



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Thursday, February 20, 2020 at 10:35 a.m.

By

Darren T. Lerner, Director  
Hawaii Sea Grant College Program  
School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology  
And

Thomas Giambelluca, Director  
Water Resources Research Center  
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research  
And

Michael Bruno  
Provost  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

### SB 2379 – RELATING TO CESSPOOLS

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and members of the committee:

The University of Hawai'i offers comments on Senate Bill 2379 from the Sea Grant College Program and the Water Resources Research Center.

The Sea Grant College Program offers comments to Part I of the measure:

Previous research and a review of other state efforts to convert cesspools and outdated onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS) by the Environmental Protection Agency highlight that education and outreach, supported by a neutral, non-regulatory entity is a major component of successful programs for conversion of OWTS. Members of the Cesspool Conversion Working Group (CCWG) established by the State of Hawai'i and led by the State of Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) have recognized that robust public education and outreach efforts in the form of a systematic, statewide outreach engagement will be needed if the State of Hawai'i is to achieve its goal of converting an estimated 88,000 cesspools by 2050.

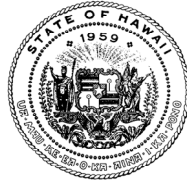
For more than 50 years, Hawai'i Sea Grant has demonstrated expertise working in communities across Hawai'i to provide unbiased science-based information to stakeholders and as such is well suited to perform the necessary needs assessment and to execute a statewide outreach program in cooperation and consultation with the DOH.

In discussion with staff from DOH, they also support this measure. They stated that they do not have the resources or staff to conduct such a program.

The Water Resources Research Center (WRRC) offers comments to Part II of this measure:

Upgrading the state's estimated 88,000 cesspools will require researching and developing onsite wastewater technologies tailored to Hawai'i's unique geology and hydrology. In general, onsite wastewater systems often have large upfront costs. System costs in Hawai'i vary widely based on the type of treatment and our geographic isolation. WRRC believes that identifying a suite of cost-effective solutions will be paramount to assisting the state achieving its goal of converting all cesspools by 2050. WRRC's staff has expertise in several interdisciplinary fields including engineering, hydrology, economics, and geology and is committed to protecting and preserving the state's drinking water and groundwater resources.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
P. O. Box 3378  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB2379**  
**RELATING TO CESSPOOLS**

SENATOR DONOVAN M. DELA CRUZ, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Hearing Date: 2/20/2020

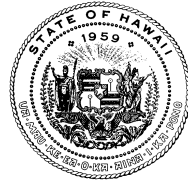
Room Number: CR 211

1 **Fiscal Implications:** This measure may impact the priorities identified in the Governor's  
2 Executive Budget Request for the Department of Health's (Department) appropriations and  
3 personnel priorities.

4 **Department Testimony:** The Department supports this measure. Act 132, Session Laws of  
5 Hawaii (SLH) 2018 established a Cesspool Conversion Working Group (CCWG) that is  
6 administered by the Department, to develop a long-range, comprehensive plan for cesspool  
7 conversion statewide of all cesspools by 2050. Outreach and education is an important part of  
8 implementation of the plan. The Department supports the outreach program that is being  
9 proposed by the University of Hawaii Sea Grant College Program. The measure also includes  
10 the University of Hawaii Water Resources Research Center to conduct research on wastewater  
11 system technologies to determine the most cost-effective way to upgrade cesspools in the State  
12 and reduce the impact of cesspools on drinking water and groundwater resources. The  
13 Department supports this research because the results could potentially save cesspool owners  
14 thousands of dollars when converting or upgrading their cesspools.

15 **Offered Amendments:** None.

16 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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15 **Offered Amendments:** None.

16 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

Harry Kim  
Mayor



Roy Takemoto  
Managing Director

Barbara J. Kossow  
Deputy Managing Director

## County of Hawai'i Office of the Mayor

25 Aupuni Street, Suite 2603 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720 • (808) 961-8211 • Fax (808) 961-6553  
KONA: 74-5044 Ane Keohokālole Hwy., Bldg C • Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i 96740  
(808) 323-4444 • Fax (808) 323-4440

February 18, 2020

Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair  
Committee on Ways and Means

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

### RE: **SB 2379 Relating to Cesspools**

SB 2379 calls for research, education, and outreach, with respect to the impact of cesspools on Hawaii's waters. While I applaud this initiative, I would like to ask for one amendment.

