

BILL022(26)
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 288

COUNCIL

COUNCIL Meeting

Meeting Date: Jul 8, 2026 @ 10:00 AM

Support: 0

Oppose: 18

I wish to comment: 4

Name: Pikachu Shelby Billionaire	Email: presidentbillionaire@gmail.com	Zip: 96792
Representing: Ohana Unity Party	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Jul 3, 2026 @ 06:42 AM

Testimony:

****Subject:**** Testimony on Bill 22 – Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Operating Budget: Accountability Before Appropriations

Chair Waters, Vice Chair Okimoto, Honorable Council Members, and Mayor Rick Blangiardi,

Aloha,

My name is ****Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire****, and I am a candidate for ****Office of Hawaiian Affairs Trustee At-Large****.

Although I am seeking a seat at OHA, fiduciary responsibility does not stop at the boundaries of one agency. Whether entrusted with Native Hawaiian trust assets or taxpayer dollars, our duty is the same: spend wisely, measure results, and protect the public interest.

Today I offer testimony on ****Bill 22****, the Executive Operating Budget.

Honolulu Is Managing Billions of Public Dollars

The proposed FY2027 Executive Operating Budget appropriates approximately ****\$3.809 billion in non-federal funds****, an increase of roughly ****\$43 million (1.13%)**** over the prior year's enacted operating budget of ****\$3.766 billion****. When combined with the City's capital improvement program, the overall budget approaches ****\$5 billion****. ([Grassroot Institute of Hawaii][1])

To appreciate the scale:

- * ****\$5 billion per year**** is about ****\$13.7 million every day****.
- * That's roughly ****\$570,000 every hour****.
- * Nearly ****\$9,500 every minute****.

Every minute this government operates, thousands of taxpayer dollars are committed. That demands exceptional stewardship.

Stewardship Requires Measurable Results

Government should be managed with the same discipline that investors use before committing capital.

If a private company requested a **\$5 billion investment**, investors would ask:

- * What measurable results were produced last year?
- * Which projects finished on time?
- * Which exceeded budget?
- * Which programs consistently underperformed?
- * What is the expected return on this investment?

Taxpayers deserve the same level of transparency.

The Budget Already Moves in the Right Direction

One aspect of Bill 22 deserves recognition.

The ordinance strengthens reporting requirements by directing the Director of Budget and Fiscal Services to provide:

- * monthly reports on salary savings from vacant positions,
- * quarterly reporting when general fund savings exceed **\$500,000** in departmental activities,
- * annual reporting on recruitment and retention incentive payments,
- * and reports regarding temporary transfers between City funds. ([City & County of Honolulu][2])

These are meaningful accountability tools. They should not remain paperwork—they should become public dashboards that every resident can understand.

Vacancies and Lapsed Funds

During this budget cycle, Council discussions highlighted concerns about **more than 2,000 vacant City positions** and departments carrying appropriations that were not fully spent. Those questions go directly to efficiency and whether resources are aligned with actual capacity. ([Grassroot Institute of Hawaii][1])

Before creating additional positions or increasing appropriations, I encourage the City to ask:

- * Which vacancies are mission-critical?
- * Which positions should be eliminated?
- * Can technology improve productivity?
- * How much recurring salary savings can be redirected to infrastructure and public safety?

Infrastructure Is a Better Long-Term Investment

The recent Kona Low storms reminded us that neglected infrastructure carries real costs.

Flooded roads, blocked access, damaged homes, and disrupted businesses are expensive for both families and government.

Investments in drainage, culverts, stormwater systems, road maintenance, and resilience projects often generate long-term savings by reducing emergency response and disaster recovery costs.

An investor would ask not only, "What does this project cost?" but also, "What future losses does it prevent?"

Transparency Builds Public Trust

I respectfully recommend that the City publish a public online dashboard showing:

- * Department budgets
- * Actual expenditures
- * Vacancy rates
- * Capital project status
- * Performance measures
- * Audit recommendations
- * Quarterly progress reports

Residents should be able to see how public money is being used without filing public records requests.

A Shared Responsibility

Mayor Blangiardi has exercised his veto authority. The Council has the authority to reconsider those vetoes. Regardless of the outcome, I encourage both branches to keep the focus on measurable performance rather than institutional disagreement.

Every appropriation should answer four questions:

1. What problem does it solve?
2. How will success be measured?
3. When will the public see results?
4. How will taxpayers know whether it worked?

Those answers—not politics—should guide fiscal decisions.

As our kūpuna taught us:

***"He ali'i ka 'āina; he kauwā ke kanaka."**

The land is chief, and we are its servants.

Likewise, public funds belong to the people, and government serves as their steward.

Mahalo for your service, for your commitment to the people of Honolulu, and for your willingness to strengthen accountability, transparency, and responsible governance.

Respectfully,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire, HRM

Vote 4 Pikachu 4 OHA At Large Trustee

Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I.

Ohana Unity Party, Chairman

Presidentbillionaire@gmail.com

Facebook @Keiki'okalani

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CashApp \$ShelbyBillionaire

BTC Wallet 1sRfKDphW18hojoyTQVy9qQVSUtQgahYwj

[1]: https://www.grassrootinstitute.org/2026/04/city-budget-shows-fiscal-prudence-but-more-efficiency-cuts-needed/?utm_source=chatgpt.com "City budget shows fiscal prudence but more efficiency cuts ..."

