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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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HISTORIC PRESERVATION
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION
LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
DAWN N. S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the House Committee on
WATER & LAND
Tuesday, March 25, 2025
9:40 AM
State Capitol Conference Room 411 & Videoconference

In consideration of
HOUSE RESOLUTION 118
HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 122
REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES TO
ESTABLISH A COLLABORATIVE WORKING GROUP TO SURVEY, IDENTIFY, AND
MONITOR CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SHORELINES IMPACTED BY EROSION.

House Resolution 118 (HR) and companion House Concurrent Resolution 122 (HCR) requests the Department of Land and Natural Resources to establish a collaborative working group to survey, identify, and monitor culturally sensitive shorelines impacted by erosion. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure and offers comments.**

The Department recognizes that coastal erosion has been an ongoing issue leading to detrimental impacts on iwi kupuna buried along the shoreline and further acknowledges that climate change will perpetuate and exacerbate the problem. The Department's State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD) regularly responds to the inadvertent discovery of iwi exposed by erosion, many of which are located in culturally sensitive, "hotspot" areas known for recurring finds.

On Hawai'i Island, the shoreline along Old Kona Airport is a prime "hotspot" example, accounting for a large majority of the inadvertent discoveries reported to SHPD's Hilo office. As a popular beach park, the heavy foot traffic and recreational activity it experiences further compromises the integrity of iwi. Similar circumstances occurring in the Hāmākuapoko corridor on Maui recently prompted the County's Department of 'Ōiwi Resources to take coordinated action with SHPD to address the large number of iwi that are exposed along coastline cliffs and beaches during the winter months when large swells slam Maui's north facing shores. Similar circumstances extend to O'ahu where SHPD staff met with State House Representative, Darius Kila, earlier this year to discuss iwi being continuously exposed on the Wai'anae coast. In each of these areas, the Department has been faced with the same challenge of

determining the extent of the burial(s), mitigation efforts that may preserve the iwi, and any appropriate locations for temporary curation and reinterment should it be necessary—especially when the adjacent shoreline parcels where iwi are discovered are private property.

The Department notes that each island is subject to its own unique challenges. Therefore, the Department recommends changing the following language on HR page 2, line 32; HCR page 2, line 34, to include one representative from each of the island burial councils:

- (4) AOne representative from each of the Island Burial Councils, to be selected by the ~~Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources~~respective burial councils' members;

The Department notes that the proposed working group is a major forward in addressing the impact of coastal erosion on iwi kupuna. SHPD has already begun meeting with OHA to discuss potential remedies, and this working group will provide a formal platform to advance these discussions. We are hopeful that this initiative will help further identify critical issues, conduct thorough evaluations, and explore feasible solutions.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HCR122/HR118

REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES TO ESTABLISH A COLLABORATIVE WORKING GROUP TO SURVEY, IDENTIFY, AND MONITOR CULTURALLY SENSITIVE SHORELINES IMPACTED BY EROSION.

House Committee on Water & Land
Hawai'i State Capitol

March 25, 2025

9:40am

Conference Room 411

Dear Chair Hasehm, Vice Chair Lamosao, and members of the House Committee on Water & Land:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) offers **SUPPORT with comments** on HCR122, which would establish a collaborative working group to survey, identify, and monitor culturally sensitive shorelines impacted by erosion.

OHA supports proactive protections of iwi kūpuna wherever possible, and it is well known that Native Hawaiian iwi kūpuna were historically interred along sandy shoreline areas and are thus increasingly threatened to exposure by coastal erosion. **The working group proposed here will make it possible to ensure that these threatened iwi receive proper attention, protection, and treatment in a responsible manner.** Proactive protections also align with the State's affirmative trust duties to identify and reasonably protect Native Hawaiian traditional and customary rights, including protection of iwi kūpuna.¹

OHA supports the creation of a collaborative working group that includes representatives from OHA, Department of Land and Natural Resources, State Historic Preservation Division, the Island Burial Councils, and each county. **Given the need to evaluate erosion-impacted shorelines statewide as part of this proposed process, we also suggest the inclusion of a representative from the Office of Conservation and Coastal Lands.**

Protection of iwi kūpuna is of the deepest concern to OHA and its beneficiaries. OHA regularly receives communications from beneficiaries concerning iwi that erode out along the shoreline and the difficulties they experience in seeing the matter properly resolved. Given the threat of sea level rise, we only expect this matter to get worse. Proactively identifying culturally sensitive shoreline areas and developing mitigation actions

¹ Haw. Const. Art. XII § 7.

in collaboration with other state and county agencies may help reduce these concerns and provide more appropriate treatment for these iwi.

