

DEPARTMENT OF HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS
BENEFICIARY CONSULTATION

PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS ADMINISTRATIVE RULES

January 28, 2026 – 12:00 pm (Virtual)

January 28, 2026 – 6:00 pm (Hybrid)

Virtual attendees: [Go to Chat to register; enter all your info then hit enter.](#)

Register with your first and last name; identify whether you are a lessee, applicant, both, or other public member; identify the City where you reside and the State if not in Hawai'i. State: I want to testify; or I don't want to testify; or Not sure about testifying. This will establish the order of testifiers.



Public Hearing

- The public hearing is conducted pursuant to Chapter 91, HRS.
- The purpose of the Public Hearing:
 - To receive oral and written testimony from beneficiaries and the public on proposed administrative rule amendments.
 - To formally place testimony into the administrative rulemaking record.
- Public Hearing Protocol:
 - DHHL staff and Commissioners cannot respond to questions or testimony during the hearing.
 - Testimony may express support, concerns, or recommend changes.
 - State law requires us to receive testimony without responding, but every comment becomes part of the official record.
 - No dialogue, no discussion.



Agenda

Part 1: Informational Briefing on Pilina Priority

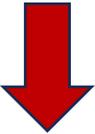
- The Process – What we did, Where we are now, What's next?
- What were the main points that beneficiaries raised during the consultation meetings? How did the HHC address them?
- What is the current proposed rule amendment?
- Questions and Answers

Part 2: Formal Public Hearing, Chapter 91, HRS

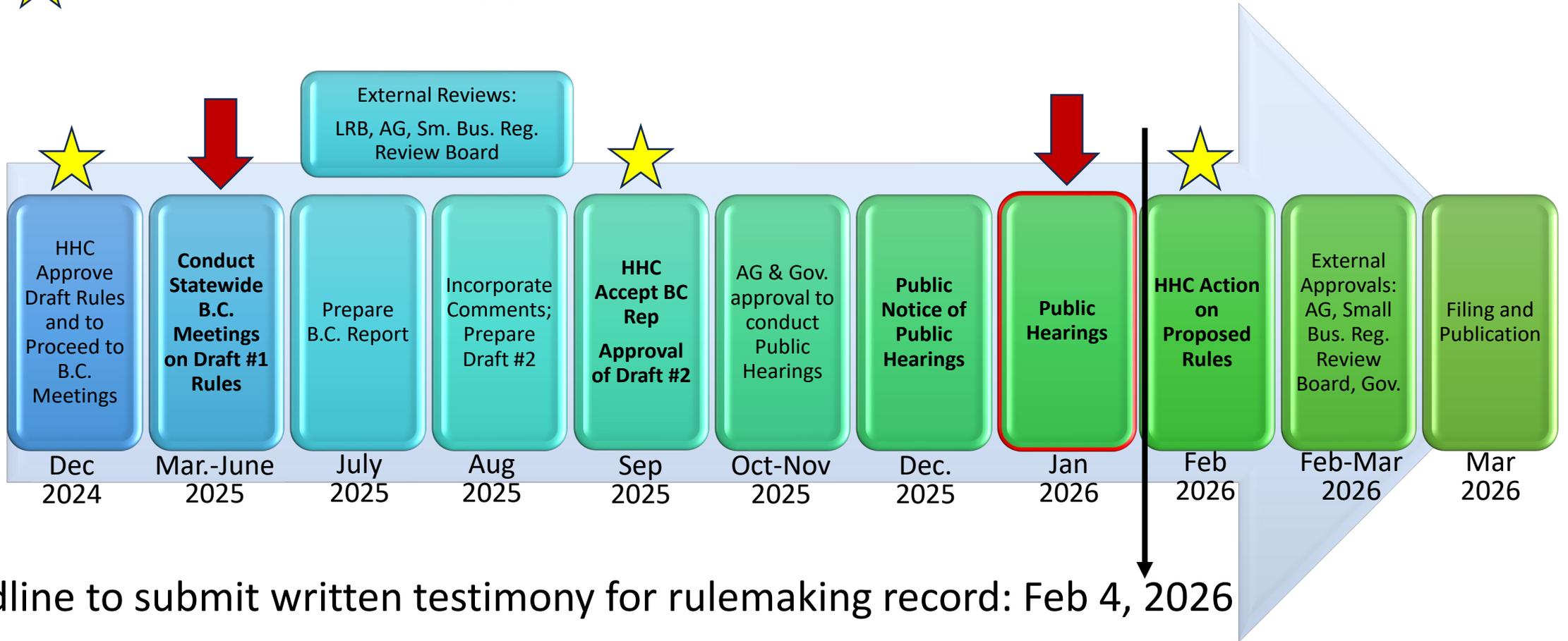
- Hearing Officer will call testifiers in the order of registration
- There is no dialogue; we cannot answer questions
- Please limit testimony to 3 minutes.
- DHHL will accept written testimony after the Public Hearing—Feb. 4