[2]: https://hnl.doc.ehawaii.gov/hnl/doc/measure/browse/3647?utm_source=chatgpt.com "Bill 22 (2026), CD2, FD1"

Name:

Sakamoto Dean

Email:

deans@dsarch.net

Zip:

96817

Representing:

SHADE Institute

Position:

I wish to comment

Submitted:

Jul 6, 2026 @ 01:57 PM

Name:

Joseph Uno

Email:

joe@joeuno.com

Zip:

96822-1475

Representing:

Self

Position:

Oppose

Submitted:

Jul 6, 2026 @ 02:59 PM

Testimony:

If this bill passes, the economic development strategy for Chinatown and Downtown TODs will be thwarted. This bill is shortsighted and the savings will be small in comparison to the future economic benefit that this office will bring to our City.

Name:

Lesa Griffith

Email:

lesa@lesagriffith.com

Zip:

96815

Representing:

SHADE Institute

Position:

Oppose

Submitted:

Jul 6, 2026 @ 03:11 PM

Testimony:

With elections quickly approaching, please consider retaining the Office of Economic Revitalization's budget, which is positioned to make our State's largest infrastructure development an economic success starting at our beloved Chinatown.

I am on the board of SHADE Institute, a nonprofit public-interest design organization based in our Chinatown. The Institute provides pro-bono and low-bono services, programs, and initiatives towards a more sustainable and humane built environment, especially for underserved communities. SHADE stands for sustainable, humanitarian, architecture, design for the earth.

Your anticipated override of Mayor Blangiardi's line-item veto regarding the Office of Economic Revitalization's 2026-2027 operating budget has consequences that you may not be aware of.

Last week, the Mayor informed SHADE executive director Dean Sakamoto that due to the anticipated veto override, SHADE Institute's and OER's strategy to implement major economic and physical improvements in Chinatown will be thwarted. OER will lose the necessary operational funds for establishing the Community Action Center for Chinatown's transit-oriented development to revitalize the neighborhood. This is collateral damage, in addition to the loss of other programs and numerous full-time staff cuts. Also at risk is the Institute's community service and its landlord's ability to keep its real estate investment in Chinatown. Businesses are closing around us, and others are considering leaving. The Pig & Lady

restaurant alone brought 30,000 to 50,000 people to Chinatown every month until they moved away to Kaimuki earlier this year.

SHADE Institute was positioned to start economic and physical revitalization efforts – strategic planning and immediate improvements – within and around the Chinatown TOD in collaboration with OER, our Neighborhood Board, and other neighborhood businesses and organizations. A large part of this strategy was a signed lease agreement with SHADE's landlord, King Liberty LLC. It was our Mayor's vision to start the economic revitalization of the Chinatown TOD with "boots on the ground" and SHADE's third-party collaboration and in the heart of the historic district.

The King Liberty is a historic former bank building, designed by Vladimir Ossipoff, at the corner of Maunakea and N King Street. Dean Sakamoto is a partner of the King Liberty LLC group, which preserved this landmark building, in anticipation of a completed Chinatown rail station in 2031 (4.5 years from now).

Furthermore, during this year's State Legislative session, the CAC whitepaper provided the basis for SB 3007 SB2 HD1, which mandates DBEDT to establish the Office of Community Culture and Innovation in FY 2026-2027. Chinatown is slated to be the first community funded through this program in FY 2027-2028. Governor Green and DBEDT Director Jimmy Tokioka agree that Chinatown is underserved and under-recognized as a key cultural asset. This state legislation was created in coordination with the SHADE-OER Chinatown strategy.

You can find the bill in its final form as signed by Governor Green at:
https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/measure_indiv.aspx?billtype=SB&billnumber=3007&year=2026

With elections quickly approaching, please consider retaining OER's budget, which is positioned to make our State's largest infrastructure development an economic success starting at our beloved Chinatown.

Dean Sakamoto's efforts to support Chinatown have been Herculean, but one man can't do it alone! Please do not pass this bill, and instead retain OER's budget—leverage the efforts and enthusiasm of people who care about Honolulu and are doing something about it, rather than just complaining. Supporting organizations like this make you look good and benefits the entire community.

Mahalo nui for all you do!

Name: ronald lee	Email: aloharonlee@gmail.com	Zip: 96816
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Jul 6, 2026 @ 03:26 PM
Testimony: Not only is SHADE Institute at risk of ceasing operations, but the economic development strategy for Chinatown and		

Downtown TODs will be thwarted.

Name:

Natalie Graham-Wood

Email:

ngrahamwood@hotmail.com

Zip:

96712

Representing:

Self

Position:

Oppose

Submitted:

Jul 6, 2026 @ 05:24 PM

Testimony:

I oppose Bill 22. My name is Natalie Graham-Wood and I reside at Sunset Beach, Oahu.

Name:

Katherine Ozawa

Email:

katie.ozawa@gmail.com

Zip:

96789

Representing:

Self

Position:

I wish to comment

Submitted:

Jul 7, 2026 @ 12:42 AM

Testimony:

Aloha kākou Chair Waters, Vice Chair Tupola, and members of the Honolulu City Council.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in support of upholding Mayor Blangiardi's line-item vetoes, specifically regarding the budget for the Office of Economic Revitalization.

