



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

---

Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Higher Education and  
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment  
Wednesday, March 23, 2022 at 1:30 p.m.

By  
Nicholas Comerford, Dean  
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources  
And  
Michael Bruno, PhD  
Provost  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 2305 HD1 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chairs Kim and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Kidani and Nishihara, and members of the Senate Committee on Higher Education and Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2305 HD1 which provides funding to study the diseases affecting red ginger on Oahu and the neighbor islands.

Ornamental ginger is a valued plant that can be used as a shrub or as a cut flower. The College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources' scientists have been able to identify three different viruses and one fungal pathogen that are infecting ornamental ginger. In addition, the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) scientists have identified the presence of fourteen additional pathogens. The following has been accomplished:

- The islands of O'ahu, Kaua'i, Maui and Hawai'i have been surveyed multiple times in order to document the magnitude and spread of the decline. This has resulted in the discovery of two new viruses never before identified.
- Symptoms have been characterized based on visual identification and genetic sequencing. Symptom categorization has been presented to stakeholders.
- The impact of co-infection by two dominant viruses is being investigated.
- Vectors of the viruses are being investigated. While not definitive, mealybugs and aphids are suspected. More investigation is required.
- It is still unclear which viruses, and how the presence of co-infections can explain the dieback. More investigation is required.
- An Extension publication was produced outlining the current information and potential mitigation strategies. More work is required.
- Outreach efforts with HDOA and industry groups continues. More is required.

Additional funding would promote the better understanding and mitigation of the disease and allow for:

- the development of virus-free plants to distribute to growers via tissue culture, which is a high priority;
- continued experimentation with the virus with respect to mitigation including vectors and major causal agents;
- continued survey of the extent and spread continue to be needed; and,
- continued outreach.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2305 HD1 provided that its passage is in addition to and does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.