

LATE TESTIMONY

IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 1385 RELATING TO A NEW APPROACH TO THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL LAND

FIN

Date: March 30, 2011 Time: 2:00p.m.

LATE

I fully support the formation of a new pilot program leading in turn to a new approach to the management of public school lands.

At present, public school lands represent one of the largest underutilized resources in the State of Hawaii. In an era in which the DOE is forced to make agonizingly difficult decisions for the sake of several hundred thousand dollars we simply cannot allow potential sources of revenue to go unrealized.

Despite the fact that many recognize the inherent potential of underutilized properties there is currently no mechanism available to allow ANY of the "owners" in question to realize their full value. It is only through collaboration and by changing our current practices that this can be achieved. This bill facilitates an innovative pilot program, under Board of Education leadership, which would in turn lead to a new approach to the optimization of public school land with the exclusive objective of bringing our schools up to a 21st century standard.

Some might say that DLNR can already address this concern. DLNR does indeed have the authority to withdraw lands under Executive Order to DOE where the lands are abandoned or no longer needed for the intended purpose. In such cases DLNR could develop that land yet in such cases all revenues would go to the general fund (if trust lands) or Land Division's special fund (if non-trust lands). Either way, DOE would not see the proceeds. In addition, many properties are partially owned by a number of entities. There needs to be statutory authority to consolidate the ownership of such properties and to direct resulting revenues into a "ring-fenced" trust dedicated to Hawaii's public schools for whose benefit this land was originally intended.

Revenue from the bill's pilot projects would be awarded on a merit-driven basis and directed toward those projects that most help elevate our schools to a 21st century standard in a manner that is fully consistent with the BOE's long term policy objectives. These grants would represent truly leveraged investment that would no doubt have a positive impact on student outcomes as well as on the culture within our public schools.

In addition to its impact on student outcomes and school culture, this bill would have benefits far beyond the classroom. Next generation building techniques greatly reduce the environmental "footprint" that Hawaii's schools currently have and could in many cases actually increase open space by potentially consolidating multiple ageing single level buildings into several state-of-the-art multi-story ones.

While there is admittedly more work to be done to arrive at the structure most suited to Hawaii's unique circumstances, this bill represents an excellent first step toward integrating facilities planning and curriculum planning in a mutually supportive fashion.

In summary this bill takes existing underutilized land resources and turns them into 1) new or renovated facilities 2) additional funding to be reinvested by the BOE to elevate other public schools to a 21st century standard 3) workforce housing 4) a broader tax base AND 5) additional jobs.

I believe that we can no longer ignore this important potential revenue source that could be used to further our collective efforts to bring Hawaii's public schools into the 21st century.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Bill Reeves