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Testimony of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs

**Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
and
Senate Committee on Judiciary
Wednesday, February 26, 2025
10:05 a.m.
Conference Room 211 and Videoconference**

**On the following measure:
S.B. 148, S.D. 1, RELATING TO COMBAT SPORTS**

Chair Dela Cruz, Chair Rhoads, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Nadine Ando, and I am the Director of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs. The Department supports the intent of this bill, which establishes a Combat Sports Commission (Commission), and offers comments.

The purposes of this bill are to: (1) establish a new regulatory framework for combat sports contests by renaming the existing Boxing Commission of Hawaii as the Combat Sports Commission of Hawaii; (2) expand the Commission's jurisdiction to include combat sports; and (3) repeal existing law that governs mixed martial arts contests in Hawaii.

The Department appreciates the consideration of combining the regulation of mixed martial arts and boxing under a single commission titled the Combat Sports Commission of Hawaii. This expansion would ease administration costs on licensees

and provide flexibility to the Commission to address all combat sports. However, the bill, as currently written does not address many issues related to combat sports which are essential to the regulation of mixed martial arts and are currently included in Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) chapter 440E, Mixed Martial Arts Contests.

The Department requests the following amendments:

1. That the regulations related to amateur mixed martial arts athletes, the control of amateur mixed martial arts contests, and the requirement of bloodwork be included in the bill. The requirement of annual bloodwork under HRS chapter 440E-5 guarantees health standards are maintained across all contestants. Prior to any contest, a contestant must provide results of HIV and hepatitis testing within the last six (6) months. This requirement, combined with a medical report of a medical examination completed provides adequate safeguards to ensure the Department and contestants hold mixed martial arts events among medically fit contestants.
2. The requirement for an ambulance to be present during events be returned to the statute as it provides support necessary the attending healthcare professionals. The presence of an ambulance also allows for a more expedited response to critical injuries that occur during a combat sports contest. States such as California, Texas, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Florida, Kansas, Oregon, and Nevada all require the presence of an ambulance at combat sports events.
3. In regard to section 440-P on page 21 line 18 to 21, and page 22, line 1 to 13, the Department asks that the section be amended to the original form of the bill. While the Department acknowledges that licensed health care professionals may assist an attending physician, the Department feels it is essential that at least two (2) licensed physicians are in attendance to evaluate each contestant during and immediately after each contest.
4. Page 34, lines 20 to 21, continued to page 35, lines 1 to 4, the Department recommends that: (a) the composition of any board or commission be an odd

- numbered of members; and (b) that at least one (1) member on the Commission be a public member.
5. Page 9, section 440-7 Other employees. The Department requests the employment of inspectors be removed. Instead, inspectors shall be appointed by the director or Commission similar to the current process established in HRS chapter 440E.
 6. The Department has concerns with the amendments to HRS chapter 440-9 as the removal of boxing from the statute may be interpreted to preclude boxing from regulation. The Department suggests instead that boxing be explicitly included in HRS chapter 440-9, or the definition of boxing be removed to allow the definition of combat sports to include all unarmed combat.
 7. Currently HRS chapter 440E provides a provision, which allows the control of amateur contests to be placed under the supervision of a national association. This provision allows the Director the flexibility to utilize approved experienced national associations to supervise amateur events in accordance with national standards. This flexibility is provided currently to boxing through the USA Boxing in HRS chapter 440. The Department requests that this flexibility be extended to all combat sports.
 8. Add definitions to the bill related to “amateur combat sports contestants” and “amateur combat sports contest.” These definitions will provide the Commission with clear guidance in relation to the regulation of amateur athletes. It is common practice in other states for an entire combat sports event to revolve around the development of local amateur athletes. Without clear guidance, it is unclear if the Commission will have jurisdiction over amateur events as outlined on page 13, line 9.
 9. Provide further flexibility to the licensed combat sports physician servicing combat sports events and contestants as it relates to the requirement listed on page 9, line 3, by changing the requirement from one (1) to three (3) hours. Contestants arrive at various times, including during contests. At the

time of the event, the physician's sole focus is on the active contest. The expansion of the period related to the pre-fight examination will allow physicians the flexibility to meet the requirement between contests or during intermissions.

