



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Energy and Environmental Protection
and
House Committee on Water, Land, and Hawaiian Affairs
Tuesday, February 12, 2019 at 8:55 a.m.

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HB 1548 – RELATING TO RAPID OHIA DEATH

Chairs Lowen and Yamane, Vice Chairs Wildberger and Todd, and members of the House Committee on Energy and Environmental Protection and Committee on Water, Land, and Hawaiian Affairs:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on HB 1548 relating to Rapid Ohia Death (ROD). The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) supports the intent of this bill to combat ROD, but opposes the matching requirement. ROD is a disease that is changing the natural landscape of Hawai'i on state and private lands. ROD is the greatest threat to our native forests, watersheds, and the endangered species that live there. Widespread ohia mortality would also be a severe loss for native Hawaiian culture.

A team of scientists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Research Service, Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center in collaboration with UH have:

- discovered the two new species of fungus that are attacking the ohia;
- developed molecular diagnostic tools to enable certain identification of the fungus;
- identified how the pathogen moves, both by human and natural means, in particular by boring beetles;
- shown that wounding of ohia trees allows them to become infected; and,
- UH Hilo has developed the drone methodology for detecting trees with ROD symptoms from the air.

The news that the fungus has reached Kaua'i demonstrates that this is a statewide problem, not just a Hawai'i Island problem. A recent detection of a virulent pathogen of ROD, *Ceratocystis lukuohia* indicates that there might be more ROD infected trees or the spread of disease would be rapid on Kaua'i. This bill addresses the state-wide need through research, prevention and outreach.

CTAHR strongly supports the effort expressed by this bill and is willing to assist in the mentioned outreach through the Hawai'i Cooperative Extension Service and the CTAHR Office of Communications.

CTAHR extension agents, while distributed throughout the state, all have a level of state-wide responsibilities to extending information to the community through a variety of educational platforms, including but not limited to, workshops, social media, print media, and video.

Since people are one of the major vectors, the University of Hawai'i, Department of Land and Natural Resources, and others have been conducting an extension program that has:

- given hundreds of community talks and events, reaching tens of thousands of local people;
- produced and distributed tens of thousands of brochures, produced radio public service announcements, websites, and social media that have reached hundreds of thousands of people;
- produced a half hour documentary film on ROD; and,
- shown that almost half of everyone in Hawai'i is aware of ROD, with 90% awareness on Hawai'i Island (this survey was done before the Kaua'i outbreak)

In summary, UHM/CTAHR is in support and is ready to cooperate in whatever form is needed to address the spread of this disease. This bill is also related to HB 230 and combining them may provide a more integrated approach to a state-wide issue.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testify in support of HB 1548.