RULE AMENDMENT PROCESS

 = Opportunities for Beneficiary Review and Comment

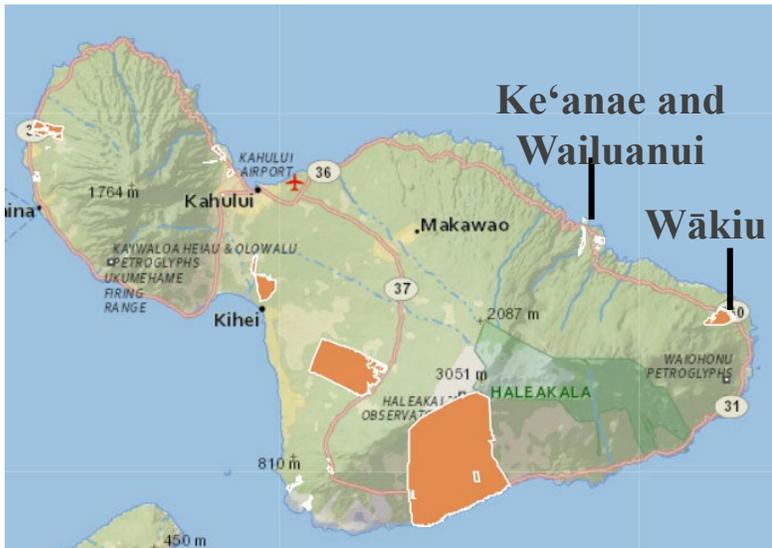
 = HHC Review and Approval





BENEFICIARY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Developing Homestead Master Plans with Beneficiaries



- Native Hawaiian communities
- “Cultural Kīpuka”-- Community held fast to cultural traditions and practices.
- Subsistence economies rely on sustainable management of resources.



THE PLIGHT OF RURAL HAWAIIAN COMMUNITIES

- Each community was dealing with the depletion of habitat--Resources were not in balance and it was affecting their ability to feed their families.
- They were losing the ability to manage their natural and cultural resources—affecting their ability to practice and pass-on traditional knowledge, ‘ike kupuna of managing resources to support generations of thriving Hawaiian families.
- As their families grew, the supply of housing shrunk, prices soared. Priced out of paradise, family members were forced to leave the community to find affordable housing, which made room for more outsiders to come into their community. The tight-knit fabric of the community was changing.
- When we asked beneficiaries in these rural Hawaiian communities to plan for a new homestead, they all arrived at the same question:

“Who are we planning for? Our mo‘opuna or more outsiders?”

PROPOSED RULE AMENDMENT WITH HHC CHANGES

- Establishes a Pilina-Based Priority Waitlist for areas where DHHL is awarding ~~Kuleana~~ Homestead leases.
- When notified by DHHL, Applicants on the respective Islandwide Waitlist can apply for the Pilina-Based Priority Waitlist for the specific homestead if the Applicant can document that he/she is:
 - A former or current resident who has lived in the **area*** for at least ~~20~~ 18 years; OR
 - A lineal descendant of an ancestor who lived in the **area*** prior to 1900.
 - ~~Related to a current resident of the wahi~~
- The **qualifying area*** around the homestead being awarded that the Applicant or the Applicant's ancestor would have to reside within to qualify for the Pilina Priority Waitlist will be determined in the planning process for the particular homestead.
- While Applicants could potentially qualify for the Pilina Priority Waitlist for a number of homesteads, Applicants are restricted



