



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 Water & Land
House Committee on Higher Education & Technology
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By

Jan Gouveia

Vice President for Administration, University of Hawai'i System
and

Michael Bruno, PhD

Provost, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

and

Charles "Chip" Fletcher, PhD

Interim Dean, School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology

and

Megan Donahue, PhD

Interim Director, Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology

HB 1136 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII INSTITUTE OF MARINE BIOLOGY

Chairs Ichiyama and Perruso, Vice Chairs Poepoe and Kapela, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. The University supports HB 1136 to appropriate general obligation bond funding for health and safety related repairs to Moku o Lo'e (Coconut Island) so that the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology (HIMB) may continue its research, policy contributions, and communal developments towards advancing Hawai'i ocean health.

HIMB is a world-renowned institute located on Moku o Lo'e in Kāne'ōhe Bay. Moku o Lo'e possesses unique conditions for research, as it hosts the only research facility in the world within 100 feet of living reefs. Additionally, Kāne'ōhe Bay's pH balance and higher temperature gives researchers a living lab to investigate a future Pacific Ocean affected by climate change.

HIMB is a leader of sound research and policy at the local and global level. As a short list of examples, HIMB researchers have served on state and federal government boards and commissions to address reef health, whale and dolphin population numbers, fisheries, and nearshore water quality. Researchers from HIMB have also advised Hawai'i lawmakers and DLNR of the "30x30" goal aiming to protect 30% of state waters by 2030. Such efforts made Hawai'i the birthplace of the 30x30 motion at the IUCN World Conservation Congress.

HIMB attracts large-scale stakeholders towards the advancement of Hawai'i ocean health. Over the last three years HIMB has received over \$30M in extramural funding, including awards to develop an engineered coral reef ecosystem to help protect coastlines from flooding, erosion and storm damage, ultimately to support statewide climate resilience through data science.

HIMB utilizes its world-class facilities towards the advancement of the Hawai'i community— particularly youth. Through its countless community partnerships and large investment in K-12 education, HIMB not only elevates the quality of science in schools, but also orients the next workforce for place-based conservation, Indigenous science, and Hawai'i ocean stewardship.

Not part of the main campus, HIMB must independently oversee the entirety of its utilities, majority of which were originally developed in the 1930's and 1940's, on Moku o Lo'e by a private owner. The sewage system, which runs throughout the island and under Kāne'ohe Bay into the City and County of Honolulu's sewage system, is in poor condition and badly deteriorated. In its current state, the on-island sewer system runs the risk of spilling into Kāne'ohe Bay.

The University has comprehensively assessed the situation and has commenced initial planning and design efforts to replace the sewer system on Moku o Lo'e and improve the connection to the City's sewer system. The total project cost for design, construction, and equipment is estimated at \$10 million.

In addition to the deteriorating sewer system, the main pier and associated seawalls that provide island access to employees, researchers, visitors, school groups and community partners, and their respective supplies and equipment are crumbling into Kāne'ohe Bay. This not only presents a health and safety risk to all employees and visitors of Moku o Lo'e, but the integrity of HIMB's research and education buildings is also at risk. Failed seawalls also have a high probability of damaging the rare coral that surrounds the pier and seawall.

In order for the important work to continue on Moku o Lo'e, both the pier and seawalls need to be repaired or replaced. The piers, which act as access points to the island, were originally built in 1935. The seawalls, which prevent coastal erosion, are 50-100 years old.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1136, which would appropriate \$10,000,000 for the complete repair and replacement of the sewer system and \$2,000,000 for the plan and design of pier and seawall repairs at Moku o Lo'e. Your consideration is greatly appreciated.