



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 and Environment
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By

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And

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SB 1232 – RELATING TO WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

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

The University of Hawai'i Water Resources Research Center (WRRC) **stands in strong support of SB - 1232**, which establishes a pilot program to evaluate and certify new wastewater treatment technologies in Hawai'i. This initiative is a critical step in addressing the State's cesspool conversion challenges by expanding affordable and effective treatment options.

Hawai'i's commitment to improving water quality and public health is evident in the legislative mandates requiring the transition away from cesspools. However, the currently approved replacement options pose challenges—advanced treatment units (ATUs) are highly effective but costly, while septic systems, though more affordable, have limited nutrient removal efficiency in Hawai'i's coastal environments. The lack of viable, cost-effective solutions is a major barrier to meeting the State's water quality goals and could lead to substantial investments with limited impact.

This bill leverages WRRC's expertise in wastewater research to implement a pilot program that will rigorously test and evaluate new wastewater treatment technologies. By identifying and validating solutions that are both effective and financially feasible, WRRC will provide the Hawai'i Department of Health with the necessary scientific basis for approving new, lower-cost alternatives for cesspool conversion. This research is essential to ensuring that the State's approach is data-driven, efficient, and tailored to Hawai'i's unique environmental conditions.

As the designated implementing entity, WRRC has extensive experience in wastewater research and policy development. Our previous work includes:

- The Hawai'i Cesspool Prioritization Tool, developed in collaboration with the Hawai'i Department of Health to assess cesspool risks statewide.

- A long-term wastewater outflow biomonitoring program conducted with the City and County of Honolulu, contributing critical data on wastewater impacts.
- Numerous faculty-led studies on wastewater treatment and its environmental effects, which inform local and national policy discussions.

We strongly support the appropriation of funds for WRRC to establish and implement this pilot program, including necessary infrastructure, equipment, and administrative support, 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.