



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Finance  
Wednesday, March 1, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

By

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#### HB 1396 HD2 – RELATING TO CESSPOOLS

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) and UH Water Resources Research Center **strongly support** HB 1396 HD2.

This bill would advance multiple important efforts that would benefit community and environmental health.

Part I of the bill seeks to create an innovative pilot program within the Department of Health Environmental Management Division that provides funding for wastewater planning and management specific to cesspool conversion via connection to sewer or other centralized systems. This program would incentivize county-level action and promote partnerships and information sharing between the state and county wastewater management programs. Importantly, the bill not only provides planning support but also includes stakeholder outreach and implementation funding. Implementation of this measure could allow for the connection of existing cesspools to sewer or other centralized systems that would not have occurred otherwise, and would likely alleviate financial hardships on those selected to participate in the pilot programs within each county.

Part II of this bill would provide a critical expansion of capacity for the Department of Health by establishing and staffing a Cesspool Conversion section within the Wastewater Branch of the department. The Cesspool Conversion section would create a centralized resource to assist with the multifaceted nature of cesspool conversion and upgrades, including, financing, public outreach and education, providing consistent

information to homeowners, managing grants, securing federal funding, and facilitating partnerships. Currently, these tasks are either not being completed or have been divided in a piecemeal way among entities without standardization or leadership. The Cesspool Conversion section at the Department of Health would be an invaluable resource to ensure the state meets its goals for cesspool conversion and upgrades. Hawai'i Sea Grant and UH Water Resources Research Center defer to the Department of Health on the number of positions needed to fulfill their cesspool-related responsibilities.

Hawai'i Sea Grant and UH Water Resources Research Center further support Part III, the disclosure of a cesspool's presence on a property during a real estate transaction. This disclosure would motivate conversion prior to the sale of the property, accelerating the statewide conversion and upgrade of cesspools. It would also prevent new buyers from the undue burden of conversion without their knowledge and explicit understanding. The new responsibilities for the Department of Health required under this section make the allocation of their new personnel as discussed above even more important.

Finally, we support re-issuing an income tax credit to offset the financial difficulties of cesspool conversion and upgrades. The Cesspool Conversion Working Group recently reported that the vast majority of cesspool owners cannot afford the upgrade of their cesspool to an advanced form of wastewater treatment. Because it is critical to both human and environmental health that the state's cesspools be eliminated as soon as possible, it is important that a multitude of mechanisms for financial assistance be created for homeowners.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.