In 2024, I had the privilege of serving as OER's Office Manager. Within that year, I had so many invaluable experiences that reinforced for me what the unmet needs of the community I have called home for my entire life are, why they usually go unmet, and that it is always possible to make that change. I took what I learned into my next job, and it has made me a better civil servant.

A concerning occurrence I've seen in my career is frustration that a program or an office/department is not meeting one's expectations after years of constant budget and salary cuts. I know what it's like to work in low-staffed offices with people trying their best, with morale slipping lower and lower year after year. This is not what I want for my former colleagues. It is unfair and unreasonable to slash OER's budget, and then expect a perfectly working office at this time next year.

The budget as it stands would cut 18 jobs - That's 18 Honolulu residents left looking for a job in an already challenged local economy - an economy that they were tasked to try to help. External grants that the city has benefited from thanks to this office require a full staff to find them, apply for them, and then see the projects that those grants fund all the way through. Disaster recovery in hard-to-reach communities, outreach programs to O'ahu's small businesses that need it most, ensuring equal access to the internet in low-income communities - these projects require more than the small handful of staff left in this budget.

Should this veto be successfully overridden - who will take over this important work? Is there another city department that can help the communities on the North Shore still recovering after the storms this past spring? If there was a hypothetical

audit that found issues with any other city department, would this council's response be to cut ¾ of positions in that department too?

I humbly ask that OER's full budget as it stood last year be restored - not just for the sake of the city employees about to lose their jobs, but for the communities that those employees depend on to reach a higher potential.

Mahalo nui loa,

Kate Ozawa

Member of Neighborhood Board #25 (Mililani-Waipio-Melemanu)

Name:

Don Shaw

Email:

donshawaia@gmail.com

Zip:

96795-1660

Representing:

Self

Position:

Oppose

Submitted:

Jul 7, 2026 @ 07:29 AM

Testimony:

To quote an article in today's Civil Beat:

Why O'ahu Still Needs The Office Of Economic Revitalization

" But if an audit finds that TheBus could perform better, the answer isn't to eliminate TheBus. It's to fix it. The same principle applies here. The logical response to a critical audit is not elimination — it is improvement. Especially where, as here, there is no groundswell from the community demanding OER's elimination....."

By all means, please try to improve this vital function, don't eliminate it.

Don Shaw AIA

DonShawAIA@mac.com

www.DonShawAIA.com

1-808-295-7429

Name:

Hale Takazawa

Email:

hale.takazawa@gmail.com

Zip:

96822

Representing:

Self

Position:

Oppose

Submitted:

Jul 7, 2026 @ 09:36 AM

Testimony:

We should prioritize much more funds for economic development as the soil and seed for our communities. It's part of a much larger picture that involves building community resilience (of which a big part is economic) by building: 1. relationships, 2. connecting with our native ecosystems, 3. learning and education of adding to host-culture-first

technologies, 4. Building resilience hubs as a practice, and 5. Application of practice: cottage industry.

It's not about just funding startups... It's truly about capacity building that improves community relationships and the ability to build skills and businesses that support a community in both Blue-sky and grey-sky events.

The 5 steps are repeatable and scalable.

Think of it as a holistic way to build all communities while involving all interests and stakeholders - it revitalizes food, water, energy, societal and cultural security. The communities become self-sufficient and self-reliant.

If you would like to discuss this more, please contact me. The government cannot directly manage these assets that you are seeding, but you can provide fertile soil for these activities to grow. And the Economic Development funds are the tip of the spade.

Respectfully submitted,
Hale Takazawa, Architect
HALE DfRR

Name: Brent Tokita	Email: brenttokita@hotmail.com	Zip: 96814
Representing: Self	Position: I wish to comment	Submitted: Jul 7, 2026 @ 09:38 AM

Testimony:

Aloha,

I am a local architect and volunteer with the SHADE Group and would like to bring to your attention possible unintended consequences regarding the approval of the proposed budget and defunding OER. We have been working in conjunction with the City and the Chinatown neighborhood providing much needed guidance with planning and capital improvement projects to help it regain its place as a vibrant and healthy social and economic engine in the heart of Honolulu. It is critical to making Honolulu a place where residents can truly live work and play and will be integral to kickstart the TOD district surrounding the future Skyline Station. Current City strategy is to use OER's structure to support our progress developed through a decade of community engagement and countless volunteer hours. It would be a shame to lose this momentum and opportunity to lay the groundwork for a successful TOD at this vital Skyline stop. It is with this in mind that I ask you to reconsider your budget to allow OER to operate until such time that an alternative mechanism can be found to support this good work.

Mahalo,

Brent Tokita, AIA

Name: YUTING LU	Email: yuting@dsarch.net	Zip: 96822
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Jul 7, 2026 @ 10:35 AM

Testimony:

RE: BILL022(26)- Relating to the executive operating budget and program for the fiscal year July 1, 2026, to June 30, 2027 - Oppose

Dear Chair and Members of the Council:

I am a resident of Honolulu, and I oppose Bill 022(026) because defunding this agency is short-sighted and will stall economic development.

As a resident of Hawai'i, including the years before the pandemic, I have observed many residents leaving because of limited local economic opportunities and the high cost of living. More recently, natural disasters have further slowed our economic recovery and created additional challenges for local businesses and communities.

