

ACT 83

H.B. NO. 746

A Bill for an Act Relating to Hula.

*Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:*

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that hula has significant historical and cultural importance to Hawaii. The first oral account of a hula performance dates back to the seventh century. Hula performances were documented on the Kona coast at Kealahou Bay, and on Oahu at Waimea Bay, although there were numerous other undocumented hula performances during that time. Hula later experienced a decline from 1830 to 1870 when Queen Kaahumanu, influenced by her Christian teachings that viewed hula as a "heathen practice", forbade public hula performances. However, despite the edict, hula continued to be a major source of communication and historical preservation to the Hawaiians as evidenced by the fact that clandestine hula schools operated in every district on all the islands and that people were irresistibly drawn to hula performances. It was not until King David Kalakaua's reign that the ban on public hula performances was lifted, at which time hula gained widespread acceptance and flourished at both official and unofficial functions.

In the early 1900s, hula became a feature at carnivals and pageants, endearing itself as the standard entertainment to the growing tourist trade. Due to the audience's lack of knowledge in the Hawaiian language, hula became a style of dancing in which the gesture became the important feature instead of being a dance form to portray a cultural story. As such, the non-traditional hula dancer became the image of Hawaii in the visitor's eye.

The legislature recognizes that in the last thirty years, the Hawaiian renaissance sparked a newfound interest in traditional hula. This has led to the birth of numerous hula festivals in Hawaii and around the world, including the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival (Hawaii), Queen Liliuokalani Keiki Hula Competition (Oahu), Ka La Hula I Orlando (Florida), Hula Festival of Tokyo (Japan), and Ka Leo O Na Hula Seminario (Mexico), to name a few. Hula's recent worldwide acceptance

can be attributed in part to the fact that people appreciate the significant role that hula plays in perpetuating the Hawaiian culture.

In the words of the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival, “hula is the language of the heart, and therefore the heartbeat of the Hawaiian people”. The hula mele ma’i was composed to honor gods, chiefs, the newborn of royal families, and on occasions of importance to the whole populace, such as the completion of a canoe house, and the consecration of taro fields. However, more importantly, there is no “true” version of a dance, for when it comes to hula, the stories are true to the hula dancer as influenced by his or her environment and experiences. As such, hula is an important tool to teach the history, values, and philosophies of the Hawaiian culture.

The purpose of this Act is to bestow formal recognition on hula as a special livelihood with deep cultural roots in Hawaii by designating it as the official state dance.

SECTION 2. Chapter 5, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated to read as follows:

**“§5- State dance.** Hula is adopted, established, and designated as the official dance of the State.”

SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.<sup>1</sup>

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

(Approved June 22, 1999.)

**Note**

1. Edited pursuant to HRS §23G-16.5.