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

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LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
DAWN N.S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
WATER & LAND

Thursday, January 30, 2025
9:00 AM

Via Video Conference, State Capitol, Conference Room 411

In consideration of
HOUSE BILL 506
RELATING TO CONSERVATION ENFORCEMENT

House Bill 506 proposes to appropriate funds for equipment for the Oahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE). **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Budget request.**

As mentioned in this measure, there has been an increase in fishing intensity around the island of Oahu, particularly at night. The proposed funding this bill provides would be used to increase DOCARE's Oahu Branch capabilities to address violations by purchasing much needed equipment including watercraft, detection equipment such as night vision goggles and unmanned aircraft systems, vehicles and communication equipment. This will provide DOCARE's Oahu Branch with resources that enhances its abilities to detect, deter and respond to violations in state waters and fisheries, and can also be used in other areas under the department's management such as State Parks, Forest and Natural Area Reserves and unencumbered state lands.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



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January 28, 2025

To: Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Lamosao, and the House Committee on Water & Land

Re: **STRONG SUPPORT** of HB506: Relating to Conservation Enforcement

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Lamosao, and the House Committee on Water & Land,

Mālama Pūpūkea-Waimea (MPW) is a grassroots, community non-profit that actively works to care for, educate about, and protect our fragile, near-shore marine ecosystems. Our mission is "working to replenish and sustain the natural and cultural resources of the Pūpūkea and Waimea ahupua'a for present and future generations through active community stewardship, education, and partnerships.

We write in **STRONG SUPPORT** of HB506 which would appropriate funds for equipment for the O'ahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR).

We are proud to have been the first State of Hawai'i Makai Watch program on O'ahu, a collaborative statewide program where citizens and NGOs become directly involved with DLNR in the management of marine resources through promoting compliance to rules, education, and monitoring.

We collaborate closely with DOCARE and rely on their ability to effectively respond to violations and enforce the rules and regulations protecting our marine resources. HB506 appropriates moneys to DOCARE for purchasing much needed equipment that will directly benefit the health and abundance of our nearshore marine resources.

For these reasons, we **STRONGLY SUPPORT HB506**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony,

Jenny Yagodich

Director of Educational Programs &
Makai Watch Coordinator

Hawai'i Ocean Legislative Task Force



January 30, 2025

House Committee on Water and Land
Hawai'i State Legislature

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 506, Relating to Conservation Enforcement

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Lamosao, and members of the committee,

We strongly support HB 506 Relating to Conservation Enforcement. This bill appropriates funds for equipment for the Oahu Branch of the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement of the Department of Land and Natural Resources.

The Ocean Legislative Task Force advocates for measures that promote funding for natural resource protection and restoration, ocean resources, our coral reefs, subsistence fishing, and coastal resilience, among other priorities.

The Ocean Legislative Task Force is a group of over 100 individuals from diverse environmental organizations, working together to safeguard marine ecosystems. Our collective expertise allows us to craft impactful strategies to protect Hawaii's waters.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this important measure.



Testimony Before The
House Committee on Water and Land (WAL)
IN SUPPORT OF HB506
January 30, 2025, 9:00 a.m., Room 411 & Via Videoconference

We are Olan Leimomi Fisher and Kevin Chang, Kua'āina Advocate and Executive Director, respectively, testifying on behalf of [Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo \(or KUA\)](#). “Kua'āina Ulu 'Auamo” stands for “grassroots growing through shared responsibility,” and our acronym “KUA” means “backbone.” **Our mission is to connect and empower communities to improve their quality of life through the collective care for their biocultural (natural and cultural) heritage, serving as a “backbone organization” that supports creative and community-driven solutions to problems stemming from environmental degradation.** Hawai'i's biocultural resources continue to be negatively impacted by political, economic, and social changes, and the increasing dangers of climate change make fostering and empowering resilient communities acutely critical.