Hawai'i is blessed with extraordinary natural resources and a unique culture, but it should be more than just a vacation destination. We should continue investing in economic development that supports small businesses, local farmers, workforce development, and entrepreneurship. Building a diverse, resilient, and sustainable economy will help create long-term opportunities for residents while strengthening our communities for future generations.

I encourage the City to support policies and programs that foster a safe, vibrant, and resilient economic ecosystem that benefits both current and future residents.

Name: Chu Lan Shubert-Kwock	Email: clskwock@gmail.com	Zip: 96817
Representing: Chinatown Business & Community Association	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Jul 7, 2026 @ 10:37 AM

Testimony:

We request Council restore funding to the Mayor's Office of Economic Revitalization (OER) due to these reasons:

1. It is the only office able to reach out to small businesses these past years to help small businesses get help and navigate the system.
2. Kona lows disaster assistance is well documented of what OER has been doing and needs to do even more.
3. Given the audit which prompted Council to cut funding and reducing position must be a guide to improve OER but not to drastically reduce help to small businesses.

4. We urge Council to restore funding to OER.

Mahalo!

Chu Lan Shubert- Kwock, President

Chinatown Business & Community Association

Name:

KENNETH KAJIWARA

Email:

k3arch@hawaii.rr.com

Zip:

96744-5302

Representing:

Self

Position:

Oppose

Submitted:

Jul 7, 2026 @ 10:42 AM

Testimony:

The economic development strategy for Chinatown and Downtown TODs will be compromised.

Name:

Dan Mestas

Email:

dsmestas@gmail.com

Zip:

96817

Representing:

Self

Position:

Oppose

Submitted:

Jul 7, 2026 @ 11:09 AM

Testimony:

Not only is SHADE Institute at risk of ceasing operations, but the economic development strategy for Chinatown and Downtown TODs will be thwarted.

"The logical response to a critical audit is not elimination — it is improvement. Especially where, as here, there is no groundswell from the community demanding OER's elimination.

OER is the only city agency whose core mission is economic development. Eliminating it would send the wrong signal at a time when economic opportunity, entrepreneurship, innovation, and workforce development should be among Hawai'i's highest priorities."

<https://civilbeat.org/2026/07/why-oahu-still-needs-the-office-of-economic-revitalization/>

Name:

Jason Takeuchi

Email:

jasontakeuchi@gmail.com

Zip:

96813

Representing:

Self

Position:

Oppose

Submitted:

Jul 7, 2026 @ 11:44 AM

Testimony:

The Office of Economic Revitalization is an essential component to guide continued economic improvements and

especially in Chinatown. With the loss of several key businesses and more considering, an investment in Chinatown is good for the community and for Honolulu. Investments that would revitalize and improve the area would vanish with the loss of OER. Please consider retaining funding for OER for the sustained vitality of our urban areas.

Name: Don Shaw	Email: donshawaia@gmail.com	Zip: 96795-1660
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Jul 7, 2026 @ 12:12 PM

Testimony:

To quote an article in today's Civil Beat:

Why O'ahu Still Needs The Office Of Economic Revitalization

" But if an audit finds that TheBus could perform better, the answer isn't to eliminate TheBus. It's to fix it. The same principle applies here. The logical response to a critical audit is not elimination — it is improvement. Especially where, as here, there is no groundswell from the community demanding OER's elimination....."

By all means, please try to improve this vital function, don't eliminate it.

Name: Samantha Moore	Email: smithandkings@gmail.com	Zip: 96817
Representing: Smith and Kings	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Jul 7, 2026 @ 02:48 PM

Testimony:

Honolulu needs economic revitalization badly.

Name: Joshua Wisch	Email: josh@holomuacollaborative.org	Zip: 96813
Representing: Holomua Collaborative	Position: I wish to comment	Submitted: Jul 7, 2026 @ 03:35 PM

Name: Mickey Chacon	Email: mickeydeanchacon@gmail.com	Zip: 96822
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Jul 7, 2026 @ 06:29 PM

Testimony:

The economic development strategy for Chinatown and Downtown TODs will be thwarted.

Name: Dale VanderBrink	Email: sandmandfgh@gmail.com	Zip: 96814
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:

Self	Oppose	Jul 8, 2026 @ 12:41 AM
Testimony: Aloha, My name is Dale VanderBrink. I am the 2nd Vice Chair of the Ala Moana-Kaka'ako Neighborhood Board, but I am providing this testimony in my personal capacity. I strongly oppose the veto override of Bill 22. This Council has been heading in the wrong direction. It has chosen to raise residents' everyday costs, most recently through bus fare increases. At the same time, it claims to be addressing the cost of living by increasing the homeowner tax exemption, even though that does little for younger residents who need relief the most, since only 24.5% of those under 35 own a home. This Council has also moved to spend \$4 million to purchase a vacant building in Kaimuki. Suddenly, there is money to spend, but only for a project in a district where the Councilmember faces a competitive election. This Council has raised revenue, cut revenue, increased spending, and now seeks to cut spending, all while offering contradictory justifications for each action. The cuts in Bill 22 would lead to job losses at OER. The cuts to OER alone would result in approximately 18 people losing their jobs. The proposed justification for these cuts is the audit, yet the audit did not call for job cuts at OER. Political vendettas against OER do not serve the interests of our residents or businesses. If the Council has concerns about the office, then reform it. Do not gut it. Do not override the Mayor's veto of Bill 22. I urge you to restore the funding cut from OER. Mahalo, Dale VanderBrink		
Name:	Email:	Zip:
Josh Powell	josh@revolusun.com	96816
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Oppose	Jul 8, 2026 @ 06:36 AM
Testimony: Dear Honolulu City Council Members: I am have been a member of SHADE Institute for over a decade. The SHADE Institute is a non-profit public-interest		

