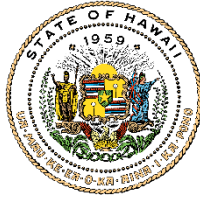


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

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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RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
FIRST DEPUTY

DEAN D. UYENO
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CONSERVATION AND COASTAL LANDS
CONSERVATION AND RESOURCES
ENFORCEMENT
ENGINEERING
FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE
HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
DAWN N. S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the Senate Committees on
PUBLIC SAFETY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS
and
AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Monday, February 5, 2024
3:00 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 225 and Via Videoconference

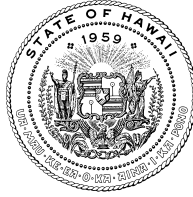
In consideration of
SENATE BILL 2356
RELATING TO WILDFIRES

Senate Bill 2356 proposes to establish within the Department of Defense the position and duties of State Wildfire Marshal, the position and duties of State Wildfire Chief, the State Wildfire Corps, and the State Wildfire Fuel Reduction Task Force and makes an appropriation. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) opposes this measure with comments.**

While the Department agrees with the intent of the bill in the expansion of wildland fire suppression forces within the state to combat Hawai'i's increasing wildland fire problem, the Department opposes the creation of a new program outside of the existing fire service. The Department would prefer to see increases in funding, training, and capacity to the accredited county fire departments and the Department's Division of Forestry and Wildlife's (DOFAW) wildland fire program. Trained and experienced personnel already exist at the State and county levels, however, the county fire departments and DOFAW have not received the support required to meet the growing wildland fire problem in the state. Modern wildland firefighting equipment, additional fire management program personnel, and training opportunities within the existing fire service, as well as the creation of a Fire Marshall's Office within the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, where the Fire Council currently resides, will allow the counties and DOFAW to adequately respond to wildland fires across the state. In addition, a fire service under the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency cannot receive funding from the United States

Forest Service as the Rural Fire Capacity and National Fire Capacity programs mandate that funding goes to the state forestry agency, which is the Division of Forestry and Wildlife.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition on this measure.



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

**Senate Committees on Agriculture and Environment and Public Safety and
Intergovernmental and Military Affairs**

Monday, February 5, 2024

3:00 p.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 225 and Videoconference

With Comments

S.B. No. 2356, Relating to Wildfires

Chairs Gabbard and Wakai, Vice Chairs Richards and Elefante, and Members on the Senate Committees on Agriculture and Environment, and Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs:

The Office of the Governor provides the following comments on S.B. No. 2356, Relating to Wildfires. This bill would establish within the Department of Defense the position and duties of State Wildfire Marshal, the position and duties of State Wildfire Chief, the State Wildfire Corps, and the State Wildfire Fuel Reduction Task Force and provides appropriations.

Recent natural disasters, including the Maui wildfire, have served as a wake-up call that due to climate changes, the risk of these events happening again in Hawaii has increased. While we appreciate the intent of this bill to assist with wildfire mitigation, the Office of the Governor would respectfully ask that the Legislature considers Senate Bill No. 3098, which would reestablish the State Fire Marshal's Office within the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations. The State Fire Marshal would among other responsibilities, review and assess the fire risk to the State and review the emergency resources that are available in the State to be deployed to address fires.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

SB-2356

Submitted on: 2/3/2024 7:52:14 AM

Testimony for AEN on 2/5/2024 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kazuo Todd	Testifying for Hawaii Fire Department	Comments	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

While the Hawaii Fire Department is in favor of allocating funding to fire suppression and an air response fleet at the state level, we are looking to get clarification as to why this bill is trying to stand up a new branch of the government instead of using an existing one like the Department of Forestry and Wildlife which responds to fires already?



TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

SENATE COMMITTEES ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT and PUBLIC SAFETY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

FEBRUARY 5, 2024

SB 2356, RELATING TO WILDFIRES

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **supports** SB 2356, relating to the wildfires. 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 establishing a State Wildfire Marshal, State Wildfire Chief, and wildfire and fuel reduction personnel and task forces to mitigate and, hopefully, prevent 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,

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Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
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Testimony by Dr. Clay Trauernicht IN OPPOSITION to SB 2356, Relating to Wildfires

For the hearing on February 5th, 2024, Conference Room 225

To Senator Glenn Wakai, Chair of the Committee on Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs and Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair of the Committee on Agriculture and Environment:

I am submitting testimony in opposition to SB 2356 Relating to Wildfires. I have been working at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in the field of wildfire science and management since 2013, however, I am submitting this testimony as an individual and not as an official University of Hawai'i spokesperson.

The current bill (SB 2356) correctly identifies the limited funding and capacity historically available to mitigate the risk of and respond to wildfires and seeks to adequately increase resources for that purpose. However, it is my opinion that the mechanism that the bill proposes, namely, the creation of an entirely new program and a variety of new positions within the state Department of Defense is misguided for the following reasons.

First and foremost, the State of Hawai'i has existing capacity for wildfire response and risk reduction within the Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW). DOFAW's wildland fire program has been active for decades and provides a clear pathway for increasing the state's investment in wildfire response and mitigation. DOFAW's Protection Foresters have decades of combined experience and knowledge of wildland fire tactics and long-term implementation of fuels management specific to Hawai'i's vegetation, climate, and terrain. In addition, due to the foresight and leadership of DOFAW staff, especially Wayne Ching and Miles Nakahara in the 1990s through 2000s, DOFAW advanced wildland fire training, cooperation, and coordinated response with both federal and county fire departments and other agencies across the state and nationally. These relationships persist today through the current leadership in DOFAW, many of whom were directly mentored by Mr. Ching and Mr. Nakahara. This history and these relationships are critical to the many successful examples of multi-agency wildland fire suppression and multi-partner community protection that provide a model for scaling up future efforts in Hawai'i.

Second, creating an entirely new program would require an incredible commitment of additional time and resources to implement. In addition to recruiting and training staff, the Department of Defense would have to identify and build facilities, develop and legally define operational jurisdictions, draw up new agreements for resource sharing and joint command with existing departments, and integrate and coordinate mitigation efforts with the many agencies, non-profits, and other groups already conducting and planning fire risk reduction across the state. This decision would therefore concomitantly require additional, precious time investment from all of these fire-related programs and efforts to programmatically adjust to what would effectively constitute a new fire response agency in the state.

For these reasons, I oppose SB 2356 as it currently stands. Instead, I strongly urge the legislature to push forward the proposed level of investment to build capacity within DOFAW, which the agency clearly needs. As it currently operates, DOFAW is effectively a fire “militia”, pulling staff from their normal forestry and wildlife duties to respond to fire as needed. In addition, lack of state funding and dependency on other funds like federal grants means that many DOFAW staff are not actually hired as state civil servants and are therefore unable to work directly on the fire line. In terms of precedents, the State of California transitioned their Division of Forestry to become CALFIRE in 1977, building on the expertise and experience of their existing program to develop one of the top, state-level fire response and mitigation programs in the country. DOFAW provides a strong foundation and a clear opportunity for developing a fire program of similar caliber for Hawai‘i.

Thank you for considering this testimony and don’t hesitate to contact me for further comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clay Trauernicht". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Clay Trauernicht, PhD
Extension Specialist in Ecosystems and Fire
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

SB-2356

Submitted on: 2/4/2024 3:08:23 PM

Testimony for AEN on 2/5/2024 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tamara Paltin	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Generally speaking and because of the wildfires of 2023 I am supportive of this legislation as well as the appropriations within, I do not know that the correct place to put this is under the Department of Defense or rather under the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency as a more on the ground agency for all islands within the State.

Mahalo,

Tamara Paltin

SB-2356

Submitted on: 2/4/2024 4:18:32 PM

Testimony for AEN on 2/5/2024 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gerard Silva	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Wast of Tax Payer moneys!!!!!!!!!!