



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education
and
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
Friday, February 8, 2019 at 2:30 p.m.

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And
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SB 801 – RELATING TO THE WAIKIKI AQUARIUM MASTER PLAN

Chairs Kim and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Kidani and Ruderman, and members of the committees:

The Waikiki Aquarium is Hawai'i's State Aquarium, administered by the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, supports SB 801 as long as it is in addition to the University's Biennium Budget request. Founded in 1904, it is the second oldest aquarium in the United States. The present building dates to 1955, and in the past decade has hosted an average of around 300,000 visitors annually, and 30,000 Hawai'i schoolchildren in its education programs. It is regarded as an aging gem in the middle of Hawai'i's major vacation destination.

Although the Aquarium remains internationally renowned for the quality of its exhibits, this concrete and rebar structure built next to the ocean in Waikiki is increasingly showing signs of aging and disrepair. Additionally, while aquariums throughout the world have modernized and expanded in scale and scope, as if frozen in time, the Waikiki Aquarium has remained confined inside its original structure. This disparity between the Waikiki Aquarium and more-modern and larger mainland and international aquariums is often commented upon by visitors. Indeed, it is a sobering fact that our Aquarium's largest exhibit is but 1/12 the volume of that found in a local restaurant, and the entire Aquarium building could fit within a single exhibit in some of the major aquariums on the mainland and worldwide.

The Waikiki Aquarium recognizes that to remain relevant and to achieve its three pillars of marine education, research and conservation, it requires attention and uplift. It needs to redefine itself and elevate the facilities to make itself a favored destination for locals and visitors to Hawai'i, and to actively contribute to research at the University of Hawai'i and provide marine education for local schoolchildren and all visitors.

As the first step in this process, in 2017 the Friends of Waikīkī Aquarium commissioned a preliminary study to explore options for renovating and expanding the Aquarium within its present location. The result was an Entitlement Report that identified building requirements and approvals that will be required to achieve an ultimately successful program implementation, and a Conceptual Master Plan (currently in draft stage) that will outline the concept and design of the upgraded and expanded Aquarium.

Senate Bill 801 will continue this project by producing a Comprehensive Master Plan that will identify all of the Capital Improvement Projects that will require funding for Design, Reconstruction and Expansion of the Waikīkī Aquarium.

Ultimately, the goal is to provide Hawai'i, an island state, with a vibrant, modern aquarium that highlights, and educates about, the unique marine life of the tropical Pacific. This aquarium will be ideally positioned to assume its place as a vital tourist destination and a marine research, conservation and science center: a facility that Hawai'i sorely needs, richly deserves, and of which all in Hawai'i can be justly proud.

Thank you!