



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Ocean Marine Resources, & Hawaiian Affairs
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By

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HB 2468 – RELATING TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Chair Ing, Vice Chair DeCoite, and members of the committee:

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) supports the intent of House Bill 2468 provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents approved executive biennium budget. This legislation establishes a Hawai'i beach preservation special fund, authorizes the office of planning to expend moneys from the Hawai'i beach preservation special fund to purchase lands threatened by sea level rise or beach erosion, requires the Department of Land and Natural Resources to manage the purchased lands. Creates a task force within the office of planning to determine appropriate funding mechanisms for the Hawai'i beach preservation special fund.

Here we offer some suggestions for further strengthening this important legislation:

1. Use a Working Group of the Climate Commission, Legacy Land Commission or similar existing task force. Rather than creating a new task force within the Office of Planning to identify the funding mechanisms for the Hawai'i beach preservation fund. The Climate Commission membership provides an appropriate structure for such a working group, including representatives from county planning agencies, and would be a logical extension of the Commission's duties for implementing their recommendations with legislation as needed.
2. Expand the language of the bill to include other managed retreat strategies in addition to buyouts. This would complement and be consistent with a Managed Retreat Symposium the Office of Planning convened in January, 2018. Currently HB 2468 amends Chapter 225M to authorize the Office of Planning to expend moneys from the fund for "purchase from landowners any lands threatened by sea level rise or beach erosion for the protection of adjacent public beaches." As written, this is a buyout bill, not a managed retreat bill.

3. Add the North Shore of O‘ahu as a pilot project for this new fund. With the recent high-profile severe erosion around Sunset Beach, O‘ahu the last couple of winters, there is much attention and community interest on developing alternative solutions to erosion for what many consider to be some of the most valuable and important “Legacy Beaches” on O‘ahu.
4. SB 3063 is a complimentary Bill related to developing an economic valuation study of the North Shore beaches. SB 3063 will assist local decision-makers regarding critical issues, such as coastal land use, shoreline management, and applications for armoring of the shoreline for private development. Other applications of natural resource valuation estimates include assessing long-range planning options including managed retreat.

Hawai‘i’s beaches have become increasingly threatened by coastal erosion. According to the United States Geological Service (USGS) National Assessment of Shoreline Change for the Hawaiian Islands, 70% of Hawai‘i’s beaches are eroding and 13 miles of beach have been lost over the last century. Beach erosion effects shoreline access, recreation and cultural activities, coastal environments, and our economy. Beaches are the backbone of Hawai‘i’s \$15 Billion tourism industry and are central to Hawai‘i’s unique culture and lifestyle. With sea-level rise and chronic coastal erosion, the state is challenged to find effective and efficient ways to preserve and maintain our naturally occurring sand beaches. We believe the proposed legislation will help support the long-term preservation and protection of our coastal resources.

North Shore beaches are at increasing risk of deterioration from intensive shorefront development and chronically retreating beaches and rising water levels with climate change and sea level rise. The North Shore is host to championship surfing contests throughout the winter season, bringing millions of dollars into the local economy. It is also an invaluable public and cultural resource for residents from all over O‘ahu. While the beaches of the North Shore of O‘ahu are highly regarded, the true economic value of North Shore beaches is currently unquantified and therefore, likely undervalued.

Managed retreat strategies, are among some of the most effective long-term coastal policy tools. Managed retreat can employ a range of tools including, but not limited to, purchase of conservation easements, assistance with relocation of current property owners, and other means for allowing the coastline to migrate inland over time. These are the best alternative for preserving North Shore beaches as a public trust resource in the long-term. A managed retreat strategy needs to also take into account the total value of the public resource including the beaches, and natural coastal resources.

Hawai‘i Sea Grant supports HB 2468 in the effort to establish alternative options for coastal land management to conserve legacy beaches statewide. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.