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DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
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KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION  
LAND  
STATE PARKS

Testimony of  
DAWN N. S. CHANG  
Chairperson

Before the House Committee on  
WATER & LAND

Thursday, April 11, 2024  
9:00 AM

State Capitol, Conference Room 430 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of  
SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 181 SENATE DRAFT 1  
REQUESTING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STATEWIDE FIREFIGHTING  
AIRCRAFT PROGRAM

Senate Concurrent Resolution 181 Senate Draft 1 requests the establishment of a statewide firefighting aircraft program. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure.**

SCR 181 SD1 addresses a critical need within the state to enhance capabilities in fighting wildfires, which have become increasingly prevalent and destructive due to climate change and adverse weather conditions. Helicopters are a critical component of fighting wildfires in Hawai'i, allowing access to remote and otherwise inaccessible areas swiftly, delivering targeted water drops and fire retardants with precision, and supporting the insertion of ground firefighting teams. Hawai'i's unique geographical isolation limits the ability to quickly mobilize external firefighting resources from the continental United States, necessitating a self-reliant and efficient in-state response capability. While invaluable, the individual counties' current helicopter and firefighting resources face limitations in deployment across county lines during mass emergencies. They are primarily small aircraft that cannot effectively address large-scale or concurrent wildfires on multiple islands. While the National Guard and Department of Defense aircraft often fill this role in the state, there are extended periods when these aircraft are unavailable due to deployment out of state. A unified, state-funded program would facilitate a full-time coordinated response, enable the sharing of larger aircraft in times of crisis, and provide a rapid, flexible, and effective response to wildfires across all islands.

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



**Hawaiian  
Electric**

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
WATER & LAND**

**SCR 181, SD1**

**REQUESTING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STATEWIDE FIREFIGHTING  
AIRCRAFT PROGRAM**

Thursday, April 11, 2024  
9:00 AM

State Capitol, Conference Room 430

Jimmy D. Alberts  
Senior Vice President & Chief Operations Officer  
Hawaiian Electric

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jimmy D. Alberts and I am offering written testimony on behalf of Hawaiian Electric **in support** of SCR 181, SD1, which requests the establishment of a statewide firefighting aircraft program.

Hawaiian Electric supports this resolution because it would expand the breadth of tools available for fighting wildfires in Hawai'i, where the unique geography and terrain of our islands compounds the challenges firefighters face. Establishing a dedicated statewide firefighting aircraft program would help address these challenges and enhance wildfire safety throughout the State. A statewide firefighting aircraft program, including use of helicopters, fixed-wing aircraft, and/or drones would be an important addition to existing firefighting helicopters operated by the counties and the National Guard. Hawaiian Electric appreciates that this resolution encompasses all aerial firefighting tactics, such as fixed-wing aircraft, which addresses a concern that in high

wind events where the risk of wildfire spread is greatest, a firefighting helicopter might not be able to operate, whereas a firefighting fixed-wing aircraft would still be able to fly. It is our understanding that fixed-wing firefighting aircraft are utilized in California and other areas of the mainland, and Hawai'i should consider adopting this best practice.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SCR 181, SD1.