bills to promote and cater to the tourism industry. We strongly oppose.



Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on
Water and Land

Thursday, April 23, 2026; 10:00am

By
Rick Egged, President
Waikiki Beach Special Improvement District Association

SCR94– ENDORSING WAIKIKI AS A WORLD SURFING RESERVE.

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

The Waikiki Beach Special Improvement District Association (WBSIDA) supports Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) 94, which recognizes Waikiki as a World Surfing Reserve.

Waikiki’s world-renowned surf breaks and coastal ecosystems are foundational to both its cultural significance and economic vitality, demonstrating the clear connection between environmental health and long-term economic resilience. Protecting these natural resources is essential to sustaining the livelihoods, visitor industry, and community identity that depend on them. Designation as a World Surfing Reserve would formally acknowledge Waikiki’s exceptional environmental, cultural, and recreational value while elevating public awareness of the growing threats facing its coastal resources.

This designation would elevate awareness of the increasing threats to Waikiki’s coastal environment, while providing a framework to strengthen community-based stewardship. Designation as a World Surfing Reserve does not automatically trigger new environmental or commercial regulations but instead facilitates the formation of a stewardship committee and subsequent community-based management plan. Recognizing Waikiki as a World Surfing Reserve can help align stakeholders, support informed management, and advance a shared vision for protecting these vital natural and cultural resources for future generations.

Equally important, this recognition would help strengthen and formalize community-based stewardship. It offers a mechanism to enhance collaboration among local stakeholders, practitioners, cultural leaders, and resource managers, fostering a shared commitment to protecting Waikiki’s natural and cultural heritage. By aligning conservation efforts with community values and local knowledge, this initiative can support more effective, inclusive, and adaptive management approaches. The WBSIDA supports the intent of this measure and looks forward to continued discussion on the details.

HON. PATRICIA M. LOUI
c/o Pioneer Plaza Suite 1718
900 Fort Street Mall
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96821

April 21, 2026

The Honorable Mark J. Hashim, Chair
The Honorable Dee Morikawa, Vice Chair
Committee on Water and Land
Hawaii State House of Representatives
Re: SCR 94 Support
Via email submission

Dear Chair Hashim and Vice Chair Morikawa:

Mahalo to you both and members of the House Water and Land Committee for hearing this bill. I write to support SCR 94 to endorse Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve.

A World Surfing Reserve designation helps to preserve wave breaks, surf zones and their surrounding environments. Besides preservation, this designation for Waikīkī will reinforce global recognition of Hawai'i as the home of surfing. Although this is commonly recognized in our Aloha State, competition from other destinations are attempting to lay claim the heritage of surfing. I thus believe that Hawai'i would benefit from being more pro-active in positioning surfing as an essential part of our culture, environment, and people. The World Surfing Reserve is one step in this direction.

I therefore kindly request the Hawai'i State House of Representatives Committee on Water and Land endorse this designation through a favorable vote on SCR 94.

Mahalo nui loa for your kind consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Loui

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

Hearing: Apr 23, 10:00 a.m.

Re: SCR 94 – Endorsing Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve

Position: Support with Amendments

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

Leimomi Khan, ko‘u ‘inoa. I respectfully submit this testimony in **support with amendments** of SCR 94, endorsing Waikīkī as a World Surfing Reserve.

Waikīkī is unquestionably deserving of this recognition. As reflected in SCR 94, Waikīkī is the birthplace of modern surfing and a place where Native Hawaiian cultural practices—wave riding, surfboard crafting, and our deep relationship with the ocean—continue to be preserved and shared with the world.

I strongly support the intent of this measure. At the same time, I respectfully urge this body to strengthen the resolution by adopting amendments that reflect the full breadth of Hawai‘i’s surfing legacy.

Hawai‘i is the birthplace of surfing—he‘e nalu—a Native Hawaiian cultural practice grounded in ‘ike kūpuna and a profound relationship with ‘āina and kai. Our islands are home to numerous surf sites of global significance, each possessing unique cultural, historical, environmental, and community-based values. These include Mākaha, the North Shore of O‘ahu, and surf breaks throughout Maui, Kaua‘i, and Hawai‘i Island.

As a former **Miss Mākaha**, I have experienced firsthand the depth of community, ‘ike, and stewardship that defines surfing on the west side of O‘ahu. Mākaha is not only a world-class surf break, but a living center of Native Hawaiian ocean knowledge and generational practice. Similarly, the North Shore of O‘ahu stands as a global proving ground for surfers, while also embodying traditions of courage, kuleana, and respect for the powerful winter seas. Across the islands, surf culture and competitions demonstrate that Hawai‘i’s surfing legacy is diverse, statewide, and sustained through local communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully propose that SCR 94 be amended to:

- **Add WHEREAS clauses** recognizing that Hawai‘i is the birthplace of surfing and home to multiple world-renowned surf sites across the islands;
- **Amend the primary BE IT RESOLVED clause** to recognize Waikīkī as the **initial designation under a broader Hawai‘i Surfing Reserve Initiative**; and

- **Add additional BE IT RESOLVED clauses** to establish and support a Hawai‘i Surfing Reserve Initiative that:
 - Provides a framework for identifying and evaluating additional surf sites, including Mākaha and the North Shore of O‘ahu;
 - Ensures that any future designations are **community-driven and culturally grounded**;
 - Emphasizes **protection, stewardship, and perpetuation of Native Hawaiian traditions**, rather than increased commercialization; and
 - Encourages collaboration among state and county agencies, community organizations, and cultural practitioners.

These amendments do not diminish the importance of Waikīkī. Rather, they elevate this measure by positioning Waikīkī as the **first of many sacred surf places to be recognized and protected**, while ensuring that other communities have a respectful and appropriate pathway forward.

This is an opportunity for Hawai‘i to lead—not only in surfing—but in how we define and steward our most treasured ocean places through aloha ‘āina, kuleana, and ‘ike kūpuna.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

Leimomi Khan, a former Miss Mākaha