BILL046(25)
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 593

*PUBLIC SAFETY & ECONOMY (PSE)

***PUBLIC SAFETY & ECONOMY (PSE) Meeting**

Meeting Date: Nov 20, 2025 @ 01:00 PM

Support: 1

Oppose: 2

I wish to comment: 0

Name:	Email:	Zip:
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Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Support	Nov 15, 2025 @ 12:00 AM

Testimony:

enough with the delays. pass this bill now. the public has the right to know what is going on, in real time. too often, because of poor leadership and communications skills at both HPD and the police commission, we are learning about serious situations via social media instead of via the media who we can trust. if HPD had its way, we wouldn't learn about anything until 3025 (this is not a typo).

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Mathew Ursua	mathewursua.ventures@gmail.com	89048
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Self	Oppose	Nov 18, 2025 @ 05:49 AM

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Self	Oppose	Nov 19, 2025 @ 12:50 PM

Testimony:

If HPD leadership continues to oppose, then I oppose Bill 46 (2025) to require HPD to implement new procedures and protocols to provide more timely updates to news media organizations (who desire real-time access to police scanners).

I haven’t yet heard proponents make a compelling case that a change to the current process is critical to our way of life (especially to the extent that HPD leadership objects and believes it creates undue burden, strain, or risk to our officers in the line of duty). I personally utilize and rely on HNL Alert to keep me informed about emergency situations.

Moreover, my desire/expectation from our local news media organizations is not that they deliver news stories fast/first, rather that they get the stories right and accurate. Said differently, I expect that their stories are responsibly vetted by editors with high journalistic standards and aren’t just pushed out to get clicks (e.g., stories that don’t promote necessary public discourse while infringing on private citizens’ privacy). I think most of the time they get it right, but even one exception that hurts a private citizen (who wasn't charged or convicted in accordance with due process) is unacceptable (and I've seen it happen).

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OPPOSING BILL 46

Introduction

My name is Mathew Ursua, and I submit this testimony opposing Bill 46. I write as a longtime independent stringer photographer, writer, and advocate for photographers' rights. I have spent 15 years documenting breaking news, public-safety events, and first-responder operations. My work has been published globally. My book *Comeback of the Century*[1] addresses Bill 46, preserving open data, and journalism's future. I fight for the public's right to access timely, unfiltered information. Bill 46 threatens the pillars of transparency on which public trust depends.

1. The Public Has the Absolute Right to HFD Fire Dispatch — Not Just the Media

Bill 46 codifies a dangerous trend to further restrict public-safety information that should remain broadly accessible. It needs to be amended so the public can access a 24/7 livestream of Honolulu Fire dispatch audio and data through a public website — a simple, direct way for all residents (not just credentialed media) to understand what's happening in their city. That right must be defended and expanded.

The recently unveiled HFD "Incident Trend Dashboard" and "Fire Response Search Tool" on fire.honolulu.gov provide historical data. But **these tools are not enough**. They offer only post-incident trends and searchable past incidents, not live, real-time dispatch data. This is a critical gap. The public should not only see historical graphs — they deserve a **live feed of active fire dispatch**.

Access to real-time dispatch is not a threat to operations. Rather, it's the basis of **trust and accountability**. When citizens, eyewitnesses, and independent journalists can monitor active calls, they can independently verify what HFD claims happened, how long responses took, and whether appropriate units were dispatched. That ability is fundamental to democratic oversight.

If Bill 46 passes, it risks rolling back this kind of transparency by failing to require real-time access and by placing too much discretionary power in HFD's hands. The public — not just large media organizations — must continue to have the right to observe, monitor, and verify HFD's operations as they happen, not only after the fact.

[1] https://a.co/d/2Snu2TK

2. Bill 46 Allows Police to Control the Landscape of Truth with Zero Consequence

Bill 46 gives HPD sole authority to control, withhold, or omit incident information from any feed provided to journalists or the public because no penalties for doing so, even if omissions are discovered.

This means:

- If HPD excludes a major incident, the media has no recourse.
- If eyewitnesses submit videos showing omissions, there is still no recourse.
- If citizen journalists publish documentation contradicting official records, there is still no recourse.

A transparency law with no penalties for dishonesty is not transparency. It is a blank check for abuse of power.

3. Bill 46 Wrongly Attempts to Enforce "Ethics" as a Condition for Access

Ethics Are Not Law, and They Cannot Be Legislated**

The Bill's attempt to impose "ethical requirements" on journalists and photographers is fundamentally flawed. **Ethics are not legal criteria.** They differ by newsroom, by culture, by audience, and by purpose.

Mainstream publications may adhere to one set of ethics. Independent journalists, alternative media, and specialized audiences operate by others. A community that values unfiltered documentation has a different expectation than a corporate newsroom.

Journalistic ethics **cannot be standardized by government fiat.**

Moreover, as society becomes increasingly sanitized through social-media moderation and corporate gatekeeping, unfiltered journalism has become **even more essential**. We have seen:

- Graphic documentation of public-interest events removed from platforms even when vital to civic understanding.
- Independent websites like Ogrish.com — once places where the public could see the raw reality of war and political violence — shut down under pressure from corporate and political interests.

- A growing cultural trend in which "graphic" becomes synonymous with "unacceptable," while the consequences of state violence, war, and public-safety failures are visually erased.

We cannot legislate away uncomfortable images. We cannot suppress free speech to protect the sensibilities of rich families with trust funds, like Charlie Kirk's, while leaving poor families to face the realities of policing, surveillance, and criminalization — including #BeBest Honolulu City Council's slippery-sloping us into the problematic spread of HPD officers acting as school security on public school campuses to widen the pipeline from detention to incarceration as a $15M Motorola radio system enables police to respond within minutes if we want them there.

