



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Water and Land
and
Senate Committee on Higher Education
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SB 2755 – RELATING TO PUEO RESEARCH

Chairs Kahele and Kim, Vice Chairs Keith-Agaran and Kidani, and members of the Senate Committee on Water and Land and Senate Committee on Higher Education:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 2755, relating to pueo research. The College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa supports this measure.

We are supportive of actions to prevent extinction of Hawai'i's iconic and valued pueo, and are pleased to see continuing support of this effort through the appropriation of funds in SB 2755.

The pueo, or Hawaiian short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus sandwichensis*), is an endemic subspecies of ecological and cultural importance in the Hawaiian Islands. It is the only native raptor that lives across all of the islands, playing an important role in controlling invasive mammals, birds, and insects. Pueo are a form of 'aumakua, and their presence is valued by Hawaiians and other Hawai'i residents alike.

However, a statewide species assessment has never been done, despite the pueo's unique role in our Hawaiian ecosystems. Studies of nesting and foraging in the last two years, and a population study on O'ahu, have helped to identify important habitats for the pueo, but statewide population numbers are unknown. Thus, we have no baseline from which to assess increases or decreases in the population size. Currently the subspecies is state-listed as endangered on O'ahu, and potential population declines highlight the need for effective management actions to reduce extinction risk.

In Hawai'i, pueo survival may be impacted by a combination of factors, including predation by invasive mammals, food availability, disease, as well as anthropogenic causes such as car strikes. It is imperative that pueo research takes place across the

Hawaiian islands, as population size and causes of mortality may vary across the state. SB 2755 would identify population numbers and distribution across the Hawaiian Islands, and determine whether pueo warrant additional state or federal protections. This knowledge will direct managers toward actions most likely to stabilize populations and reduce extinction risk. The research funded under SB 2755 will provide valuable information that may be used in other sectors as well, including state-led pueo conservation efforts, pueo as biocontrol for agriculture, and as a culturally and socially important native raptor.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2755 provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities in our BOR Approved Budget.