



COMMENTS ON HOUSE BILL HB603
RELATING TO NATIVE HAWAIIAN BUSINESS MARKETING

Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs

January 31, 2025

2:00 PM

Room 325

Dear Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) would like to mahalo the authors of **HB603** and the Native Hawaiian Caucus for introducing this measure. This bill proposes to establish a Native Hawaiian marketing program and label, which would allow consumers to support Native Hawaiian-owned businesses much like they may choose to purchase “USDA Organic” or “Made in America” labeled products. The proposed marketing and branding initiative ensures that Native Hawaiian businesses can benefit from the high market demand for authentic Hawaiian products, providing economic empowerment while protecting cultural integrity.

OHA appreciates and supports the intent of this measure to set up a marketing and branding program to support the development and success of Native Hawaiian-owned businesses. However, to ensure effective implementation and roll-out of such a program, **OHA requests that the proposed funding be reallocated to allow OHA to convene a working group to engage with relevant stakeholders about program design, implementation and long-term viability.** In particular, OHA is concerned about the enforcement costs of the proposed initiative, and how enforcement would be implemented, which would require OHA to collaborate with other state agencies with expertise in such enforcement.

Advanced planning with other state agencies, businesses, and stakeholders will ensure effective implementation of such a branding/marketing program when implemented. OHA is prioritizing research into this area and looks forward to partnering with the legislature and the public and private sector to ensure this initiative comes to fruition.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to provide comments

Testimony in Strong Support of HB603 Establishing a Native Hawaiian Marketing Program

My name is Nikki Savella, and I am the owner of *Cupcakes, BOOM!*, a Native Hawaiian-owned bakery and café in Hilo, as well as the founder of *BOOM! Wahine*, a community of fearless Native Hawaiian women entrepreneurs dedicated to supporting one another in business and in life. I submit this testimony in strong support of HB603, which would establish the Native Hawaiian Marketing Program under the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

As a Native Hawaiian business owner, I have built my business from the ground up without formal education or a degree—relying instead on willpower, faith, grit, and hustle. Over the past decade, I have worked tirelessly to create a successful bakery that now serves as a gathering place for our community. But like many Native Hawaiian business owners, I have faced unique challenges, including limited access to marketing resources, visibility, and business development support. This bill would be a game changer for entrepreneurs like myself.

By creating a designated marketing label, a structured directory, and much-needed technical assistance, this program will provide Native Hawaiian businesses with a platform for greater visibility and economic empowerment. Customers, both local and visitors, want to support Native Hawaiian-owned businesses, but without clear recognition, it can be difficult for them to identify us. This program will allow businesses like mine to proudly display our Native Hawaiian identity while also ensuring that our culture and contributions are not misrepresented by non-Native entities.

Furthermore, as the leader of *BOOM! Wahine*, I have seen firsthand how many Native Hawaiian women entrepreneurs struggle to scale their businesses due to a lack of access to marketing tools and professional networks. A program like this, administered by OHA, would directly impact the growth of these businesses by increasing their reach and credibility. It would give Native Hawaiian entrepreneurs the resources they need to succeed, not just in our local communities, but in broader markets as well.

The \$350,000 funding for this program is an investment in the future of Native Hawaiian businesses. With proper implementation, it will not only uplift individual business owners but also strengthen the Native Hawaiian economy as a whole. I urge the committee to pass this bill and ensure that Native Hawaiian entrepreneurs are given the tools and recognition they deserve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify, and I humbly ask for your support of this critical initiative.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

Nikki Savella

Owner, *The BOOM!*

Founder, *BOOM! Wahine*

Hilo, Hawai'i

Testimony in Support of HB603

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Courtney Sabater-Hart, and I am the owner of Welo Creations, a Native Hawaiian-owned business that designs and handcrafts Hawaiian-inspired jewelry. I am writing in strong support of HB603, which seeks to establish a Native Hawaiian Marketing Program under the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

As a small business owner, I know how challenging it can be to grow a brand, reach the right customers, and stand out in a competitive market. Many businesses incorporate Hawaiian elements into their products, but there is currently no clear way for consumers to identify and support those that are truly Native Hawaiian-owned. HB603 would help bridge this gap by providing a recognized marketing label, business directory, and support system that highlights Native Hawaiian entrepreneurs and their work.

This program would not only provide greater visibility for Native Hawaiian-owned businesses but also help ensure that consumers can confidently support companies that contribute to our local economy. Additionally, protecting the marketing label from misuse will add credibility to the program and maintain its value for both business owners and customers.

For many small business owners like myself, a structured marketing program backed by OHA would provide essential tools to expand our reach and continue growing. The resources allocated through this bill would make a real difference in helping Native Hawaiian-owned businesses succeed.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB603 and support the long-term growth and sustainability of Native Hawaiian entrepreneurs.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Courtney Sabater-Hart

Founder, Welo Creations

HB-603

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 2:08:58 PM

Testimony for JHA on 1/31/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kanani Higbee	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly support HB 603. I'm Kanani Higbee, a Maui 'oiwi. I am in support of HB 603 because as a Native Hawaiian fine artist, I feel that my culture and livelihood must be protected. The Ike, or knowledge, that I have of my culture has been passed down through the generations and is what I incorporate into my livelihood of fine art. This ike that cannot be duplicated by a malihini, newcomer. I would like what the Native Alaskans have in which anything made by a Native Alaskan has a seal that shows that, while anything made within Alaska also has a seal that shows that. This differentiates from those products made from people who are not Native Alaskan, and those people who are not in Alaska, but may be in a country like Thailand or China, making products that tourists think are Native Hawaiian artifacts when they are far from representing our sacred culture.

Please vote in support of HB603 so we may protect the livelihood of Native Hawaiian artists and those who make Native Hawaiian goods. That way we can perpetuate our culture and be able to provide for ourselves financially. Then we can remain in Hawaii and don't need to find a life outside Hawaii because we cannot afford to live in Hawaii nei. For the sake of the Hawaiian people, I ask that you vote in support of HB603.

Mahalo,

Kanani Higbee

HB-603

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 7:54:36 AM

Testimony for JHA on 1/31/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keri Lehua Watson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I strongly support HI HB603 in support of all Native Hawaiian owned businesses and this marketing program. It is important for the economic empowerment and sustainability of Native Hawaiian-owned businesses,

Mahalo, Lehua Watson