UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI SYSTEM
ʻŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAIʻI

Legislative Testimony
Hōʻike Manaʻo I Mua O Ka ʻAhaʻōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Consumer Protection & Commerce
Tuesday, March 21, 2023 at 2:00 p.m.
By
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SB 285 SD2 HD1 – RELATING TO WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

Chair Nakashima, Vice Chair Sayama, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawaiʻi Water Resources Research Center and UH Sea Grant College Program (Hawaiʻi Sea Grant) stand in **strong support** of SB 285 SD2 HD1.

The State of Hawaiʻi has shown its intention to improve water quality, mitigate drinking water risks, and join the other 49 states in addressing the known impacts of cesspools. However, Hawaiʻi's 88,000 cesspool owners are faced with a paradox, the State's approved list of replacement options includes systems such as ATU's, which are effective at reducing nutrients but are very costly, or septic systems, which are less expensive but have been shown to have limited nutrient removal efficiency in Hawaii's coastal environments.

The lack of affordable, effective technology options is a major impediment to Hawaii's water quality improvement goals, and has the potential to result in a huge investment yielding little in return. This bill would leverage the University of Hawaiʻi's extensive research expertise to create an innovative pilot program that would promote development of new less expensive on-site technologies and assess the safety and efficiency of new and emerging on-site wastewater options. Specifically, this bill would enable research to improve our understanding of which technologies are best suited for Hawaiʻi's unique conditions, and it will ultimately support the Hawaiʻi Department of Health in approving new, more effective and less costly technologies for large-scale implementation.

While we cannot delay the process of replacing cesspools, a multi-pronged approach including policy changes, creating new financing options, and technology development is needed to successfully address this complex and challenging issue.

Additionally, since the bill delegates responsibility to the University of Hawai‘i Water Resources Research Center (UH WRRC), it is worth noting that UH WRRC has significant experience in providing the state with useful research specifically relating to the impacts of cesspools and wastewater. This is demonstrated by our recently developed Hawai‘i Cesspool Prioritization Tool created with the Hawai‘i Department of Health, our wastewater outflow biomonitoring program that has continued for more than a decade with the City and County of Honolulu, and our faculty’s numerous reports and publications that provide critical information on the water quality impacts of wastewater on the environment.

Additionally, we strongly support the appropriation of funds for three full-time equivalent (3.0 FTE) positions within the Hawai‘i Department of Health's Wastewater Branch, which is in critical need of expansion in their personnel capacity in order to support the statewide transition away from cesspools.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.