



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
Senate Committee on Higher Education
Tuesday, February 14, 2023 at 3:07 p.m.

By

Thomas Giambelluca

Director, UH Water Resources Research Center

And

Darren T. Lerner, PhD

Director, University of Hawai'i (UH) Sea Grant College Program,
School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology

And

Michael Bruno, Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 285 – RELATING TO WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

Chairs Gabbard and Kim, Vice Chairs Richards and Kidani, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawai'i Water Resources Research Center and UH Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) **strongly support** SB 285.

The State of Hawaii 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, Hawaii's 83,000 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 come with a high cost, 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 Hawaii's extensive research expertise to create an innovative pilot program that would test the safety and efficiency of new and emerging on-site wastewater technologies, determine which are best suited for Hawaii's unique conditions, and ultimately support the Hawaii Department of Health in approving new, more effective and less costly technologies for large-scale implementation.

While we can not 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, we strongly support the appropriation of funds for two full-time equivalent (2.0 FTE) positions within the Hawaii 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. We request that the bill language be changed from referencing the 2021 to the '2022 Hawai'i Cesspool Hazard Assessment & Prioritization Tool Report' (<https://health.hawaii.gov/wastewater/files/2022/11/prioritizationtoolreport.pdf>).

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure, provided that its passage does not replace or impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents Approved Executive Biennium Budget.