

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

P.O. BOX 621
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

DAWN N.S. CHANG
CHAIRPERSON
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FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

**Testimony of
DAWN N. S. CHANG
Chairperson**

**Before the House Committee on
FINANCE**

**Monday, February 26, 2024
2:00 PM**

State Capitol, Conference Room 308 and Via Videoconference

**In consideration of
HOUSE BILL 1841 HOUSE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

House Bill 1841 House Draft 1 appropriates funds to DLNR for operating expenses, equipment, the establishment of positions, and capital improvement projects to support wildfire emergency response. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) strongly supports this measure.**

The Department's Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) is the primary responder for wildland fires across 1,368,002 acres or about 26% of the land area of the State including forest and natural area reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, and public hunting areas, and supports federal and county responders on other urban interface lands. Due to climate change and associated droughts, the annual area burned in Hawai'i has grown in past decades. The percentage of land area burned annually in Hawai'i exceeds the national average, and in some years, it surpasses the 14 most fire-prone western states.

DOFAW's fire and emergency response mandates require specialized equipment. DOFAW collaborates with the county fire departments to extinguish fires on forested lands and lands in the wildland-urban interface managed by the counties. DOFAW provides specialty expertise, equipment, and other resources in these environments. The Department also assists counties during natural disasters, such as hurricanes and lava flows.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
KA 'OIHANA PONO LIMAHANA
830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 321
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
www.labor.hawaii.gov

February 21, 2024

The Honorable Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Committee on Finance
House of Representatives
State Capitol, Room 306
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Yamashita:

Subject: House Bill (HB) 1841, House Draft (HD) 1 Relating to the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR)

I am Kazuo Todd, Chair of the Hawaii State Fire Council (SFC). The SFC supports HB1841, HD1, which appropriates funds to DLNR for operating expenses, equipment, the establishment of positions, and capital improvement projects to support wildfire emergency response.

The DLNR's Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) is the primary responder for wildland fires across 1,368,002 acres of the State of Hawaii's forested watersheds (or 25% of the land area in Hawaii) and supports federal and county responders on remaining areas in the State. Due to climate change and associated droughts, the annual area burned in Hawaii has grown in past decades. In fact, the percentage of land area burned annually in Hawaii exceeds the national average and, in some years, it surpasses the 12 most fire-prone western states.

The DOFAW's fire and emergency response mandates require specialized equipment. The DOFAW collaborates with the county fire departments to extinguish fires on forested land managed by the DOFAW and residential areas (the wildland-urban interface) managed by the counties. The DOFAW provides specialty expertise, equipment, and other resources in these environments which the county fire departments do not possess due to training, funding, or mission requirement. The Department also assists counties during natural disasters, such as hurricanes and lava flows.

The DOFAW's expertise and collaboration with the county fire departments has been invaluable in protecting residences, buildings, and critical infrastructure from the encroachment of wildland-urban interface fires throughout Hawaii.

The Honorable Kyle Yamashita, Chair
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February 21, 2024

The SFC urges your committee's support on the passage of HB1841, HD1.

Should you have questions, please contact SFC Administrative Specialist Gary Lum at 723-7169 or glum@honolulu.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kazuo Todd". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kazuo" being more prominent than the last name "Todd".

KAZUO TODD
Chair

KT/GL:

Mitchell D. Roth
Mayor

Deanna Sako
Managing Director



Kazuo S. K. L. Todd
Fire Chief

Eric H. Moller
Deputy Fire Chief

County of Hawai'i
HAWAII FIRE DEPARTMENT
25 Aupuni Street • Suite 2501 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720
(808) 932-2900 • Fax (808) 932-2928

February 25, 2024

SUBJECT: SUPPORT OF HB1841 FROM HAWAII FIRE DEPARTMENT

Aloha Legislators,

On behalf of the Hawaii Fire Department, we extend our heartfelt mahalo for your dedication to enhancing the resilience and safety of our communities and natural landscapes against the threat of wildfires. As the Fire Chief of the Hawaii Fire Department, I am writing to express our unequivocal support for House Bill No. 1841, which proposes critical appropriations for operating expenses, equipment, the establishment of positions, and capital improvement projects to support wildfire emergency response activities under the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

The devastating wildfires on Maui in August 2023 have starkly highlighted the urgent need for a robust and well-resourced response framework to address and mitigate the risks of wildfires across the State of Hawaii. These tragic events have underscored the importance of a coordinated effort involving federal, state, and county agencies, along with community stakeholders, to enhance our wildfire prevention, response, and restoration capabilities.

