

MAR 12 2021

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# SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE COMPACT OF FREE ASSOCIATION  
COMMUNITY IN THE STATE OF HAWAII.

1           WHEREAS, shortly after World War II, the United States  
2 assumed administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific  
3 Islands under a United Nations strategic trusteeship, which  
4 provided for United States control over development of the  
5 islands' economies and international relations, as well as  
6 military access to territory within the islands; and  
7

8           WHEREAS, the three nations with Compacts of Free  
9 Association (COFA) with the United States - the Republic of  
10 Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the  
11 Federated States of Micronesia have small populations,  
12 economies, and land sizes but stretch over two million square  
13 miles of ocean; and  
14

15           WHEREAS, the swaths of ocean in which they are located are  
16 incredibly strategic, lying directly on the way from the United  
17 States to Asia and Australia, and whoever controls those waters  
18 controls American access to the entire Indo-Pacific region; and  
19

20           WHEREAS, after World War II, these nations became trust  
21 territories of the United States. While the United States  
22 granted them independence in the 1980s and 1990s, these nations  
23 first signed COFA agreements with the United States, allowing it  
24 to establish bases, access territorial waters of these nations,  
25 and exclude other nations from them. For example, Kwajalein in  
26 the Republic of the Marshall Islands hosts the Reagan Test Site,  
27 a cornerstone of American missile defense capabilities; and  
28

29           WHEREAS, if the United States abandoned COFA, China would  
30 be in a unique position to gain control over COFA, jeopardizing  
31 the United States' ability to guarantee the security of its  
32 Indo-Pacific allies and trade through the world's busiest



1 shipping lanes since China's military buildup is a top threat to  
2 the region and world; and

3  
4 WHEREAS, notwithstanding the COFA islands' status as  
5 independent nations, the economies of these islands are heavily  
6 dependent on United States government grants under the COFA  
7 treaty and the United States military presence; and

8  
9 WHEREAS, treaties arising out of the special and unique  
10 relationship that has existed between the three COFA island  
11 nations and the United States allow island citizens to enter the  
12 United States without work permits or visas to study, live and  
13 work and to access benefits available to United States citizens,  
14 such as driver licenses and health care; and

15  
16 WHEREAS, the federal government estimates that there are  
17 currently over fourteen thousand seven hundred COFA migrants  
18 living in Hawaii; and

19  
20 WHEREAS, citizens from the Federated States of Micronesia  
21 volunteer to serve in the United States Armed Forces at per  
22 capita rates higher than most states; and

23  
24 WHEREAS, a report in 2019 found up to one thousand five  
25 hundred Micronesian citizens currently serving in the United  
26 States Armed Forces; and

27  
28 WHEREAS, there is widespread negative public perception of  
29 COFA migrants in Hawaii and this group continues to be  
30 scapegoated as a drain on resources, particularly regarding  
31 healthcare. COFA migrants also face discrimination in access to  
32 housing, education, and employment; and

33  
34 WHEREAS, despite these hardships and challenges, COFA  
35 migrants participate in economic activities by providing labor,  
36 consuming goods and services, and paying fees and taxes to the  
37 government. According to estimates in a report conducted by the  
38 Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism, the  
39 COFA population contributed \$336,200,000 to the Hawaii gross  
40 domestic product in 2017, accounting for 0.4 percent of the  
41 state total GDP that year; and

42



# S.C.R. NO. 215

1           WHEREAS, COFA migrants also contribute to the vibrancy of  
2 indigenous cultural practices in the State, helping to keep  
3 native cultural traditions alive in the modern day as best  
4 illustrated by the story of Mau Piailug and his contributions to  
5 traditional ocean navigation, which resulted in a cultural  
6 revolution for native Hawaiians to relearn a part of their  
7 culture that was being lost; and

8  
9           WHEREAS, the COFA island families residing in this country  
10 should be fairly treated in recognition of their contributions  
11 and the special and unique relationship between the COFA islands  
12 and the United States; now, therefore,

13  
14           BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first  
15 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2021, the  
16 House of Representatives concurring, that the Legislature  
17 recognizes the contributions and accomplishments of our COFA  
18 community in the State of Hawaii and the broader United States;  
19 and

20  
21           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislature recognizes the  
22 need to bring justice to Hawaii's relationship with our COFA  
23 community, including providing equal access to health care,  
24 ensuring meaningful inclusion and language access in schools and  
25 workplaces, and promoting the inclusion of COFA residents in  
26 government; and

27  
28           BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this  
29 Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Governor,  
30 Chairperson to the Hawaii Advisory Committee to the United  
31 States Commission on Civil Rights, and Executive Director of We  
32 Are Oceania.

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OFFERED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