PROPOSED RULE AMENDMENT WITH HHC CHANGES

- Establishes the process:
 - When DHHL publishes the Final Environmental Assessment for a new homestead, DHHL shall notify applicants on the respective Islandwide Waitlist(s) that it is accepting applications for the Pilina-Based Priority Waitlist for the new homestead.
 - Applying to the Pilina-Based Priority Waitlist is optional. If the Applicant chooses to submit an application, the Applicant is responsible to secure and submit to DHHL, all documents needed to verify the Applicant's former or existing residence in the area for at least 18-years, or the Applicant's ancestor's residence in the area prior to 1900.
 - DHHL verifies documentation, notifies applicant, puts applicant on Pilina Waitlist by date of application.
 - DHHL awards homestead leases. First to those on the Area Waitlist (if one exists), then to those on the Pilina Waitlist, then to those on the Islandwide Waitlist.
 - When all leases have been awarded for the homestead, if applicants still exist on the Pilina Waitlist, they return to their original position on the respective Islandwide Waitlist(s) and the Pilina Waitlist for that homestead is finished/eliminated.



Top Reasons for Support

- **Strengthening community pilina**
 - Keeping families, relationships, and networks intact
- **Honoring genealogy and place**
 - Recognizing ancestral ties and kuleana to ‘āina
- **Protecting cultural continuity**
 - Maintaining Hawaiian practices, ‘ike, and values in homestead areas
- **Improved stewardship of land**
 - Belief that lineal/community-connected beneficiaries will better care for DHHL lands
- **Keeping homesteads rooted locally**
 - Preventing displacement and absentee residency



Top Issues & Concerns Raised in BC Meetings

- **Equity / Fairness concerns**
 - Fear of perceived favoritism or exclusion of otherwise qualified beneficiaries
- **Need for clearer definitions**
 - Requests to clearly define “lineal descendant,” “community ties,” and verification standards
- **Legal / constitutional risk**
 - Worries about legal challenges or rule vulnerability
- **Implementation burden**
 - Questions about how DHHL would verify ancestry or residency without slowing awards
- **Risk of exclusion or community division**
 - Concern about unintended tension between beneficiaries



What Beneficiaries Told Us During Consultation

- Beneficiaries expressed strong support for the concept of Pilina-based priority:
 - Preference for lineal descendants and those with deep ties to place
 - Alignment with Hawaiian values of kuleana, genealogy, and stewardship
- At the same time, beneficiaries raised important concerns:
 - Fairness to those already on the waitlist
 - Risk of exclusion if rules were too rigid
 - Need for clear, simple, and transparent criteria
 - Desire to avoid over-regulation and unnecessary complexity



Key Changes Made Based on Beneficiary Input

Based directly on beneficiary feedback, the Hawaiian Homes Commission:

- Expanded applicability to include all homestead awards
- Clarified Pilina qualifications to focus on lived connection to place
- Reduced the residency requirement to 18 years (one generation)
- Removed eligibility based solely on a family member's residency
- Limited applicants to one Pilina-based application per offering
- Made Pilina-based priority optional, not mandatory
- Shifted from fixed definitions of “place” to community settlement plans



Why The Changes Were Made

The Commission refined the rules to:

- Honor beneficiary support for Pilina-based preference
- Protect fairness and integrity of the existing waitlist
- Avoid unintended exclusion of long-standing Hawaiian communities
- Respect differences among communities and islands

Chair Watson explicitly framed Pilina Priority as a tool to:

- Stabilize rural Hawaiian communities
- Prevent continued displacement and loss of cultural continuity

The proposed rule reflects both beneficiary values and beneficiary concerns.



Submitting Written Testimony After the Public Hearing

- DHHL will be accepting written testimony until the close of business on Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026
- Email Testimony to: dhhl.planning@hawaii.gov
- Or Mail to: DHHL-Planning Office, 91-5420 Kapolei Parkway, Kapolei, HI 96707



Mahalo



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