H.B. NO. 1841's focus on maintaining and updating wildfire-specific equipment and wildfire-suppression infrastructure is particularly commendable. The appropriation for operating costs to support fire and emergency response, prevention and pre-suppression activities, and post-fire restoration is a testament to the Legislature's commitment to protecting our communities and natural resources from the devastating impacts of wildfires.

Furthermore, the detailed allocation for equipment across the islands—including bulldozers, water tenders, dip tanks, fire engines, remote automated weather stations, unmanned aircraft systems with thermal detectors, and radio equipment—demonstrates a comprehensive approach to enhancing our wildfire response capabilities. These resources are indispensable for the effective management of wildfires and will significantly bolster our efforts to respond to and manage fire incidents more efficiently and effectively.

The establishment of twenty-two full-time equivalent (FTE) positions is another critical component of this bill, ensuring that the DLNR has the necessary personnel to implement wildfire prevention and response strategies effectively. These positions, ranging from planners and natural resources management specialists to foresters, heavy equipment operators, and mechanics, will provide the essential human resources required to manage and mitigate wildfire risks proactively.



Additionally, the authorization for the issuance of general obligation bonds to fund wildfire water infrastructure capital improvement projects further highlights the comprehensive and forward-thinking approach embodied in H.B. NO. 1841. This investment in our infrastructure is crucial for enhancing our ability to respond to wildfires and protect our communities and natural habitats.

In closing, the Hawaii Fire Department strongly supports H.B. NO. 1841 and its provisions for strengthening our state's wildfire prevention and response capabilities. We commend the Legislature for its foresight and dedication to addressing this critical issue and stand ready to collaborate with the Department of Land and Natural Resources and other stakeholders to implement these vital measures.

Mahalo for considering our support for this important legislation. Together, we can safeguard our islands and communities from the threat of wildfires, ensuring a safer and more resilient Hawaii for generations to come.

With warmest aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kazuo S. K. L. Todd', written in a cursive style.

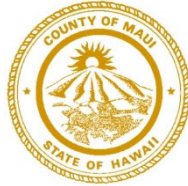
KAZUO S. K. L TODD
Fire Chief

RICHARD T. BISSEN, JR.
Mayor

JOSIAH K. NISHITA
Managing Director

BRADFORD K. VENTURA
Fire Chief

GAVIN L.M. FUJIOKA
Deputy Fire Chief



DEPARTMENT OF FIRE & PUBLIC SAFETY
COUNTY OF MAUI
200 DAIRY ROAD
KAHULUI, MAUI, HAWAII 96732
www.mauicounty.gov

February 26, 2024

The Honorable Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Committee on Finance
House of Representatives
State Capitol, Room 306
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Chair Yamashita,

SUBJECT: HOUSE BILL (HB) 1841, HOUSE DRAFT (HD) 1 RELATING TO DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES (DLNR)

I am Bradford K. Ventura, member of the Hawaii State Fire Council (SFC) and Fire Chief of the Maui Fire Department. The SFC supports HB 1841, HD 1, which appropriates funds to DLNR for operating expenses, equipment, the establishment of positions, and capital improvement projects to support wildfire emergency response.

The DLNR's Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) is the primary responder for wildland fires across 1,368,002 acres of the State of Hawaii's forested watersheds (or 25% of the land area in Hawaii) and supports federal and county responders on remaining areas in the State. Due to climate change and associated droughts, the annual area burned in Hawaii has grown in past decades. In fact, the percentage of land area burned annually in Hawaii exceeds the national average and, in some years, it surpasses the 12 most fire-prone western states.

The DOFAW's fire and emergency response mandates require specialized equipment. The DOFAW collaborates with the county fire departments to extinguish fires on forested land managed by the DOFAW and residential areas (the wildland-urban interface) managed by the counties. The DOFAW provides specialty expertise, equipment, and other resources in these environments which the county fire departments do not possess due to training, funding, or mission requirement. The Department also assists counties during natural disasters, such as hurricanes and lava flows.

