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Testimony of
Mike McCartney
President and Chief Executive Officer
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on
H.R. 55
**Urging the Federal Government to Include Hong Kong in the
United States Visa Waiver Program and Ease Visa Restrictions and
the Visa Application and Approval Process for Business and
Tourism Travelers with Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Passports**

House Committee on International Affairs
House Committee on Tourism
Monday, March 19, 2012
9:45 a.m.
Conference Room 312

The Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) supports the intent of H.R. 55, which requests the U.S. Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Attorney General to include Hong Kong in the United States Visa Waiver Program and ease visa restrictions for business and tourist travelers with Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passports.

Hong Kong is a special administrative region provided for by the Chinese Constitution. As a Special Administrative Region, Hong Kong issues its own passport. Granting easier access for holders of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passports has the potential to increase the number of Chinese visitors to Hawaii, who spend an average of over \$350 per day.

With the passage of the Travel Promotion Act of 2007, the federal government has established the goal of increasing international travel to the United States, including making improvements to the visa program and the expanding the visa waiver program. The Visa Waiver Program, however, authorizes the Attorney General, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to "*designate any country*" as a visa-waiver country that meets the requirements listed in the law (8 U.S.C. §1187). That may raise the question of whether Hong Kong may be considered a *country* under the Visa Waiver law because it is designated as a special administrative region.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments.