

Testimony of
Ryan Kawailani Ozawa
Publisher, Hawaii Bulletin
Founder, Hawaii Hui LLC / Kilinahe Foundation

Before the
Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs
Hawaii State Capitol Room 325
2:00 p.m. HST, Wednesday, March 27, 2024
SB3312 SD1 HD1 — Relating to a State Gesture

Dear Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair; Rep. Gregg Takayama, Vice Chair; and Members of the Committee:

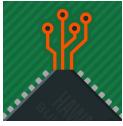
I am submitting this testimony to express my **STRONG SUPPORT** of **SB3312 SD1, HD1** (HSCR1277-24) relating to establishing a STATE GESTURE.

The shaka is perhaps the best symbolic embodiment of the spirit and values of our island home. As a lifelong born-and-raised resident of Hawaii and native Hawaiian, I believe it has grown to encompass the aloha spirit as it is practiced and celebrated by all lucky to live in, visit, and love Hawaii.

“Official recognition is valuable because the shaka is so culturally resonant, so much a part of this place,” long-time political commentator Neal Milner wrote last week. “The gesture is a source of origin stories, family stories, and a way to talk about life in Hawaii.”

This meaningful bill is the tip of the spear on a broader shaka movement. With a documentary on the origins of the shaka expected to premiere this summer, a special shaka Hawaii license plate in the works, and an upcoming proposal for an international standard shaka emoji, 2024 is shaping up to be ‘The Year of the Shaka.’

The shaka is a globally understood, universal expression of warmth, welcome, and even strength and resilience. When you share a shaka, you are sharing friendship, compassion, gratitude, and connection.



The shaka binds us together across cultures and backgrounds with positivity and goodwill. Few hand gestures have persisted for as long as the shaka and retained a pristine and positive vibe.

Establishing the shaka as a state symbol will honor the unique culture of Hawaii. It will celebrate the diverse histories that contributed to this gesture while preserving its origins here.

Adopting the shaka as an official symbol will also strengthen Hawaii's global brand—officially staking Hawaii's claim to the globally familiar hand sign—and spread the spirit of aloha worldwide.

The shaka represents the best of who we are as a people. There is no better symbol to share our island values with the world. And while Hawaii continues to face systemic and sudden challenges, I believe this bill focuses on the qualities that will ensure we overcome them.

Thank you for your consideration.

SB-3312-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/22/2024 5:10:54 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Steve Sue	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

IN SUPPORT OF RECOGNIZING THE SHAKA AS THE STATE GESTURE OF HAWAI'I

Aloha Representatives,

My name is Steve Sue, a Honolulu, Kaimuki District resident who, since 2019, has been involved in an oral history project to create an educational documentary that preserves the 110-year old story and evolution of the Shaka gesture. The project was first-funded by Kamehameha Schools and is produced by ID8, a Honolulu-based 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization of which I serve as Chairperson. No individual, including myself, has any financial interest in the project and I take no compensation from the nonprofit. I am also the producer/writer of the project and through the project believe that I am currently the world's leading expert in the Shaka gesture. My only goal is that as a fan of the Shaka, I desire to help it be an effective tool of aloha to build a better Hawai'i and a better world at large.

I strongly support bill SB3312 including the following Committee-suggested amendments:

I SUPPORT SENATE TCA AMENDMENT SB3312_SD1: "The state foundation on culture and the arts may develop a public work of art related to the shaka and its history to be displayed in a prominent location within the State for residents and visitors to Hawaii."

I SUPPORT HOUSE JHA AMENDMENT HD2736_HD2: Description of the Shaka gesture as, "For the purposes of this section, the shaka generally consists of extending the thumb and smallest finger while holding the three middle fingers curled, and gesturing in

salutation while presenting the front or back of the hand; the wrist may be rotated back and forth for emphasis."

I again register strong support for the underlying Bill in that:

IT MEMORIALIZES HAWAI'I AS THE PLACE OF THE SHAKA'S ORIGIN. While multiple theories on the origin of the Shaka exist, from Hawaii Island, Maui, Molokai and Oahu, all theories have the Shaka developing within the State of Hawai'i. The Shaka however, is now used around the world, with epicenters of significance outside of Hawai'i which causes confusion as to the place of its origin. For example, California might think it emanates from their surf and sun culture, Texas might think it derives from longhorn bulls or the country of Brazil may see it as part of their surfing industry and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu. In the cases of California and Brazil, their use of the Shaka clearly derives from Hawai'i as the place of origin. Thus Hawai'i's adoption of the Shaka would ensure Hawai'i's place on the global map as the birthplace of the Shaka.

IT PROTECTS THE SHAKA AS A PART OF HAWAI'I'S CULTURE & HERITAGE. Multiple Hawai'i ethnic cultures including Hawaiian, Samoan, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Filipino Haole, and various resident groups have contributed to the deep and complex meanings of the Shaka. The Shaka is in fact representative of 110 years of Hawai'i history and Hawai'i's melting pot of cultures and heritage at large. And while the unknowing may fear it's a gang sign, it actually IS a gang sign, but a friendly one as in "Hey gang, I'm part of the Hawai'i Ohana." In our documentary "Shaka, A Story of Aloha," World Champion surfers Ian Cairns and Peter Townend talk of surfers from abroad coming to Hawai'i to earn their stripes as surfers in the place of surfing's origin and on the most epic waves in the world at North Shore. For them, the Shaka was a sign of being a top surfer and earning their way into local Hawai'i culture. Outside of surfing, every visitor who throws a Shaka, is also signifying an association with Hawai'i.

IT PROTECTS THE HAWAI'I MEANING OF THE SHAKA. If any state other than Hawai'i adopted the Shaka first, the meaning and historical significance of Hawai'i's Shaka would be diluted. For example, if California were to adopt the Shaka as their State gesture, the gesture would commonly become known for California surf culture rather than Hawai'i's historical meanings and lineage. Thus Hawai'i's adoption of the Shaka will ensure that the meaning of the gesture will be protected and forever tied to Hawai'i culture and heritage.

IT PROTECTS THE SHAKA AS THE MOST ICONIC AND INTUITIVELY MEANINGFUL SYMBOL FOR HAWAI'I AND ALOHA. No other symbol for Hawai'i or Aloha is as visual and intuitively meaningful as the Shaka. There are currently 24 Official State Symbols of Hawai'i including rainbows, hibiscus, the Hawaiian flag, the State Seal, nēnē, Humuhumunukunukuāpua'a, kukui, hula, surfing, kalo and ukelele, none of which communicate the concepts of Hawai'i or Aloha as efficiently and intuitively as the Shaka. Further, the Shaka is known the world over as the sign of Hawai'i, thus Hawai'i simply needs to officially claim it for the State and it's people.

IT PROTECTS THE SHAKA AS AN ECONOMIC ASSET OF HAWAI'I. The Shaka is a key asset for the people and the State of Hawai'i to enjoy in that it offers the power to build our economy and global brand. For example, Shaka Tea, a 2015 startup, grew in just 9 years from Hilo to over 4,000 distribution locations around the Continent, creating countless jobs and prosperity for Hawai'i people. And a challenge: walk into any ABC Store and try NOT to see a Shaka product. There are countless Hawai'i apparel, food, art, transportation, souvenirs and other products that leverage the Shaka as a key design element. The Shaka is one of Hawai'i's greatest export products and must be preserved for the economic vitality of Hawai'i's economy.

IT MAKES OUR ROADWAYS SAFER, MORE EFFICIENT AND REDUCES ROAD-RAGE. In our documentary, "Shaka, A Story of Aloha," Jon Nouchi, DTS Director and inventor of The Bus' digital Shaka/Mahalo sign, notes that the Aloha effect from The Bus Shaka signs make our roads safer and more efficient through creating a cooperative and sharing attitude on the road. Even before The Bus, the local saying, "Right on the Kini Popo" (meaning "righteous") dates back to the 1950s when the Shaka was used in a driving context to thank others for letting one into the lane of traffic. The Shaka is also commonly used today in an apologetic context, typically resulting in defusing what might become a road-rage incident in other States. Showing Aloha on our roadways is pono and maintains a key part of Hawai'i as paradise.

IT PROTECTS THE SHAKA AS A TOOL OF ALOHA. The Shaka is imbued with Hawaii's meaning of aloha, such as being thankful, welcoming, being of service, fostering connection and being "pono." For example, in our documentary "Shaka, A Story of Aloha," Major General Kenneth Hara, commander of the "Shaka Battalion" in the Iraq War (2004-5), notes that in the most dangerous place on the planet at the time, that his battalion used the Shaka to save lives on both sides. As such, it is an ideal way to share aloha, both locally and around the world.

IT SUPPORTS THE ALOHA SPIRIT LAW (§5-7.5). The Aloha Spirit Law is an actual law that is encoded in the Hawai'i Revised Statutes §5-7.5. This statute requires that all citizens, government officials and visitors conduct themselves in accordance with the Aloha Spirit. Appropriate use of the Shaka supports and makes possible the compliance with the Aloha Spirit Law.

IT FOSTERS THE SHAKA AS A KEY TO PEACE & PARADISE. Famed Hawaiian philosopher Aunty Pilahi Paki once wrote, "The world will turn to Hawai'i as they search for world peace, as Hawai'i has the key, and that key is aloha." The Shaka is such a key to unlock peace. In fact, it's a key symbol of Aloha, as the concept of Aloha is intellectual and not driven by a tangible object. Further, the Shaka meaning of having no fear and going for excellence, also renders it a key to creating paradise in Hawai'i and anywhere in the world beyond. To achieve these ends, it's essential that the Hawaiian Shaka be preserved and protected.

The Shaka has been under our noses for over 110 years, yet no one has made a move to preserve it for Hawai'i. This Bill does just that. The Shaka originated in Hawai'i, was created through a melting pot of island groups, is representative of all Hawai'i people, is the most iconic and intuitive symbol of Aloha, Hawaii, Paradise, excellence, thankfulness, connecting, sharing and love, is the subject of a great body of Hawai'i cultural art, powers significant economic activity and prosperity in Hawai'i, helps keep our roads safe, efficient and friendly, and is a tool to support the Aloha Spirit Law and the sharing Aloha internationally. Thus, for the above-note reasons, I support HB2736 & SB3312 to adopt, establish, and designate the Shaka as the official gesture of the State of Hawai'i.

Mahalo nui loa,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Sue". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, sweeping initial "S".

Steve Sue

Kaimuki Resident

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SB-3312-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/22/2024 5:38:03 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tammy Yamada	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

SB-3312-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/22/2024 5:39:03 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johanna Tokunaga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of the Shaka gesture as an official gesture as a symbol of the spirit of aloha that we are uniquely known for.

SB-3312-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/22/2024 7:05:30 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephanie Antonio	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB3312.

SB-3312-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/22/2024 7:32:11 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Steven Navon Schonberger	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I encourage the State of Hawaii to protect this important aspect of its multi-cultural heritage.

SB-3312-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2024 9:11:43 AM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nancy Lueck	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support SB3312 that will recognize Hawaii's iconic Shaka as the official state gesture. Known worldwide as a symbol of aloha it's time we officially recognize its place of origin.

SB-3312-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2024 4:16:14 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tony Santini	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

Tony Santini