design organization based in our Chinatown. The Institute provides pro-bono and low-bono services, programs, and initiatives towards a more sustainable and humane built environment, especially for underserved communities. SHADE stands for sustainable, humanitarian, architecture, design for the earth. Today, I'd like to share one consequence of your anticipated override of Mayor Blangiardi's line-item veto regarding the Office of Economic Revitalization's 2026-2027 operating budget. A majority override vote by the City Council will thwart over a year's worth of SHADE Institute's and OER's efforts and investment in a Chinatown improvement strategy. OER will lose the necessary operational funds for the Chinatown TOD revitalization, and numerous full-time staffmembers will lose their jobs. Also at risk is the Institute's service to the area and its landlord's ability to keep its real estate investment in Chinatown. Businesses are closing around us, and others are considering leaving. The Pig & Lady restaurant alone brought 30,000 to 50,000 people to Chinatown every month until they moved away to Kaimuki earlier this year. The Institute was positioned to start economic and physical revitalization efforts – strategic planning + immediate improvements – within and around the Chinatown TOD in collaboration with OER, our Neighborhood Board, and other neighborhood businesses and organizations. A large part of this strategy was a signed lease agreement with SHADE's landlord, King Liberty LLC. It was our Mayor's vision to start the economic revitalization of the Chinatown TOD with "boots on the ground" and SHADE's third-party collaboration and in the heart of the historic district. The King Liberty is a historic former bank building, designed by Vladimir Ossipoff, at the corner of Maunakea/N King Street. The King Liberty LLC group has preserved this landmark building, in anticipation of a completed Chinatown rail station in 2031 (4.5 years from now). Furthermore, during this year's State Legislative session, The SHADE Institute provided the basis for SB 3007 SB2 HD1, which mandates DBEDT to establish the Office of Community Culture and Innovation in FY 2026-2027. Chinatown isslated to be the first community funded through this program in FY 2027-2028. Governor Green and DBEDT Director, Jimmy Tokioka agree that Chinatown is underserved and under-recognized as a key cultural asset. This state legislation was created in coordination with the SHADE-OER Chinatown strategy.

Please consider retaining OER's budget with recent progress toward making our State and municipality's largest infrastructure development in history an economic success.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Josh Powell, AIA

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Lei Sakamoto	sakamoto.leinaomi@gmail.com	96817

Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Jul 8, 2026 @ 09:22 AM
Testimony: Please assist the OER Department. Chinatown is in need of their support. Thank you.		



Don Shaw AIA, *President*
Hale Takazawa AIA, *Vice-President*
Melanie Ide, *Secretary*
Lei Naomi Sakamoto, *Treasurer*
Dean Sakamoto FAIA, LEED AP, SEED,
Executive Director

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Lesa Griffith
Mark Enomoto
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Mo Zell ACSA, AIA
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Ryan M.K. Char PE, LEED AP
Steffen Lehmann PhD RIBA RAIA AoU
Stephen Nash AIA, CSI
Thomas Lee BS

SHADE Institute is an exempt
organization as described in Section
501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code
EIN 811670035

SHADE Institute
99 N. King Street
Honolulu, HI 96817
(808) 591-5558
www.shadegroup.org

July 6, 2026

City Council
City & County of Honolulu
Attention: Tommy Waters, Chair

Via: <https://hnlldoc.ehawaii.gov/hnlldoc/testimony>

Dear Honolulu City Council Members:

I am the executive director of SHADE Institute, a non-profit public-interest design organization based in our Chinatown. The Institute provides pro-bono and low-bono services, programs, and initiatives towards a more sustainable and humane built environment, especially for underserved communities. SHADE stands for sustainable, humanitarian, architecture, design for the earth.

Today, I'd like to share one consequence of your anticipated override of Mayor Blangiardi's line-item veto regarding the Office of Economic Revitalization's 2026-2027 operating budget.

A majority override vote by the City Council with thwart over a year's worth of SHADE Institute's and OER's efforts and investment in a Chinatown improvement strategy. OER will lose the necessary operational funds for the Chinatown TOD revitalization, and numerous full-time staff members will lose their jobs. Also at risk is the Institute's service to the area and its landlord's ability to keep its real estate investment in Chinatown. Businesses are closing around us, and others are considering leaving. The Pig & Lady restaurant alone brought 30,000 to 50,000 people to Chinatown every month until they moved away to Kaimuki earlier this year.

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See the attached one-pager which describes SHADE's original proposal for the Honolulu Community Action Center (CAC whitepaper) at King Liberty Center in Chinatown.

The King Liberty is a historic former bank building, designed by Vladimir Ossipoff, at the corner of Maunakea/N King Street. I am a partner of the King



SHADE Institute
99 N King Street
Honolulu, HI 96817
(808) 591-5558
www.shadegroup.org

Liberty LLC group, which preserved this landmark building, in anticipation of a completed Chinatown rail station in 2031 (4.5 years from now).

