



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Energy and Environmental Protection
Thursday, February 16, 2023 at 9:15 a.m.

By

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And

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HB 756 HD1 – RELATING TO LAND USE

Chair Lowen, Vice Chair Cochran, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) and the Climate Resilience Collaborative (CRC) support the intent of HB 756 HD1, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents approved executive biennium budget.

HB 756 HD1 requires the Department of Land and Natural Resources to prepare plans and a program to facilitate voluntary relocation of residential development away from areas at risk of sea level rise, establishes the sea level rise relocation special fund, allows the exchange of public land for private lands for the transfer of development rights or land exchanges to relocate private development away from high-risk areas. The bill also expands the climate change adaptation priority guidelines and appropriates funds to implement these measures. In order to prepare for, react to, and manage the impacts related to sea level rise, the Department must have every tool available in order to effectively protect Hawai'i's coastal communities and public trust beaches. This measure would give the Department additional necessary regulatory tools and financial resources to help facilitate managed retreat.

The complex nature of managed retreat requires evolution beyond the narrow binary options of armor or retreat and instead requires evaluation of broader adaptation options in the context of hazard risk and vulnerability, socio-economic factors and place-based and community driven considerations for a variety of phased adaptation options that include managed retreat. Managed retreat has significant advantages over shorter-term mitigation responses, especially over longer time frames. While there may be

significant opposition to this approach, especially in regard to the use of public funds to acquire coastal lands, the strategy may be best suited when protection of the natural beach resources are the highest priority and are economically justified for public investment into acquisition.

Historically, coastal retreat has taken the form of mandatory relocation of development or communities through government buyouts or incentives but future methods of retreat may include broader planning options such as down zoning and rebuilding restrictions, transferable development rights, increased coastal setbacks, and limitation of ownership transfers. Climate change-driven coastal adaptation will require some phased combination of retreat along with protection and adaptation. Disaster management literature reveals an unprecedented number of major natural disaster events around the world, this suggests a modern era of unmanaged or forced retreat is now affecting many of the low-elevation coastal communities around the world. Unmanaged retreat is often a default reactive response due to a lack of viable adaptation options, and is fundamentally different from strategic managed retreat as part of a holistic suite of adaptation policy tools. This measure will support developing comprehensive adaptation plans including managed retreat along with other adaptation approaches through a variety of mechanisms.

Hawai'i Sea Grant's mission is to provide integrated research, extension, and education activities that increase understanding and use of ocean and coastal resources of the Hawaiian and Pacific Islands and support the informed personal, policy, and management decisions that are integral to realizing this vision. Hawai'i Sea Grant is part of a national network of 34 university-based programs associated with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) that promote better understanding, conservation, and use of coastal resources.

CRC is a multi-investigator research project at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa focused on sea level rise adaptation and climate resilience. CRC is working to update coastal models with more recent projections of sea level rise and to take account of other variables that impact Hawai'i's shorelines.

Hawai'i Sea Grant and the Climate Resilience Collaborative support HB 756 HD1.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.