



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
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By

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SB 1239 – RELATING TO RAPID OHIA DEATH

Chair Tokuda, Vice Chair Dela Cruz and members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 1239, which appropriates funds to the Department of Agriculture for research on prevention and mitigation of Rapid Ohia Death.

Rapid Ohia Death (ROD), is caused by two closely related fungal pathogens within the genus *Ceratocystis*. The disease was first identified in 2014, has spread extremely rapidly on the Big Island, from 15,000 acres of ohia forest infected by the disease in 2014, to 50,000 acres in late 2016. Ohia is the dominant tree in at least 80% of Hawai'i's native forests, and makes up half the acreage, and half the woody biomass, of all the forests in Hawai'i. Loss of ohia across the state will severally impact our endangered forest birds that depend on the trees for nesting sites, and will intensify invasion of the forest by invasive plant species such as strawberry guava that use more water than ohia, with negative impacts on the watershed. From a cultural standpoint, it is difficult to imagine Hawai'i without ohia and the lehua flowers. Further, forests of dead trees will greatly damage tourism, particularly on the Big Island, and greatly increase fire hazards.

The nursery industry in Hawaii has also been impacted by rapid ohia death, since it has been necessary to impose a quarantine on soil movement from the Big Island to prevent possible spread of the disease.

Researchers from state and federal agencies and the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) are working to address the spread and management of this severe plant disease, and distributed the interagency Rapid Ohia Death Strategic Response Plan in November 2016. Their efforts are limited by resources and by the absence of prior information on this devastating and very rapidly spreading forest disease. SB 1239 would appropriate the funds necessary to ramp up research and management efforts before this disease devastates Big Island forests, and spreads across the state.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in strong support of SB 1239.