Mahalo nui for the Committee's consideration of this resolution. OHA respectfully urges the committee to **PASS HCR122**.

HR-118

Submitted on: 3/20/2025 6:04:21 PM

Testimony for WAL on 3/25/2025 9:40:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ted Bohlen	Hawaii Reef and Ocean Coalition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT!



Environmental Caucus of The Democratic Party of Hawai'i

March 23, 2025

Testimony in Support of HR118/HCR122 - Working Group to Survey, Identify, and Monitor Culturally Sensitive Shorelines impacted by Erosion

To: Chair Mark J. Hashem, Vice Chair Rachele F. Lamasao, and Members of the Committee on Water & Land

Date: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 **Time:** 9:40 a.m.

Place: Conference Room 411 & Videoconference

Dear Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Lamasao, and Members of the Committee:

The Environmental Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawaii submits this testimony in strong support of HR118/HCR122, requesting the Department of Land and Natural Resources to establish a collaborative working group to survey, identify, and monitor culturally sensitive shorelines impacted by erosion.

Key Points in Support:

- Shoreline erosion poses significant risks to Hawaii's natural landscapes, ecosystems, and cultural heritage, making it vital to take action to address these challenges.
- Establishing a collaborative working group ensures that culturally sensitive shorelines are identified and monitored with input from experts, communities, and stakeholders.
- This initiative provides an opportunity to engage Native Hawaiian perspectives and traditional ecological knowledge in protecting these vital areas.
- Proactive management of erosion protects public lands, cultural sites, and biodiversity while promoting sustainable and equitable resource management practices.
- Advancing HR118/HCR122 reflects the commitment of the Environmental Caucus to preserve Hawaii's cultural and environmental resources for future generations.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

Melodie Aduja and Alan Burdick

Co-chairs, Environmental Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawaii



House Committee on Water and Land

Testimony on HR118 / HCR122

Relating to Culturally Sensitive Shorelines

March 25th, 2025

9:40 AM

Room 411

The Climate Change and Health Working Group (CCHWG) is a cross-sector collaborative interested in strengthening climate and health resiliency in Hawai'i. CCHWG supports this resolution, which requests the Department of Land and Natural Resources to establish a collaborative working group to survey, identify, and monitor culturally sensitive shorelines impacted by erosion.

Testimony of the Hawai'i Climate Change and Health Working Group

In Support of HR118 & HCR122

Relating to Culturally Sensitive Shorelines

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

The Climate Change and Health Working Group (CCHWG) strongly supports this resolution requesting the establishment of a collaborative working group to address the ongoing exposure of Native Hawaiian burial sites along eroding shorelines. As a cross-sector coalition dedicated to safeguarding public health in the face of climate change, we recognize that coastal erosion is not simply an environmental concern—it is also a cultural, spiritual, and mental health issue.

The erosion of Hawaii's coastlines is an ongoing challenge, especially in the midst of climate change, and it is critical that the state respond to the immediate need for protection of iwi kūpuna (ancestral remains) that are being exposed as a result of this erosion. These remains are not merely bones but are integral parts of Hawaiian culture, history, and spirituality. Native

Hawaiian iwi kūpuna are sacred, and their exposure due to erosion requires thoughtful and respectful management to ensure their protection and, when necessary, reinterment.

By establishing a working group that includes key stakeholders, this resolution ensures that a coordinated and culturally sensitive approach is developed. The involvement of all relevant parties is critical to identifying effective, respectful, and responsible solutions for locating, preserving, and restoring these sacred sites. In addition, climate change accelerates shoreline erosion and intensifies the threat to these burial areas, which can cause deep emotional distress to Native Hawaiian communities. Protecting these sites not only preserves cultural heritage but also safeguards mental health by preventing the spiritual and psychological harm that comes with the disturbance of ancestral remains.

The provision requiring the working group to report its findings and recommendations, including potential legislative measures, ensures that this critical issue remains at the forefront of legislative action. By working together as a lāhui, we can mitigate further exposure and damage to iwi kūpuna and preserve these sacred sites. To care for iwi kūpuna is to care for the people of Hawai'i who carry the legacies of those kūpuna forward.

For these reasons, the Climate Change & Health Working Group strongly supports House Resolution 118 and urges its passage. This resolution represents a vital step in the ongoing efforts to preserve the cultural and historical legacy of Hawai'i, protect iwi kūpuna from the devastating effects of coastal erosion, and safeguard community well-being in the face of climate change.

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

Sincerely,

The Climate Change & Health Working Group