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May 22, 2026

The Honorable Members of the California State Legislature
California State Senate and Assembly

RE: Support for a California Concurrent Resolution Recognizing Open-Water Lifeguards as First Responders and Emergency Response Providers

Dear Members of the Legislature,

On behalf of the Malibu Coast Surf Lifesaving Association (MCSLA), I write in strong and unequivocal support of a California concurrent resolution formally recognizing Open-Water and Ocean Lifeguards as first responders, professional rescuers, and emergency response providers.

The MCSLA is proud to represent nearly 150 professional ocean lifeguards who protect 20 miles of Los Angeles County and Ventura County coastline—from El Matador State Beach to Point Mugu. Our members are routinely the first trained professionals on scene to drownings, cardiac arrests, and traffic collisions along the infamous Pacific Coast Highway.

Open-Water Lifeguards are sometimes referred to as the “forgotten first responders”. Not because our work is unseen, but because the recognition of that work has not kept pace with the reality of what we do daily. Despite performing duties identical to those of every other recognized emergency-response classification in California, Open-Water Lifeguards have yet to be named as first responders in California. We fulfill the duty without the recognition, and without the statutory protections, benefits, and emergency-planning inclusion that designation provides.

This is not a request to create a new category of worker, nor to write new law. It is a request that California name what the work already is. On April 8, 2026, the Hawai‘i State Legislature adopted Senate Resolution 54 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 56 recognizing Open-Water Lifeguards as first responders, with zero dissenting committee votes. California now has the same opportunity.

The Malibu Coast Surf Lifesaving Association respectfully urges the Legislature to consider a concurrent resolution formally recognizing California’s Open-Water Lifeguards as first responders and emergency response providers. This legislation would extend formal first-responder recognition to a class of public safety professionals whose operational role has long exceeded their statutory classification.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and for your continued commitment to the safety of every Californian who visits our coast.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "G. Halualani", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gisele Halualani

President, Malibu Coast Surf Lifesaving Association

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