Furthermore, during this year's State Legislative session, the CAC whitepaper provided the basis for SB 3007 SB2 HD1, which mandates DBEDT to establish the Office of Community Culture and Innovation in FY 2026-2027. Chinatown is slated to be the first community funded through this program in FY 2027-2028. Governor Green and DBEDT Director, Jimmy Tokioka agree that Chinatown is underserved and under-recognized as a key cultural asset. This state legislation was created in coordination with the SHADE-OER Chinatown strategy.

You can find the bill in its final form as signed by Governor Green at:

https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/measure_indiv.aspx?billtype=SB&billnumber=3007&year=2026

Please consider retaining OER's budget with recent progress toward making our State and municipality's largest infrastructure development in history an economic success.

Mahalo for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean Sakamoto".

Dean Sakamoto FAIA LEED AP SEED
Executive Director

About SHADE Institute

The Institute was started in 2015 to supplement the C&C's DPP TOD planning team's on-the-ground community engagement, physical planning, and design strategies. SHADE was initially funded by a \$5,000 grant from the City Council that year. In addition to making the DPP TOD team's planning more community-sensitive, our objective was to help guide the City Council's policy decisions through our stakeholder-informed design work. SHADE's work in the Chinatown area extended to 2024 with the Riverwalk Revitalization study (see link below). SHADE provides funded fellowships to university-level and recent graduates in the environmental planning and design fields for training and service, through its mentorship program.

<http://www.shadegroup.org/vision-map>
<http://www.shadegroup.org/riverwalk-revitalization>

SHADE Institute's mission is to promote and create a more sustainable, humane, resilient, and equitable built environment through initiating, leading, and producing public interest design projects, programs, and events in collaboration with other non-profit organizations, private industry, and government agencies.

The Institute is a Hawai'i-registered non-profit and IRS 501(c)(3) tax-exempt public charitable organization, EIN 81-1670035.



How the Community Action Center (CAC) can help to realize the Downtown Neighborhood TOD Plan's Iwilei, Chinatown, and Downtown Transit-Oriented Districts

The CAC is envisioned to be a community resource and place where information is shared toward the common objective of creating positive change in Honolulu's urban core. Located in the Chinatown Special District in the King Liberty Center building, designed by Vladimir Ossipoff, and operated by SHADE Institute, Hawai'i's first and only public interest design foundation, the CAC is positioned to catalyze the Downtown TOD in collaboration with City & County agencies through a program of events and everyday community engagement.

ASAP can do (low hanging fruit):

1. Identify & organize *community stakeholders* and other community-based orgs in each TOD.
2. *Determine existing zoning, design & regulatory constraints* which inhibit development and propose alternative policy or rule.
3. *Assess the physical, social, and economic conditions* of every property in the TOD.
4. *Analyze existing uses* of every property in the TOD and its preservation, adaptive reuse, or new build potential to increase mixed-use and economic diversity.
5. *Kick-off the CAC* with its first Community Design Workshop (CDW) with an exhibition of area history from its origins as an *important Native Hawaiian settlement* to the present day.
6. Initiate/execute *Vacant Storefront & Street Improvement Art Project*.
7. Initiate/execute *Facade Improvement Pilot Project* (Cindy's Lei Shoppe).
8. Provide information and design/permitting assistance to property and business owners, and developers who are considering property improvements.

Long-term to do (within 3.5 years from now)

1. Seek State funding to prepare Iwilei, Chinatown, and Downtown's transition into a *living cultural tourism zone*.
2. Draft a *Strategic Economic and Physical Revitalization Design Implementation Plan* with designated projects for City Council legislation.
3. Work with HART to *better design and integrate area rail stations* with their specific sites and neighborhoods.
4. *Deliver a minimum of 2 CDW* for each TOD per year to accomplish all the above with stakeholder participation.
5. Establish the CAC facility at the Ossipoff-designed King Liberty Center as a community institution for making a better Honolulu.

SHADE Institute Mission Statement:

To promote and create a more sustainable, resilient, humane, and equitable built environment through its public interest design services, initiatives, and events, and its fellowship training program in collaboration with other non-profit organizations, private industry, and government agencies.



OUR MISSION

To support and advance public policies that make Hawai'i affordable for all working families.

OUR VISION

Collaborative, sustainable, and evidence-based public policies that create a diverse and sustainable Hawai'i economy, an abundance of quality job opportunities, and a future where all working families living in Hawai'i can thrive.

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Honolulu City Council

Bill 22 (2026), CD2, FD1, Executive Operating Budget for FY 2027

July 8, 2026 at 10:00am

Re: **Testimony of Holomua Collaborative – In Support of Retaining Funds for the Office of Economic Revitalization**

Aloha Chair Waters, Vice Chair Tupola, and Members of the Council:

We submit this testimony to respectfully urge you to retain the City administration's budget request for the Office of Economic Revitalization (OER) for Fiscal Year 2027. Additionally, we have attached an Op-Ed that was run in Civil Beat on July 7, 2026, highlighting the importance of keeping OER functionally intact. While we have seen some argue that OER's budget is only being "trimmed," it seems clear to us that the cuts in the proposed Council budget would – effectively – eliminate OER. Only a handful of positions would be retained and the only remaining operational funds would last for no more than a few months.

