



## SURF EQUITY

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Monday, February 20, 2023

Director Laura H Thielen  
Department of Parks and Recreation  
City and County of Honolulu  
1000 Uluohia Street, Ste 309  
Kapolei, HI 96707

### Re: **Discrimination in Pro Surf Competitions & Backlash Against LGBTQIA+ Surfers**

Dear Director Thielen,

For nearly 5-years, Surf Equity has politely requested parity in women's divisions and men's divisions in all professional surf competitions held on Honolulu County and City beaches, parklands and shore water. We are concerned that delays in correcting gender discrimination are negatively impacting girls and women. The World Surf League's (WSL) women's division and men's divisions continue to lack parity, this is visible at WSL events held on Oahu and on their [website](https://www.worldsurfleague.com).

We are also alarmed by the recent targeting of a transgender surfer and a backlash against the LGBTQIA+ surf community. Sadly, much of the negativity is coming from cisgender surfers living in Hawaii including Oahu. We will address these concerns on page 2.

### GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN PRO SURF COMPS

Discrimination is the biggest challenge facing women professional surfers in Hawaii and globally. Gender discrimination results in the exclusion of women from athletic competitions. It is more difficult for women pro surfers to qualify for the Olympics than men, because women athletes have fewer opportunities to earn prize money and ranking points in WSL competitions held on Oahu and globally.

To correct this problem, we request that the City and County of Honolulu Department of Parks and Recreation develop rules and permit requirements that prohibit gender discrimination that are enforced. The rules and permit requirements should apply to all professional surf competitions including WSL events and the Eddie.

Please require the following for all professional surf competitions:

- A women's division and a men's division with an identical number of participants in each gendered category and age division.

- An identical number of competition heats in each gendered category and age division.
- Identical playing time/heat time in each gendered category and age division.
- Equal prize compensation in each gendered category and age division.
- Additionally, professional surf competitions should be encouraged to include an equal number of women and men judges and women and men announcers.

## TRANS INCLUSION IN PRO SURF COMPS

We applaud the WSL's recent decision to adopt the [ISA's trans inclusion policy](#). It's a positive step towards ending prejudice and bigotry against trans athletes and their families and fans. We hope the City and County of Honolulu will do its best to help educate residents and visitors about the importance of safe and accessible public beach and park access for everyone including trans and nonbinary people. In professional sports, we support the inclusion of trans women/girls and trans men/boys in the gendered category/division that best matches their gender identity.

## VISIBILITY

The response to addressing concerns about gender and gender identity discrimination has been slow. Please move quickly to prevent further damage to athletes. Please take steps to address the toxic anti-trans culture found within the pro surfing community on Oahu.

We suggest the following:

- Please include clearly written non-discrimination requirements in all event permits and commercial activity permits to prevent sexism, LGBTQIA+ discrimination and racism.
- Please show year-round PRIDE at public beaches and parks with more rainbow painted lifeguard towers.
- Please raise year-round Progress Flags on all County and City flagpoles including the North Shore.
- Please consult with local LGBTQIA+ groups and organizations and implement their ideas.
- Please do more to demonstrate support for equality, access and inclusivity. Parks, beaches and the shoreline is for everyone.

## THE EDDIE

The 2023 Eddie was an impressive big wave event, sadly, it failed to meet gender inclusivity standards. Starting next surf season, please require a women's division and a men's division with an identical number of participants in each gendered category, an identical number of competition heats in each gendered category, identical playing time/heat time in each gendered category and equal prize compensation in each gendered category. Additionally, professional surf competitions should be encouraged to include an equal number of women and men judges and women and men announcers.

## WAVE HEIGHT

Per our previous comments emailed on Sept 13, 2022, we recommend that the County and City of Honolulu remove all wave height requirements from the Shore Water Event Rules. Wave height requirements are unique to Oahu, and they are unnecessary, inconsistent and discriminatory. Historically, the County and City wave height rule has been used to block women's participation in big wave events at Waimea Bay. Wave height rules are not a reasonable way to address community concerns about beach access, event schedule conflicts, parking, traffic, access for emergency responders, environmental damage caused by an overabundance of tourism, wildlife protection, sea level rise and tsunami evacuation routes. There are more accountable and transparent ways to address those significant concerns without discriminating against women athletes.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

On Aug 26, 2019, Surf Equity began the process of requesting an end to gender discrimination in surf competitions held on Oahu. That day, as cofounder of the Committee for Equity in Women's Surfing, I attended the annual North Shore Big Wave Contest Meeting held in a Parks and Rec conference room. During the meeting, I was not given an opportunity to speak, I interrupted and read this section from the [Hawai'i Constitution](#), "no person shall be denied the enjoyment of civil rights or be discriminated against in the exercise thereof because of race, religion, sex or ancestry."

This year, women surfed the Eddie for the first time. There is more work to do.

Thank you,



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