The DOFAW's expertise and collaboration with the county fire departments has been invaluable in protecting residences, buildings, and critical infrastructure from the encroachment of wildland-urban interface fires throughout Hawaii.

The Honorable Kyle Yamashita, Chair

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February 26, 2024

The SFC urges your committee's support on the passage of HB 1841, H D1.

If you have any questions, please contact SFC Administrative Specialist Gary Lum at (808) 723-7169 or glum@honolulu.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brad Ventura".

BRADFORD K. VENTURA
Fire Chief



TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

FEBRUARY 26, 2024

HB 1841, HD1, RELATING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL
RESOURCES

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **supports** HB 1841, HD1, relating to the Department of Land and Natural Resources. Pursuant to the "Public Safety and Disaster and Emergency Preparedness" section of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i platform, the party supports "policy that protects the people of Hawai'i and their property against natural and man-made disasters," and "believes that climate change is real, affirms human activity as its primary cause and main driver, and supports emergency preparedness and planning efforts to mitigate its impacts."

Last year, we witnessed the impact of the climate emergency on our shores. On August 8, 2023, wildfires swept across Maui and killed at least 100 people, making it one of the nation's deadliest natural disasters. The spread of the fires has been attributed to climate change conditions, such as unusually dry landscapes and the confluence of a strong high-pressure system to the north and Hurricane Dora to the south.

The wildfires destroyed over 2,200 structures, including numerous residential buildings, historic landmarks, and school facilities. In September 2023, a report from the United States Department of Commerce estimated

the total economic damage of the wildfires to be roughly \$5.5 billion. According to a report issued by the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization on September 22, 2023, the unemployment rate on Maui was expected to soar above 11 percent by the end of 2023 and remain above 4 percent through 2026. A total of 10,448 new claims for unemployment in Maui County were filed in the four weeks following the wildfires, about 9,900 more than the preceding four weeks. Displaced families and workers who lost their jobs are still attempting to recover from the disaster, with a full recovery expected to take many years to achieve.

Accordingly, we must do all we can to prevent tragedies like this from occurring again on our shores, including by investing in positions and programs at the Department of Land and Natural Resources that mitigate future emergencies. The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency released an updated State Hazard Mitigation Plan last November, in which the state's wildfire risk level soared 74 percent to 6.6 from its previous level of 3.8 in the 2018 draft of the report.

The updated hazard mitigation plan contains statistics on how many people by county are at risk from wildfire hazards. For Honolulu, 427,293 people could potentially be affected by wildfires, which was listed as the highest risk with a risk factor of 5.7. Maui County also has wildfires as its highest emergency risk with a score of 5.8 and 81,424 people at risk. On Kaua'i, wildfires carry a 5.6 risk level and threaten 27,604 people. Hawai'i Island has a wildfire risk score of 4.6 and 32,080 people at risk.

Wildfires are now designated as the top hazard in the state according to the updated HIEMA report. It is incumbent upon policymakers to respond with urgency to keep our communities safe.

Mahalo nui loa,

Kris Coffield
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
(808) 679-7454
kriscoffield@gmail.com

Abby Simmons
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
(808) 352-6818
abbyalana808@gmail.com

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy
Support for HB 1841 HD1, Relating to Government
Committee on Finance
February 26, 2024, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference**

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) **supports** HB 1841 HD1, relating to DLNR, Forestry and Wildlife Division which appropriates funds to DLNR for operating expenses, equipment, the establishment of positions, and capital improvement projects to support wildfire emergency response.

Hawai'i faces surmounting environmental challenges like wildfires, disappearing coastlines, bleached coral reefs, and an underinvestment in the management of these natural and cultural resources. HB 1841 HD1 is a critical step, and aligns with the majority of Hawai'i voters who support increased funding to preserve, protect, and restore natural resources.

As an island region, our community safety is at risk the more years we go without significant funding toward environmental protection and restoration. Hawai'i is in immediate need of additional resources to conserve and protect our ecosystems, native species, coastlines, and the community livelihoods that depend on these resources.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **support** of HB 1841 HD1.

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