



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Tuesday, February 28, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

By

Thomas Giambelluca

Director, UH Water Resources Research Center

And

Darren T. Lerner, PhD

Director, University of Hawai'i (UH) Sea Grant College Program,

School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology

And

Michael Bruno, Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 285 SD1 – RELATING TO WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i Water Resources Research Center and UH Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) **strongly support** SB 285 SD1, provided that its passage does not impact priorities as indicated in our Board of Regents Approved Budget.

The State of Hawai'i has shown its intention to improve water quality, mitigate drinking water risks, and join the other 49 states in addressing the known impacts of cesspools. However, Hawai'i's 88,000 cesspool owners are faced with a paradox, the State's approved list of replacement options includes systems such as Aerobic Treatment Unit's (ATU), which are effective at reducing nutrients but come with a high cost, or septic systems, which are less expensive but have been shown to have limited nutrient removal efficiency in Hawai'i's coastal environments.

The lack of affordable, effective technology options is a major impediment to Hawai'i's water quality improvement goals, and has the potential to result in a huge investment yielding little in return. This bill would leverage the University of Hawai'i's extensive research expertise to create an innovative pilot program that would test the safety and efficiency of new and emerging on-site wastewater technologies, determine which are best suited for Hawai'i's unique conditions, and ultimately support the Hawai'i Department of Health in approving new, more effective and less costly technologies for large-scale implementation.

While we can not delay the process of replacing cesspools, a multi-pronged approach including policy changes, creating new financing options, and technology development is needed to successfully address this complex and challenging issue.

Additionally, since the bill delegates responsibility to the University of Hawai'i Water Resources Research Center (UH WRRC), it is worth noting that UH WRRC has significant experience in providing the state with useful research specifically relating to the impacts of cesspools and wastewater. This is demonstrated by our recently developed Hawai'i Cesspool Prioritization Tool created with the Hawai'i Department of Health, our wastewater outflow biomonitoring program that has continued for more than a decade with the City and County of Honolulu, and our faculty's numerous reports and publications that provide critical information on the water quality impacts of wastewater in the environment.

Additionally, we strongly support the appropriation of funds for two full-time equivalent (2.0 FTE) positions within the Hawai'i Department of Health's Wastewater Branch, which is in critical need of expansion in their personnel capacity in order to support the statewide transition away from cesspools.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.