Independent journalists MUST have access — especially those who do **not** conform to mainstream editorial ethics. Our diverse audiences require it. Democracy requires it.

4. The Mainstream Media Has Not Earned Exclusive Access

Another critical point: **the mainstream media does not deserve any access to public-safety information**, because it has repeatedly failed in its responsibility to defend the broader ecosystem of speech and journalism. For years, the large corporate outlets have stood by silently while independent journalists, freelancers, and citizen reporters faced escalating restrictions, takedowns, and gatekeeping — not only from police and government actors, but from the media industry itself.

The term "professional journalism" is often deployed as a conversation-ending weapon. It is used to dismiss, delegitimize, and exclude smaller outlets and independent news gatherers. But "professional journalism" is not a constitutional category. It is a **marketing term**, constructed and enforced by expensive newsroom lawyers and corporate owners who have the financial power to define what is "ethical" and what is not. Increasingly, these private standards — written primarily to avoid corporate liability — have replaced the First Amendment in practical effect. We have reached a point where "ethics policies," drafted by attorneys at firms like Cades Schutte, shape more of the real-world boundaries of speech than the Constitution itself.

This gatekeeping harms everyone. Radio, TV, and newspaper giants rarely spend their political capital defending the rights of independent journalists. They do not stand up for the citizen-livestreamer, the neighborhood scanner listener, the freelance photographer, or the small outlet that cannot afford a team of lawyers to prove its existence every time a public agency pulls its access. Instead, the industry has become comfortable with its own curated role — believing access belongs to those who follow their editorial sensibilities, their thresholds of "sensitive content," and their news judgments.

But **newsworthiness is not the exclusive property of corporate editors.**
It is not the job of the mainstream press to decide on behalf of the public what is "appropriate," "sensitive," or "responsible." That is for **the viewer, the reader, and the**

citizen to decide — the same citizens whose tax dollars fund police, fire, EMS, and every public institution bound by transparency laws.

Bill 46 dangerously empowers HPD to enforce ethics — the very ethics invented and policed by corporate media — by deciding which outlets deserve real-time information and which do not. It is an unconstitutional merger of government authority with private gatekeeping standards.

Independent journalists exist precisely because the public deserves **all of it**:
the raw information, the unfiltered documentation, the uncomfortable truth, and the stories mainstream outlets refuse to run.

If the traditional media refuses to defend that principle — if it refuses to fight for equal access for the small outlets, the stringers, the freelancers, the on-scene citizens doing their civic duty — then it has not earned the right to claim exclusive access at all.

Bill 46 should not be allowed to cement this unjust hierarchy.

5. The Bill Fails to Require Real-Time GPS and CAD Feeds — It Must Be Future-Proofed

Bill 46 conspicuously **does not require** the inclusion of GPS locations for fire trucks, police cars, EMS ambulances or any other apparatus. It also does **not mandate** direct, unfiltered real-time feeds of CAD (computer-aided dispatch) screens for Honolulu Fire Department, Honolulu Police Department, or the Emergency Services Department (including EMS). It should. It must. And the bill in its current form is **not future-proof** — and that is precisely the direction transparency must go.

In a recent call-to-action for coders and independent journalists posted on the "Disaster Images™" blog, I argued for the creation of a modular, scalable GIS-mapping platform that *ingests* these very kinds of real-time public-safety feeds:

"*I envision this system ingesting:*

- • Honolulu Police Department feeds: GPS positions of patrol cars, CAD dispatch screens showing active calls with callsigns, and real-time logs of which officers are responding.
- • Honolulu Fire Department CADs: real-time incident data, GPS vehicle routing, and deployment info as engines and ladder companies are dispatched.
- • Emergency Services Division (ESD) & EMS feeds: ambulance routing, dispatch assignments …"

With such feeds, independent journalists can build KML/GeoJSON files, embed them in mapping apps, share live incident tracks with freelancers and staff reporters — all without being embedded or reliant on controlled "access" privileges from agencies or

mainstream broadcast systems. That model shows how **real transparency** works when everyone—not just legacy outlets—has access to real-time data.

In comparison, Bill 46 remains stuck in the past: it contemplates selective information flows, delayed disclosures, and ambiguous access rules. It **does not** require:

- GPS tracking of apparatus (police cars, fire engines, ambulance units)
- Live CAD screen feeds with callsigns, assignment details, routing tracks
- A data-feed architecture that allows independent coders, citizen journalists, and smaller outlets to subscribe and integrate into their own tools
- Any future-proofing language for evolving dispatch/data systems, live telemetry, or expanded public-safety data sets

Because the bill omits these, it fails to meet the standard of *real-time public accountability* and integration.

If the goal truly is **public trust**, then the policy must move from "some information, maybe, in some form" to **"all relevant dispatch/vehicle/response data, live, machine-readable, and freely accessible to any outlet, coder, or citizen reporter."** That is the direction the blog post describes and that the public deserves. Bill 46 must be amended accordingly or rejected.

Conclusion
Bill 46 reduces transparency, restricts information, polices journalistic culture, and institutionalizes selective truth-telling. It removes public access, erodes independent verification, and imposes ethics as conditions for transparency.

If the City Council is concerned about public trust, the solution is more access, more transparency, and real penalties for agencies that restrict information — not less.

I urge you to reject Bill 46 in full.

Sincerely,



— Mathew Ursua