Currently KUA supports three major networks of: (1) over 40 mālama 'āina (caring for our 'āina or “that which feeds”) community groups collectively referred to as E Alu Pū (moving forward together); (2) over 60 loko i'a (fishpond aquaculture systems unique to Hawai'i) and wai 'ōpae (anchialine pool systems) sites in varying stages of restoration and development, with numerous caretakers, stakeholders, and volunteers known as the Hui Mālama Loko I'a (“caretakers of fishponds”); and (3) the Limu Hui made up of over 50 loea (traditional experts) and practitioners in all things “limu” or locally-grown “seaweed.” **Our shared vision is to once again experience what our kūpuna (ancestors) referred to as 'ĀINA MOMONA – abundant and healthy ecological systems that sustain our community resilience and well-being.**

KUA supports HB506 as an incremental step towards 'āina momona.

This bill would appropriate funds to the Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE) of the Department of Land and Natural Resources, to supply needed equipment for the O'ahu Branch to effectively carry out its mission to uphold the laws necessary to protect, conserve, and manage our unique and limited biocultural and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations.

A large number of our network members partner with DOCARE officers through growing community-based co-management initiatives from mauka to makai. These DOCARE officers are often the first representation community members face from DLNR. Some wahi pana (significant places) have become well-known for their absence of almost any DOCARE presence – largely due to inadequate training resources and capacity. A bill like this, which we urge you to support, and the growing DOCARE Academy we hope you continue to support, are beginning to fill that gap. With the recent graduating classes, so far we have heard only praise and gratitude from our community members with DOCARE's increased presence and effectiveness throughout our state. **As DOCARE's officer pool continues to grow, likewise they need more equipment to carry out their enforcement duties.**

The communities we work with are committed to ensuring the long-term health of our biocultural resources that they have cared for and depended on for generations since time immemorial. **We believe our environment, the foundation of our very existence, is about long-term investment and a vision of ‘āina momona.** To get there it requires taking the steps necessary for greater self-sufficiency, development of a pipeline of new and more innovative career pathways, mindsets, relationships, and resources for mālama ‘āina efforts. Passing this bill out of your committee supports reaching our goal to once again realize the abundant and thriving ecological balance in Hawai‘i.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support. Please **PASS** HB506.

Aloha ‘Āina Momona no Nā Kau ā Kau.

HB-506

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 3:55:48 PM

Testimony for WAL on 1/30/2025 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Philip Fernandez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

While DOCARE has graduated new officers from the DOCARE Academy, the officers need equipment to be effective. While this bill is limited to Oahu, every resource will help the enforcement of wildlife laws. I support this bill.

Please vote in favor of this bill.

Mahalo,

Phil Fernandez

Fisherman

HB-506

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 6:28:24 PM

Testimony for WAL on 1/30/2025 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrew Evans	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Water and Land Committee Members,

My name is Andrew Evans, I am born, raised, live, and work on the windward side of O'ahu, am a conservation professional and volunteer fishmonger advocating for local, sustainably caught seafood on island. I am in support of funding enforcement of fishing regulations, but am initially hesitant of HB 506.

I have worked state conservation jobs before and have witnessed how funding is readily given for shiny high-tech equipment that rarely gets used or implemented. Likewise, I also understand the #1 funding constraint will always be funding for personnel. In the text of HB506, it describes how enforcement is lacking because personnel has been diverted to land-based crime prevention (as well as lack of equipment), yet this bill only addresses equipment funding. Does the salary/personnel funding already exist for the 32 described enforcement officers? And if so, what measures are being established to ensure those officers will be solely tasked with fishery regulation enforcement, and won't be redirected to other tasks leaving all this requested expensive equipment idle. Similarly, is all the equipment described in this bill necessary for enforcement, or is more personnel necessary? Is each officer actually expected to have and use a drone and night vision equipment during every shift? And is all this high-tech equipment actually necessary to find poachers on the reef at night, their lights beacons on their own.

Although I will provide enthusiastic support to funding the needed enforcement for our fishery regulations, my hesitation asks whether the requested funding accurately addresses the described need of and barriers to enforcement? Can some of it be reduced or redirected to provide greater funding for enforcement personnel and getting more eyes on the reef at night.

I ask that you support enforcement funding, but strategically consider what is being funded. This is what will protect our reefs and our future subsistence fishing opportunity.

Thank you for your time and your consideration with HB506.

