



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM

TESTIMONY

SB 1747, SD 2 Relating to the Lyon Arboretum

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education

March 17, 2005

by

Dr. Chuck Hayes
Interim Dean, College of Natural Sciences
University of Hawaii

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Chair Tommy Waters, Vice Chair Maile Shimabukuro and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 1747, SD 2.

Of the approximate 2000 endangered species in the United States approximately two-thirds are located in Hawaii. The conservation biology program that is housed in the arboretum is an important effort for this need with hundreds of species being currently preserved and cared for at the arboretum.

The thousands of visitors who come to the arboretum, as well as the hundreds of volunteers that contribute their time and effort there, are a clear statement of the importance of the arboretum to the community. The teacher training and K-12 student activities also underline the broad need of the arboretum that extends beyond the normal scope of responsibilities of an ordinary organized research unit of the University.

One of the major goals of the Chancellor of the University of Hawaii at Manoa is to have our campus be a Hawaiian place of learning. The arboretum is obviously a key factor in facilitating this result. It is well known that there are ancient lo'i at the arboretum that we wish to restore. The initial occurrence of the Kawa Festival at the arboretum is an event that we seek to continue on an annual basis. The Hui Konohiki educational program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa has as one of its organizing resources the arboretum.

There are other resources of the arboretum that also underline its importance as a Hawaiian place of learning. Ancient Polynesians settled in the Hawaiian Islands almost 2000 years ago bringing over 40 species of plants and using the wide variety of plants already here. The Arboretum has one of Hawaii's largest collections of plants that historically have been closely linked to the Hawaiian culture. The 'awa (kava) collections, for example, are the largest of their kind representing all of the known Hawaiian varieties. Over 1800 accessions (455 species in 53 genera with about 340 varieties) of edible and ornamental aroids growing as vines, ground cover, or erect plants are scattered throughout the arboretum. The Arboretum has one of the world's largest living collections of palms and rattans with 1900 accessions (650+ species in

150 genera). Palms are among the most important culture of plants with most having numerous uses as foods, clothing, building materials, medicines, and craft materials.

As correctly stated in this bill, due to safety concerns, there has been a closure of the arboretum for approximately four months. During this time, trees judged as dangerous and near the point of falling were taken down, one the height of a 12 story building. The structural evaluation of buildings at the arboretum was evaluated and resulted in the closure of five. There is orange fencing wrapped around these buildings with doors locked barring entrance. Trail signs have been put in place to advise visitors where they can and should not go. Arboretum staff members have undergone first aid and CPR training. An ADA portable toilet has been put in place. It was found that a power line was located within 10 inches of a metal roof of one of the buildings. This line has been moved as well as low phone utility lines going over the children's area.

Although these and other safety items have been addressed, the arboretum is still not open for the children's center due to ADA compliant issues that still need to be addressed. There are also ADA compliant changes for the visitor center that also should be made.

There are also issues of financial support of day to day operation of the arboretum. With the need of funds to prevent closure of university classes and other student needs there is strong competition for funding at Manoa. A separate line item in the budget for funds to provide support for the arboretum would alleviate this concern and maintain the needed support for the Lyon Arboretum.

We support the allocation of funds associated with Senate Bill 1747, SD 2, so long as it does not supplant funds for the support of the priorities in the Board Of Regents-approved University Biennium Request.