



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

KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI  
A HO'OMĀKA'IKĀ'I

**BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT DIVISION**

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Statement of  
**Dennis T. Ling**  
Administrator

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

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

Wednesday, April 8, 2026  
1:05 PM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

In consideration of  
**SR46**

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

Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye, and members of the Committee, the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports **SR 46**, which seeks to establish a Sister-State relationship between the State of Hawai'i and Okayama Prefecture.

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

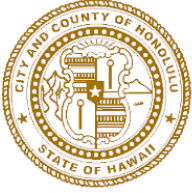
Okayama, known as the "Land of Sunshine" for its mild and dry climate, is a leading agricultural region. Hawai'i's tropical environment and multicultural society support a vibrant tourism industry that is vital to our economy. Both regions share economic similarities, with agriculture, manufacturing,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

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

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

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



# HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL

*KE KANIHELA O KE KALANA O HONOLULU*

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Wednesday, April 8, 2026

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

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

**SCR47** Testimony in Support

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

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

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

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

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

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

Aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tyler Dos Santos-Tam".

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

**To:** Senator Chris Lee and members of the Committee

**From:** Debora I Lum, Okayama Kenjin-kai Member

**Date:** Friday, March 27, 2026

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**RE: SCR47/SR46 ESTABLISHING A SISTER-STATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE OF HAWAII,  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND THE PREFECTURE OF OKAYAMA, JAPAN.**

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

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports SCR47/SR46, which establishes a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii and the Okayama Prefecture in Japan.

SCR47/SR46 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for Economic Action. This resolution offers an encouraging opportunity to deepen Hawaii's trade relationships and support diplomatic progress at a time when international economic engagement in the Asia-Pacific is increasingly important. Sister-state partnerships provide a structured pathway to facilitate business-to-business connections, expand export opportunities for local producers, and support the development of long-term trade relationships. With Hawaii's small businesses and value-added producers facing significant economic pressure, these partnerships can serve as an important mechanism to access overseas markets and build consistent export channels for the State. In all, these benefits improve Hawaii's economic security.

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

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

We respectfully ask to pass SCR47/SR46. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.