
SENATE RESOLUTION

RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE COMPACT OF FREE ASSOCIATION
COMMUNITY IN THE STATE OF HAWAII.

1 WHEREAS, shortly after World War II, the United States
2 assumed administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific
3 Islands under a United Nations strategic trusteeship, which
4 provided for United States control over development of the
5 islands' economies and international relations, as well as
6 military access to territory within the islands; and
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8 WHEREAS, the three nations with Compacts of Free
9 Association (COFA) with the United States - the Republic of
10 Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the
11 Federated States of Micronesia have small populations,
12 economies, and land sizes but stretch over two million square
13 miles of ocean; and
14

15 WHEREAS, the swaths of ocean in which they are located are
16 incredibly strategic, lying directly on the way from the United
17 States to Asia and Australia, and whoever controls those waters
18 controls American access to the entire Indo-Pacific region; and
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20 WHEREAS, after World War II, these nations became trust
21 territories of the United States. While the United States
22 granted them independence in the 1980s and 1990s, these nations
23 first signed COFA agreements with the United States, allowing it
24 to establish bases, access territorial waters of these nations,
25 and exclude other nations from them. For example, Kwajalein in
26 the Republic of the Marshall Islands hosts the Reagan Test Site,
27 a cornerstone of American missile defense capabilities; and
28

29 WHEREAS, if the United States abandoned COFA, China would
30 be in a unique position to gain control over COFA, jeopardizing
31 the United States' ability to guarantee the security of its
32 Indo-Pacific allies and trade through the world's busiest
33 shipping lanes since China's military buildup is a top threat to
34 the region and world; and



1
2 WHEREAS, notwithstanding the COFA islands' status as
3 independent nations, the economies of these islands are heavily
4 dependent on United States government grants under the COFA
5 treaty and the United States military presence; and
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7 WHEREAS, treaties arising out of the special and unique
8 relationship that has existed between the three COFA island
9 nations and the United States allow island citizens to enter the
10 United States without work permits or visas to study, live and
11 work and to access benefits available to United States citizens,
12 such as driver licenses and health care; and
13

14 WHEREAS, the federal government estimates that there are
15 currently over fourteen thousand seven hundred COFA migrants
16 living in Hawaii; and
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18 WHEREAS, citizens from the Federated States of Micronesia
19 volunteer to serve in the United States Armed Forces at per
20 capita rates higher than most states; and
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22 WHEREAS, a report in 2019 found up to one thousand five
23 hundred Micronesian citizens currently serving in the United
24 States Armed Forces; and
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26 WHEREAS, there is widespread negative public perception of
27 COFA migrants in Hawaii and this group continues to be
28 scapegoated as a drain on resources, particularly regarding
29 healthcare. COFA migrants also face discrimination in access to
30 housing, education, and employment; and
31

32 WHEREAS, despite these hardships and challenges, COFA
33 migrants participate in economic activities by providing labor,
34 consuming goods and services, and paying fees and taxes to the
35 government. According to estimates in a report conducted by the
36 Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism, the
37 COFA population contributed \$336,200,000 to the Hawaii gross
38 domestic product in 2017, accounting for 0.4 percent of the
39 state total GDP that year; and
40

41 WHEREAS, COFA migrants also contribute to the vibrancy of
42 indigenous cultural practices in the State, helping to keep



1 native cultural traditions alive in the modern day as best
2 illustrated by the story of Mau Piailug and his contributions to
3 traditional ocean navigation, which resulted in a cultural
4 revolution for native Hawaiians to relearn a part of their
5 culture that was being lost; and

6
7 WHEREAS, the COFA island families residing in this country
8 should be fairly treated in recognition of their contributions
9 and the special and unique relationship between the COFA islands
10 and the United States; now, therefore,

11
12 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first
13 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2021,
14 that the Legislature recognizes the contributions and
15 accomplishments of our COFA community in the State of Hawaii and
16 the broader United States; and

17
18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawai'i State Foundation on
19 Culture and the Arts is requested to research contributions made
20 to the State by COFA migrants and submit a report of its
21 findings to the Legislature no later than forty days prior to
22 the convening of the Regular Session of 2022; and

23
24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this
25 Resolution be transmitted to the Governor, Chairperson to the
26 Hawaii Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on
27 Civil Rights, Executive Director of the Hawai'i State Foundation
28 on Culture and the Arts, and Executive Director of We Are
29 Oceania.