Mahalo,

Andrew Evans

HB-506

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 8:41:33 PM

Testimony for WAL on 1/30/2025 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mark Hixon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Legislators,

HB506 will fund much needed equipment to help the woefully understaffed DOCARE marine patrol to stop the rampant overfishing of O‘ahu reefs that occurs at night. It is common knowledge that groups of spearfishers pillage entire reefs as fishes like uhu (parrotfish) sleep helplessly under ledges at night. My neighbor witnessed a dozen trucks unload about 30 divers for night diving on our local reef. They cleaned-out our reef. I understand that there are currently only 3 DOCARE officers dedicated to night marine patrols around O‘ahu, and island of 1 million people. Without night-vision goggles, drones, and other specialized equipment, the number of apprehensions of lawbreakers is far too low to save these fishes. Parrotfishes and other herbivores are especially important for keeping dead reef surfaces clean so new corals and settle and grow. As a professional marine biologist who has studied these fishes on O‘ahu since the 1970s, I have personally witnessed their extreme decline over the decades. Those who argue that there are plenty of uhu around O‘ahu are simply wrong. It is very well documented that O‘ahu has by far the lowest abundance of herbivorous fishes in the main Hawaiian Islands. Our fishing regulations must be enforced more effectively so populations of these important reef savors can recover. I urge you to support HB506.

Mahalo,

Mark Hixon

HB-506

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 9:20:08 PM

Testimony for WAL on 1/30/2025 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
spencer vanderkamp	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is outrageous. The City and County just auctioned off a boat that they bought for over \$587,000, for the low price of \$61,250. They used the boat literally twice, ran it over the reef and it sat for 5 years. At least they bought a locally made boat; this funding includes \$50,000 of shipping... That is criminal. Buy from a local boat manufacturer: Force Marine, Hoku boats, or better yet yet, don't buy millions of dollars worth of equipment that won't get used, will rot away and be auctioned for pennies on the dollar.

The existing DOCARE officers dont do anything! They just sit in their brand new diesel trucks idling all day long baby sitting monk seals 1/2 a mile away, or 2 dozen of them patrol Waianae harbor for a week after each shooting. DOCARE just needs to do their job, they are already well equipped, that is not the issue here.

Stop wasting the tax payer's money! Cost benefit analysis, this is criminal!

HB-506

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 10:22:47 AM

Testimony for WAL on 1/30/2025 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kosaki, Randall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Legislators,

I am writing to ask for your support of HB506, which will equip DOCARE enforcement officers with equipment that is essential to night-time enforcement of fishing regulations. Illegal night spearfishing and gill-netting of reef fishes, especially in marine protected areas and in the newly created Maunalua Bay Fisheries Management Area, will exacerbate depletion of populations of herbivorous fishes (especially uhu or parrotfish, family Scaridae). These herbivores, the “lawnmowers of the reef”, are essential to keeping algal growth from smothering our corals, especially in the wake of coral mortality driven by climate change driven events such as coral bleaching (and subsequent death), and damage from major storms and hurricanes.

I have worked as a professional marine biologist here in Hawaii for nearly 40 years. I am also an avid recreational spearfisher. Whether on the job as a biologist, or in the water as a fisher, I have witnessed a serious decline in the abundance of these ecologically important fishes during my lifetime. O’ahu’s abundance of herbivores has been reduced through human activities to less than 5% of their abundance on the pristine reefs of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands where I work. These observations come from peer-reviewed scientific studies of the highest caliber.

Thank you for your support of HB506, and for helping to stem the illegal take of herbivorous fishes.

Mahalo,

Randall K. Kosaki, Ph.D.

HB-506

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 12:52:08 PM

Testimony for WAL on 1/30/2025 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stuart Coleman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair and Committee Members,

I am writing in support of this bill to help protect our coastal waters.

Aloha, Stuart Coleman (Hibiscus Place, Hon., HI 96815)

HB-506

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 2:50:13 PM

Testimony for WAL on 1/30/2025 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Matthew Gurewitsch	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honored legislators!

My name is Matthew Gurewitsch, and I urge you yo pass HB506.

The value of coral reefs to our islands is huge. The reefs provide important protection against rough seas--and their natural beauty supports our economy by attracting visitors. All our coral reefs are in endangered condition, but none are more degraded than O'ahu's, which are choking in seaweed.

What can help? A robust population of herbivorous fish (uhu, kala, nenue, and others), which contol seaweed growth and allow new coral to flourish.