Holomua Collaborative has worked closely with OER since our founding nearly four years ago. Our missions are deeply aligned: we are both focused on strengthening Hawai'i's economy so that local working families and local businesses can afford to stay and thrive. OER's mission to build a strong economy that improves quality of life for every community, small business, and 'ohana on O'ahu directly complements our own.

Because of that alignment, OER has been a critical partner in our work. Holomua convenes leaders from the for-profit, nonprofit, labor, and government sectors to address issues of affordability and economic opportunity. Through this cross-sector approach, we help develop, refine, and advance policies for legislative consideration. This work has contributed to the passage of legislation on workforce housing, statewide planning, support for local businesses, and more—efforts in which OER has played an important role.

Our partnership produces tangible results. Most recently, Holomua and OER have worked hand-in-hand to advance state-level efforts to give local businesses a better opportunity to compete for government contracts, with the ultimate passing of Senate Bill No. 2075. That bill's passage is due in large part to OER's leadership in identifying the opportunity, engaging cross-sector advocates, and helping to educate policymakers and the public about its potential impact.

OER's effectiveness stems from both the expertise of its staff and the trusted relationships it has built with local businesses across industries throughout the City and County of Honolulu. As a result, OER has been a consistent and valued partner in shaping practical, broadly supported solutions. Progress moves at the speed of trust—especially in Hawai'i. If the trust OER has built over the years is allowed to erode through the elimination of the agency, it will not easily be rebuilt.

Beyond our direct partnership, OER plays a unique role within the City's broader economic strategy. It serves as the connective tissue across the City's economic efforts—reducing fragmentation, improving coordination, and ensuring that public and private resources translate into meaningful impact. By aligning stakeholders and breaking down silos, OER helps ensure that initiatives in areas such as small business development, workforce pipelines, and innovation reinforce one another rather than operate in isolation.

OER is the only City agency whose core mission is building a strong economy. That singular focus matters. OER has successfully implemented economic response and recovery. Specifically, it has coordinated and directed the city's response to economic disruptions and aligned with state/federal agencies to leverage funding and execute programs. Additionally, for our small businesses, OER conducts outreach and engagement, promotes programs for resilience and growth, supports access to capital and technical assistance. This Office is making a difference, and we need to continue to help it grow and improve.

A budget is the government's clearest expression of its priorities, and eliminating OER would send a signal that economic revitalization is no longer a central focus. At a time when economic resilience and opportunity are top concerns for residents and businesses alike, that is not the message we should be sending. While we recognize that the items vetoed by the Mayor do not technically eliminate OER, restoring these cuts will leave OER unable to follow through on any of its missions, and therefore effectively eliminate the office.

For all these reasons, we respectfully ask the Council preserve OER's funding. At a time of significant economic uncertainty, this is the moment to strengthen the relationships, coordination, and trust that drive progress—not dismantle them.

Mahalo for your time, your service, and your continued dedication to the people of O'ahu.

Sincerely,



Joshua Wisch
President and Executive Director

[Community Voice](#)

Why O‘ahu Still Needs The Office Of Economic Revitalization

Hawai‘i can’t afford to treat economic opportunity as an afterthought.

By [Joshua Wisch](#), [Mike Pietsch](#)

July 7, 2026 · 4 min read



Cory Lum/Civil Beat/2022

In February, the University of Hawai‘i Economic Research Organization released a report titled “[Beyond the Price of Paradise.](#)” The report concluded that while affordability remains a challenge in Hawai‘i, it has been an issue for decades.

What has accelerated more recently is outmigration, driven largely by a lack of economic opportunity. For years, public discussion has focused on the symptoms of a struggling economy: housing costs, grocery prices, workforce shortages, stagnant wages, and the rising cost of doing business.

These conversations are important, but they all point to a larger issue: Hawai'i is not intentionally building an economy that creates enough opportunity for local people to stay and thrive.

ideas

Ideas showcases stories, opinion and analysis about Hawai'i, from the state's sharpest thinkers, to stretch our collective thinking about a problem or an issue. Email news@civilbeat.org to submit an idea or an essay.

