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Statement of
Hakim Ouansafi
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Before the

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

Tuesday, February 13, 2018
10:15 AM - Room 423, Hawaii State Capitol

In consideration of
HB 2474
RELATING TO THE HAWAII PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY

Honorable Chair Brower, and Members of the House Committee on Housing, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for House Bill (HB) 2474, relating to the Hawaii Public Housing Authority.

The Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA) supports the intent of HB 2474, which requires the HPHA to establish a program to offer insurance policies to landlords who rent to tenants using the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program, provided that it does not adversely affect the Governor's Supplemental Budget.

The Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA) assists low-income families through the Housing Choice Voucher Program, also known as "Section 8". The Section 8 program is one of the federal government's major programs for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market, including single-family homes, townhouses and apartments.

Because of the overwhelming need in our community to assist our low-income families, the passage of this measure could possibly assist future Section 8 participants who rent from landlords that participate in a program that offers dwelling insurance policies for landlords renting to Section 8 participants. However, the HPHA would need 1 FTE position to assist and administer the program, and will defer to the State Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs in regards to any insurance related implications.

The HPHA appreciates the opportunity to provide the House Committee on Housing with the HPHA's testimony regarding HB 2474. We thank you very much for your dedicated support.



Aloha Chair Brower, Vice Chair Nakamura and members of the House Committee on Housing,

On behalf of the nearly 600 registered members of the Young Progressives Demanding Action (YPDA) – Hawai‘i, I would like to express **strong support** for HB2474. I am also a member of the Pālolo Neighborhood Board. I live on 9th Avenue and Kiwila Street, right next to Pālolo Public Housing. Many of my community members living in the valley rely on valuable and necessary government subsidies, like Section 8 vouchers, to get by and survive here in the state with the highest cost of living in the nation. I myself make due with around \$24,000 in annual income, working as an independent contractor in media. This means I myself qualify for Section 8, as well as SNAP and a number of other subsidies.

Since graduating from the University of Hawai‘i in 2012, I have rented six different units with varying numbers of roommates—an average of one different unit per year. My frequent moves are primarily the result of poor housing environments. The pool of available, affordable housing is so limited and in such high demand that I have been forced to take houses with less-than ideal set-ups, or else move back in with my parents in Kahalu‘u, which I actually did have to do for about 4 months at the end of 2013. I cannot afford to own or lease a car, so I bus and bike to get around. Because my contracting job requires that I do almost all of my gigs in town, this made those four months on the windward side extremely difficult. My transportation situation also further limits my rental options to the Honolulu area from Kaimukī to Kalihi. Units that are available for rent at my income level in this area are generally shabby, in dilapidated neighborhoods or, in one case, literally 20 feet away from the H1 Freeway. Of course, roommate situations are often tenuous things—people move away, or get married, or get sick of one another. In short, for various reasons, moving has become an almost annual, much detested ritual.

So when I say that I have spent a lot of time house-hunting—and I mean *a lot*—I am not exaggerating. The amount of times that I have come across a unit within my price range and in a part of town that works for me and seen on the application, often in all caps or bolded font, the phrase: “NO SECTION

8” is depressingly high. It's to the point that, even if I *were* to go on Section 8 subsidy, the pool of housing available to me would be so severely limited as to make it harder to find a unit to live in, not easier. Section 8 is supposed to help poor people handle our nation's rising cost of living—a direct result of our neoliberal socioeconomic framework. Instead, Section 8 acts as such a deterrent to landlords, and the perception among these property owners and managers of Section 8 users is so negative, that Section 8 recipients—struggling local families living paycheck to paycheck—are relegated to public housing projects like the one on Kiwila Street. Recent college graduates like myself and many of YPDA's membership who qualify for Section 8, meanwhile, do not even bother trying to use the subsidy because of how limiting it is.

The widespread impression of property owners and property managers that, if they rent to someone using a Section 8 voucher, is that they risk not being able to recover the costs should damages occur. Realtors have expressed that, although they require a security deposit, there is the possibility that this will not cover the cost of damages to their housing unit should poor people—“welfare” recipients—move in. Of course, these stigmas are largely unfounded and based in prejudice. Poor people like me are perfectly capable of being responsible and clean. But nevertheless, these beliefs are the reality we face. By creating a fund that would provide owners and property managers the ability to recoup whatever costs they might incur from damages to their units as a result of allowing Section 8 recipients to rent them, we believe that these landlords would be more encouraged than they are now to make their rental units available to Section 8 voucher recipients—my constituents; my friends; me.

Today, I live in an accessory dwelling unit attached to the backside of my landlady's property with my girlfriend. We have a nice big yard, and are sheltered away from the street. The unit itself is nice and fairly spacious for an ADU. Overall, this is the nicest place I have lived since graduating from college, and I no longer have roommates to contend with. But we lack even a full-sized kitchen. We have the sink and the fridge, but we cook on portable electric burners, an electric griddle, a toaster oven and an outdoor propane grill. And all the while, nearly 65 percent of our monthly income goes directly to rent. This is the price of our so-called “paradise.” My landlady is a nice, older Japanese lady who lives alone. She knows me as the editor of a magazine, as an artist, as someone who always—somehow—pays his rent on time, and rakes the leaves in the back yard once every month or so. She doesn't know that I live at the poverty line; that I qualify for Section 8, SNAP and medicaid. And, even though she is a nice woman, I know she would not have rented the unit to my girlfriend and I had we applied with a Section 8 voucher.

Far too many of the friends that I grew up with in Kahalu‘u, went to high school with, met in college, no longer live in Hawai‘i because of the high cost of living. I am dedicated to serving Hawai‘i and its people; to advancing the causes of socioeconomic and environmental justice in this archipelago that I was born to and love. And I intend to remain here no matter what it takes. But I tell you, it is not easy. The temptation to move to the mainland where the cost of living is much lower is certainly great.

It is vital to the future of Hawai‘i that the best and brightest of the millennial generation—my generation—remain here to become the leaders in business, policy and community advocacy that we will need to meet the challenges of the 21st century. It is vital that our struggling, working families be given the opportunity to lift themselves into the middle class and become the economic dynamos we need to fuel a brave, new, sustainable economy while preserving our island way of life. If this committee can do anything to help make that goal a reality, I urge you to do so. We must do everything we can to make housing affordable to our people. Please pass this bill.

Mahalo for your support,

Will Caron
Social Justice Action Committee Chair
8083874920

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Submitted on: 2/9/2018 7:50:29 PM

Testimony for HSG on 2/13/2018 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Margaret Maupin		Support	No

Comments:

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HB-2474

Submitted on: 2/12/2018 12:50:44 PM

Testimony for HSG on 2/13/2018 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Barbara Barry	Individual	Support	No

Comments: