



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 Committees on Higher Education and Agriculture & Environment
Friday, January 31, 2024 at 1:50 p.m.

By

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SB 657 – RELATING TO THE CENTER FOR CLIMATE RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT

Chairs Kim & Gabbard, Vice Chairs Kidani & Richards, and members of the committees:

The University of Hawai'i School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology (SOEST) supports Senate Bill 657, which appropriates funds for SOEST to establish and operate a Center for Climate Resilient Development.

Senate Bill 657's proposal to establish a Center for Climate Resilient Development at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa is a pivotal step toward safeguarding Hawai'i's future.

Building on the SOEST's proven expertise in climate modeling, the Center will provide actionable data on sea level rise, coastal erosion, wave flooding, groundwater inundation, and more—already indispensable to Hawai'i's real estate, environmental review, and county resilience laws. Further, laws that refer to the Sea Level Rise Exposure Area include the clause “or its successor,” contemplating updates to SOEST's modeling products that cannot be completed without adequate resources.¹

Research at SOEST is currently reliant on precarious federal grants and this critical work is at risk without stable funding. Just this week, the Trump Administration put in place a pause on all federal grants,² which is likely just the beginning for an administration with a limited appetite for funding climate change-related research.

¹ See e.g. Haw. Rev. Stat. § 508D-15(a)(5).

² Holly Honderich, James FitzGerald & Ana Faguy, *White House defends freezing funds as 'reasonable' while Democrats express 'extreme alarm'*, BBC News (Jan. 28, 2025).

With \$3 million annually, the Center will solidify Hawai'i's capacity to address evolving climate hazards, collaborate with communities statewide, and champion equitable, sustainable development to protect the islands' people, ecosystems, and future.

SOEST supports Senate Bill 657, provided its adoption does not impact priorities as indicated in our Board of Regents Approved Budget. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.