

HONOLULU EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
KA 'OIHANA LAWE LAWE ULIA PŌPILIKIA O HONOLULU
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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April 16, 2024

The Honorable Tommy Waters, Chair
The Honorable Esther Kia'āina, Vice Chair
and Members
Honolulu City Council
Honolulu Hale
530 South King Street, Room 202
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Waters, Vice Chair Kia'āina, and Councilmembers:

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support Resolution 24-50, and Comments on
Resolution 24-92, and Resolution 24-103

In May 2021, the Honolulu City Council introduced a resolution (21-122) urging the Mayor to create a standalone Department of Ocean Safety. In September 2021, the Council introduced a resolution (21-234) calling for a ballot initiative in which voters would decide if there should be a separate Department of Ocean Safety. In April 2023, the Hawaii State Legislature passed a measure (2023: HCR21 HD1) urging the City and County of Honolulu to establish a separate department for Ocean Safety.

In every instance, testimony, discussion, debate, and input from the workforce, the community, and lawmakers sharpened the proposal to create a new Department of Ocean Safety. Council Members visited Ocean Safety personnel, rode rescue jet skis in surf, interacted with community members, and listened to what would work best in order to shape a new department.

In February 2024, Council Member Andria Tupola introduced Resolution 24-50 calling for a public vote for the proposed new Department of Ocean Safety, with a commission, because this is what Ocean Safety, and the community recommended. I stand in strong support of Resolution 24-50, and the process in which we have arrived at this point.

In the last five years, on my watch, Honolulu Ocean Safety has added more than 60 civil service lifeguard positions in order to support a significant change in operating hours, has replaced 17 of 41 towers that were nearly two decades old, added a 42nd tower, restarted a very popular and successful Junior Lifeguard Program, partnered with

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COUNCIL

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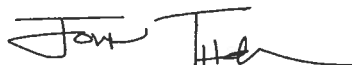
Kapi'olani Community College to train 36 lifeguards in the last two years as EMTs, promoted the first female supervisor in the history of the 107-year-old organization, helped initiate a collaborative statewide effort that will produce an aquatic safety plan, and partnered effectively with the Honolulu Police and Fire Departments on an innovative recruitment fair, while maintaining one of the lowest rates of vacant positions across county government.

Most of these achievements were due primarily to the unbelievable work and reputation of our county's heroic lifeguards. However, these achievements were also possible due to the focused, disciplined, unrelenting, positive, professional, and firm resolve of the Ocean Safety Division to work diligently in a municipal system that requires complete and transparent communications with the City Council.

It is my professional opinion that the next Chief of Ocean Safety will be better able to build upon these achievements through the construct of a new Department that has a commission, and the blessing of the county's voters. Public safety agencies must account for changes and progress in emergency response tactics, techniques, and procedures, and can best do so when the command has the ability to carefully and thoughtfully speak unhindered by the political process.

For that reason, I stand in strong support of Resolution 24-50. Through my city experience thus far, I struggle to see how there is any other option that makes sense.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Titchen", with a stylized flourish at the end.

John K. Titchen
Chief of Ocean Safety Division
Honolulu Emergency Services Department