UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI SYSTEM
Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Water and Land
and
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
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SB 650 – RELATING TO RAPID OHIA DEATH

Chairs Kahele and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Keith-Agaran and Ruderman, and members of the Senate Committee on Water and Land and Committee on Agriculture and Environment:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on SB 650 relating to Rapid Ohia Death (ROD). The University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources 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 Hawaiʻi 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 Kauaʻi demonstrates that this is a statewide problem, not just a Hawaiʻi 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 Kauaʻi. Survey of trees with ROD, implementing the methods to reduce the disease spread and determining ways to manage the diseased tree, are important tools of the ROD control program and needs to be supported. The bill appropriates funds for combating ROD, but only if there is a one-to-one dollar match from private entities. Given the fact that this is a state-wide problem and is occurring on state as well as private lands, it appears to us that this need for a one-to-one match will only delay, if not avoid, the ability to combat the disease which may spread beyond Hawaiʻi Island and Kauaʻi.

In summary, UHM/CTAHR supports the intent of fighting ROD, but opposes the need for a one-to-one match in fighting a disease that is in the process of changing the Hawaiʻi landscape.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testify in <u>support</u> of SB 650.