Why are conditions around O'ahu so precarious? Because of rampting overfishing, chiefly at nights, when spearfishers plunder uhu and other herbivores as they sleep under reef ledges. DOCARE, which is charged with enforcing bag limits, is woefully understaffed and underfunded. So poachers poach. There's no one to stop them, They get away with plundering our precious resources.

Equipe DOCARE with night-vision goggles, drones, and other such equipment sp they can enforce existing legislation.

Mahalo for your attention and consideration.

Matthew Gurewitsch.

HB-506

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 4:28:34 PM

Testimony for WAL on 1/30/2025 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Phil Rarick	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Committee on Water and Land re: HB 506 relating to DLNR DOCARE Oahu Branch equipment

Honorable Chaiman and member of the Committe, I wish to testify in SUPPORT of this bill.

I have witnessed first hand the fish population decline on Oahu, particularly the herbivore fish known as Uhu / Parrot fish and Kala. The method of take causing this is night diving and spearing of the fish. This method is illegal in Marine Life Conservation districts and Fisheries Management Areas around Oahu. Other areas while legal, the bag limits and minimum size restrictions are commonly violated. In addition night gill netting is banned, however is also violated. The Oahu fish articulated here are in serious threat of total biomass collapse in my opinion. DOCARE Oahu branch has had a staff increase with two recruit classes. The equipment for these new officers was not funded for the items articulated in this funding bill. In addition the items for a effective Marine Enforcement unit are lacking, or existing equipment is in serious need of upgrade / repair for Officer safety and effective patrol use. A Marine SCUBA Enforcement unit for underwater use does not currently have any equipment.

The shoreline to three miles off shore are the focus area for night patrols to catch poachers. Thus near shore jet ski's to adding SafeBoat patrol vessels for "blue water" patrols are needed.

Shoreline patrols at night are critical for having enough working trucks, use of night vision equipment, and drone deployment for observation and to catch violaters. DOCARE Oahu branch **does not currently have enough** working trucks for all officers.

The use of surveillance trailers and automated license plate readers @ small boat harbors on Oahu can free up patrol officers while gathering data of suspected violaters launching from the respective launch ramps. The reporting of the data is stricly for what boats, where and when they have launched so that upon return they may be inspected for compliance or possible resource violations. A secondary deterrent of violent crime may come with use of surveillance equipment, and help solve cases. Current technolgy above is not in the DOCARE Oahu branch inventory.

Communicaiton ie two way radios, and base station dispatch upgrade is a primary safety item for each patrol officer. This is an on going need for the Oahu branch of DOCARE.

In conclusion this request is not in the existing Governors budget that I am aware of. It is for Oahu only. I strongly urge you to support HB 506 to help equip the Oahu branch of DOCARE and stem the poaching of our herbivorous fish.

Mahalo,

Phil Rarick - east Oahu resident

HB-506

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 4:30:07 PM

Testimony for WAL on 1/30/2025 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alan Friedlander	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of HB506, which would improve DOCARE's ability to enforce existing fishing regulations and improve the health of fish populations around O'ahu's. Studies authored by myself and others have shown a severe decline in herbivorous fish populations across Hawai'i, some dangerously low, imperiling our coral reefs statewide. Maintenance and recovery of coral reefs require herbivores, which graze on limu and help reefs recover from climate-driven bleaching, as well as local threats from poor water quality, overfishing, and habitat loss. O'ahu's herbivore populations are in crisis with populations at less than 5% of their potential capacity. A major contributor to herbivore depletion is illegal spearing and lay gill-netting, especially at night and in marine protected areas. This bill would help to address this issue and aid in the recovery of these keystone species.

I have worked on nearshore fisheries and coral reefs in Hawai'i and across the global for over 4 decades and have documented significant declines in fish stocks, particularly in populated islands such as O'ahu. Many locations have passed the tipping point but there is still hope for Hawai'i. One of the main complaints from fishers is the lack of enforcement of existing regulations. This legislation is a critical step in helping to ensure we can restore severely depleted herbivore populations and build coral reef resilience in the face of climate impacts. Restoring herbivore populations is essential for reef recovery and for the people of Hawai'i.

Mahalo,

Alan Friedlander, Ph.D.