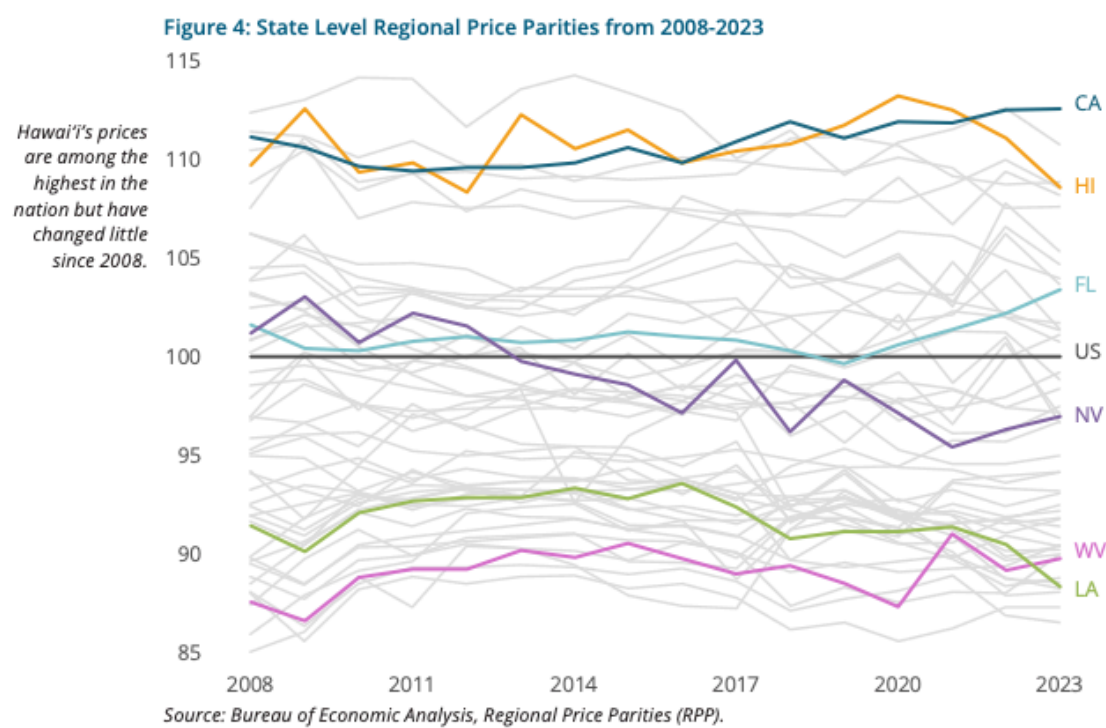
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Too many families believe they must leave Hawai'i to build a future. Employers struggle to recruit workers, and businesses face increasing challenges remaining competitive. These are not isolated problems. They are signs of an economy that is not creating enough pathways for sustainable growth.

Economic opportunity does not happen by accident. It requires leadership, coordination, and a long-term strategy. It also requires government to play a constructive role in supporting entrepreneurship, small business development, and innovation.

Successful communities invest in institutions whose sole responsibility is economic development. These institutions coordinate between government, business, nonprofits, and education. They identify barriers to growth, attract investment, and ensure that economic initiatives work together rather than in isolation.

On O'ahu, that institution is the Office of Economic Revitalization.



From “Beyond the price of paradise: Is Hawai‘i being left behind?” (UHERO/2026)

Across the country, communities that succeed in retaining talent and attracting investment are intentionally building ecosystems that support startups and entrepreneurs.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and today’s startups are often tomorrow’s major employers. If we want greater economic opportunity in Hawai‘i, we must make it easier for entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses.

On O‘ahu, the Office of Economic Revitalization is the one office focused on doing that work and continues to attract and support local startups and entrepreneurs.

This need for a strong economic revitalization office has become even more important as artificial intelligence revolutionizes the global economy. The hyperscaling of AI is creating new industries, transforming existing jobs, and accelerating competition among regions for talent and investment. OER has embraced innovation and is preparing O‘ahu’s workforce for these changes that will create opportunities for future generations.

That is why the Office of Economic Revitalization is providing AI training for local businesses and individuals. While elements of this type of work appear across agencies, OER is the only agency thinking every day about how to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, including amongst students and professionals.

Unique Role

This is how we help the next generation of business leaders build technology skills, access mentors, launch businesses, and pursue new ideas without feeling they must leave the islands to succeed.

OER's effectiveness comes from both its expertise and the trust it has built with local businesses, entrepreneurs, and community partners.

It plays a unique role in connecting stakeholders, reducing fragmentation, and helping align investments around common economic goals. It has uplifted small businesses, entrepreneurs, and local farmers. Reasonable people can debate whether OER has fulfilled its full potential.

The City Auditor identified legitimate concerns, and several Council Members have called for improvements. Those concerns should be addressed, but not through the elimination of the office. Public agencies receive audits, and those audits find fault and suggest improvements. That's how the system works.

Progress moves at the speed of trust, especially in Hawai'i

But if an audit finds that TheBus could perform better, the answer isn't to eliminate TheBus. It's to fix it. The same principle applies here. The logical response to a critical audit is not elimination — it is improvement. Especially where, as here, there is no groundswell from the community demanding OER's elimination.

OER is the only city agency whose core mission is economic development. Eliminating it would send the wrong signal at a time when economic opportunity, entrepreneurship, innovation, and workforce development should be among Hawai'i's highest priorities.

Progress moves at the speed of trust, especially in Hawai'i. If the trust OER has built over the years is allowed to erode through its elimination, it will not easily be rebuilt. Rather than dismantle our economic development infrastructure, we should strengthen it, thereby creating an economy where businesses can grow, entrepreneurs can innovate, young people can build their futures, and local families can confidently choose to stay in Hawai'i.

Community Voices aims to encourage broad discussion on many topics of community interest. It's kind of a cross between Letters to the Editor and op-eds. This is your space to talk about important issues or interesting people who are making a difference in our world. Column lengths should be no more than 800 words and we need a photo of the author and a bio. We welcome video commentary and other multimedia formats. Send

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About the Authors



Joshua Wisch

Joshua Wisch is president and executive director of Holomua Collective, a nonprofit organization committed to keeping all local working families in Hawai‘i by making sure they can afford to stay.



Mike Pietsch

Mike Pietsch serves as the board chair of Holomua Collective and the president of Title Guaranty, the largest title company in the state, owned and operated by a kama‘āina family since 1896.



Comments

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