10. The Department requests at a minimum, a delayed implementation of one (1) year to ensure that:

- a. The appropriate updates are made to the Professional Vocational Licensing Division's database;
- b. The Governor has the appropriate time to appoint members to the Commission; and
- c. There is no disruption in planned events.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

Honorable Members of the Legislative Assembly,

My name is Walt Carvalho and I am writing to express my support for the bill with amendment's to create a Mixed Martial Arts Commission in our state. As a very passionate Coach, Mentor, Promoter and a pioneer of the MMA scene here in Hawaii for more than 31 years. I believe that establishing a commission is essential for the growth, safety, and legitimacy of mixed martial arts in our community.

Reflecting on the landscape of MMA in Hawaii over the past decade, it is evident that our state once stood as a beacon of excellence in the sport. In 2011, Hawaii proudly boasted 14 athletes on the UFC roster, a remarkable accomplishment that placed us at the forefront of global MMA representation on a per capita basis. This achievement not only showcased the talent and dedication of our local fighters but also inspired countless young athletes to pursue their dreams of competing on the world stage.

During this golden era of MMA in Hawaii, our community thrived with thousands of youth athletes actively training and aspiring to follow in the footsteps of their UFC heroes. The proliferation of successful MMA events statewide provided opportunities for these aspiring fighters to showcase their skills and pursue their passion for the sport. These events not only entertained audiences but also served as platforms for talent development and community engagement.

However, as we fast forward to the present day, it pains me to acknowledge the stark contrast in the current state of MMA in Hawaii. Where once there were dozens of thriving events, we now find ourselves with less than a handful of sanctioned competitions. Even more concerning are the reports of underground and smoker events, which indicate a dangerous trend towards unregulated and potentially unsafe practices within our MMA community.

The decline of organized MMA events in Hawaii underscores the urgent need for legislative action to establish a Mixed Martial Arts Commission. Such a commission would play a pivotal role in revitalizing and safeguarding the sport in our state. By implementing regulations, licensing requirements, and safety standards, the commission would ensure the well-being of athletes, uphold the integrity of competitions, and protect the interests of fans and stakeholders alike.

Moreover, the establishment of a commission presents an opportunity to reinvigorate our local MMA scene, fostering a supportive environment for athletes, promoters, and fans to thrive. By providing guidance, oversight, and support to the MMA community, we can reignite the passion and excitement that once defined our state's involvement in the sport.

In conclusion, I implore you to support the creation of a Mixed Martial Arts Commission in Hawaii. Let us come together to honor our rich fighting heritage, empower our aspiring athletes, and ensure a vibrant future for MMA in our beloved state.

1. Combat sport commission to be separate from the Boxing commission
2. If the commissions have to be combined then we should have 2 separate chapters within the commission one for boxing and one for Mixed Martial arts each accounting and producing for themselves, all revenues ect.
3. DCCA only involved for licensing the Athletes.
4. If the DCCA is involved they should pick up some of the cost for the events IE. Judges/ Time Keeper/ Cutman/ Referees / Inspectors / Doctors. ECT.
5. All Coaches, Referees, Judges, Doctors, Time Keepers, Cutmen, Inspectors and any other event personnel have to go through training classes to make sure they are qualified to do their job. Certification like every other state and country around the World.
6. Dcca should only collect fees for licensing athletes the other fees charged should go into an appropriated fund for the each branch of this commission.

Boxing and MMA should not be combined under the new Combat sports commission. One commission 2 divisions 1. Boxing 2. MMA. Las Vegas has one Athletic Commission with 2 divisions we should follow that protocol.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Coach: Wally Carvalho