



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 Ways and Means
Friday, February 23, 2024 at 10:30 a.m.

By

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And

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SB 2513 SD1 – RELATING TO WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i's Water Resources Research Center (WRRC) and Sea Grant College Program are in strong support of SB 2513 SD1.

The State of Hawai'i has demonstrated its commitment to enhancing water quality, addressing drinking water safety concerns, and aligning with national efforts to tackle the environmental impacts associated with cesspools. However, the 88,000 cesspool owners in Hawai'i are facing a tough choice. They can either opt for expensive systems like Aerobic Treatment Units (ATUs), which effectively reduce nutrients but come with a high price tag, or choose more affordable septic systems, which, unfortunately, don't efficiently remove nutrients in Hawai'i's coastal areas.

The dearth of affordable and efficient technology options poses a significant barrier to Hawai'i's water quality improvement objectives. Without viable alternatives, there's a risk of substantial investment yielding minimal returns. SB 2513 SD1 presents a strategic solution by harnessing the University of Hawai'i's extensive research capabilities to establish an innovative pilot program. This bill would promote the development of affordable on-site wastewater technologies and allow the state to quantify their safety and effectiveness. The bill supports research efforts focused on improving our understanding of which technologies are most suitable for Hawai'i's specific environmental conditions. Ultimately, this program will aid the Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) in approving new, more efficient, and affordable technologies for widespread adoption.

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

Furthermore, entrusting WRRC with the responsibility outlined in this bill is prudent. WRRC boasts a rich history of providing the state with valuable research insights pertaining to

cesspools and wastewater management. Our collaborative efforts with DOH have yielded tools like the Hawai'i Cesspool Prioritization Tool. Additionally, our longstanding biomonitoring program with the City and County of Honolulu underscores our commitment to safeguarding water quality. The wealth of research and publications produced by our faculty serves as critical resources in understanding the environmental impacts of wastewater.

In addition to our support for SB 2513 SD1, we advocate for the allocation of funds for two full-time equivalent (2.0 FTE) positions within the DOH's Wastewater Branch. Expanding the department's personnel capacity is essential to facilitate the statewide transition away from cesspools.

We support this bill, provided that its passage does not impact the priorities as indicated in our Board of Regents Approved Budget. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.