



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, AND AGRICULTURE

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by
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SCR 163/SR101 – REQUESTING A STUDY ON ESTABLISHING A HAWAII STATE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Chair Kokubun, Vice Chair Hooser, and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon members of the Senate Committee on Water, Land, and Agriculture. My name is Chip Fletcher, I am Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Geology and Geophysics at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

The University of Hawaii School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology (SOEST) supports SCR163 requesting a study on establishing a Hawaii State Geological Survey and offers its support to the working group to be convened by the State auditor.

The role of a State Geologist, backed by a scientific office (a “survey”), is to be an autonomous voice for science, speaking on behalf of the citizens, that is free of political pressure. Hawaii has had a State Geologist in the past but it has been continuously downgraded over time and is now going to disappear.

We are the only state in the nation without a geological survey. This means that we have been unable to participate in the \$6M USGS Statemap grants program (one of only 2 states to not participate). Because of this we have no comprehensive mapping program in critical areas of public safety and resource management, including: rock falls, landslides, flash flooding, rock and mineral resources, reefs, soil and shoreline erosion, geothermal resources, wetlands, ocean hazards, and others.

Hawaii would benefit from a centralized scientific office to provide expertise, conduct research, and map the states resources and hazard zones. Presently these functions are spread among many agencies causing low efficiency and even lower effectiveness. A geological survey would provide the citizens with regular reports, maps, and research into issues that are presently spread among numerous agencies, the UH, and consultants.

This approach is disorganized, inefficient, and does not serve our citizens. There is no official designee for many of these important issues. For example, a typical hearing for a legislative committee may bring out a random assortment of experts and quasi-experts to provide guidance on an issue. Important decisions are being made on *ad hoc* advice. Last year a committee was dealing with the tsunami threat to Hawaii. The chair became so exasperated that he finally called out, "Isn't there a geologist in the audience?" A perfect setting for the State Geologist to be present.

A State Geologist could attend hearings, sit on boards and commissions, and provide scientific guidance that is currently lacking.

State surveys are responsible for making maps of natural processes, assessing threats, compiling and centralizing data and coordinating with other agencies, and adding a scientific dimension to planning.

With the ever present threat of natural hazards, residents and visitors want to know if we are safe and what can be done to improve our safety. The truth is, we can do much more than is presently being done. Organizing our scientific house with a state survey is an important step in the right direction.