



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Water & Land and
Senate Committee on Government Operations
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By

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SB 2725 – RELATING TO SPECIAL IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

Chairs Inouye and Moriwaki, Vice Chairs Keith-Agaran and Dela Cruz, and members of the committees:

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) and the Climate Resiliency Initiative (CRI; formerly Coastal Geology Group) supports SB 2725. This legislation proposes to expand the rationale for which counties may create special improvement districts to include environmental research, restoration, and maintenance; natural resource management; and natural hazard mitigation to improve environmental conditions and provide community benefits through amendments to Section 46-80.5 Hawai'i Revised Statutes. Hawai'i Sea Grant and CRI offer the following comments in support of this Bill and one suggestion for improving the measure.

Hawai'i communities are experiencing acute effects of the climate emergency as exemplified by the record-setting rainfall and flooding in Hanalei and Ha'ena, Kaua'i in 2018, recurring tidal flooding in the streets of Māpunapuna, O'ahu, and ongoing coastal erosion crises on the North Shore of O'ahu, in West Maui, and many other locations on Hawai'i coasts. Addressing these challenges through adaptation of private and public development will be very expensive and requires comprehensive planning efforts across a range of state and county agencies in close cooperation with community.

Special improvement districts can provide a vital means for communities to directly fund or finance community resilience, adaptation, and natural resource conservation and restoration efforts. Special improvement districts may be set up at the scale of one to a few ahupua'a to be most effective for addressing local priorities developed with a community-based special improvement district association. The Waikiki Beach Special

Improvement District and its association have demonstrated the effectiveness of these special tax districts for developing and funding coastal management and restoration projects in partnership with local government. A similar community facilities district has recently been created at Kahana, Maui for addressing shoreline erosion and beach loss.

Hawai'i Sea Grant and CRI recommend also adding climate change and sea level rise adaptation to the proposed expanded purposes of creating the special improvement districts in Section 46-80.5, Hawaii Revised Statutes to further enable communities to utilize these districts for improving resilience and environmental conditions.

Hawai'i Sea Grant's mission is to provide integrated research, extension, and education activities that increase understanding and use of ocean and coastal resources of the Hawaiian and Pacific Islands and support the informed personal, policy, and management decisions that are integral to realizing this vision. Hawai'i Sea Grant is part of a national network of 34 university-based programs associated with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that promote better understanding, conservation, and use of coastal resources.

The Climate Resiliency Initiative (CRI) is a newly-established applied research program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. CRI is an affiliation of researchers, technicians, undergraduate, and graduate students spread across campus working on challenges related to climate change. CRI researchers conduct investigations of sea level rise and community design, increasing resiliency to extreme weather events, projecting future climate stresses and shocks, marine and reef impacts, and better understanding community exposure to rising heat, storms, and drought. This requires cross-disciplinary and integrated research investigation on a range of spatial and temporal scales

Hawai'i Sea Grant and the CRI support SB 2725 to expand the purpose and rationale for special improvement districts to improve management and adaptation to natural and climate change hazards.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.