Right now, the bill calls for communicating "the need for statewide conversion of cesspools to protect the coastal and nearshore environment..." and "solutions that support converting all cesspools in the State by 2050." My suggestion is that this research could be more objective if one of its tasks was to determine whether there was a scientific basis for forcing the expensive conversion of "all" cesspools.

I realize that present law requires such conversion. But objective research might reveal that geographic exceptions could be made without impacting waters at all, thereby saving millions of dollars and a lot of heartache, with no countervailing negative consequences.

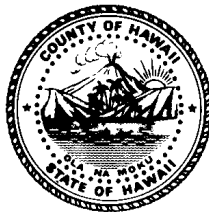
Since you are funding research anyway, wouldn't it make sense to be sure that the premise on which the research is based is scientifically sound?

I hope you will amend SB 2379 to make this simple but meaningful change and thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

Harry Kim  
MAYOR

REBECCA VILLEGAS  
Council Member  
District 7, Central Kona



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## HAWAI'I COUNTY COUNCIL

*West Hawai'i Civic Center, Bldg. A  
74-5044 Ane Keohokalole Hwy.  
Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i 96740*

February 19, 2020

### TESTIMONY OF REBECCA VILLEGAS COUNCIL MEMBER, HAWAI'I COUNTY COUNCIL ON SB 2379, RELATING TO CESSPOOLS

Committee on Ways and Means

Tuesday, February 20, 2020

10:35 a.m.

Conference Room 211

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, and Members of the Committees:

I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2379, relating to cesspools. My testimony is submitted in my individual capacity as a member of the Hawai'i County Council, and Chair of the Hawai'i County Council Public Safety Committee.

The purpose of this measure is commission a comprehensive statewide outreach program by UH Sea Grant College program that provides science-based information, and understanding of sewage contamination sources in nearshore marine areas. The program will also increase understanding of sewage capacity needs and informs stakeholders of appropriate solutions that support converting all cesspools in the State by 2050. Public health and the quality of drinking water, streams, ground waters, marine areas, and the ocean is being harmed by water pollution of cesspools. By supporting this program potential solutions to inform cesspool conversion has an educational benefit as it will research the finance, technology, and knowledge gaps of sewage capacity needs.

For the reasons stated above I urge the Committee on Ways and Means to support this measure as well. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (808) 323-4267.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Rebecca Villegas  
Council Member, Hawai'i County Council



Email: [communications@ulupono.com](mailto:communications@ulupono.com)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS  
Thursday, February 20, 2020 — 10:35 a.m. — Room 211

**Ulupono Initiative supports SB 2379, Relating to Cesspools.**

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Members of the Committee:

My name is Amy Hennessey, and I am the Senior Vice President of Communications & External Affairs at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-based impact investment firm that strives to improve our community's quality of life by creating more locally produced food; increasing affordable clean renewable energy and transportation options; and better managing waste and fresh water resources.

**Ulupono supports SB 2379**, which requires the Sea Grant College Program, with the Department of Health, to develop and conduct a 2-year comprehensive statewide outreach program that provides science-based information and understanding of sewage contamination sources in nearshore marine areas; increases understanding of sewage capacity needs; and informs all stakeholders of appropriate solutions for cesspool conversion. This bill also requires the Water Resources Research Center to research wastewater system technologies to determine the most cost-effective way to upgrade cesspools in Hawai'i and reduce their impact on drinking water and groundwater.

Hawai'i has over 88,000 cesspools statewide that discharge more than 53 million gallons of untreated sewage into the State's waters each day. This poses major health and environmental risks to our drinking water, groundwater, streams, and shore waters. Ulupono supports local community engagement statewide for sustainable waste management practices. Increasing awareness for cesspool conversions is important in moving the State toward environmentally-friendly solutions for waste management.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Amy Hennessey, APR  
Senior Vice President, Communications & External Affairs

*Investing in a Sustainable Hawai'i*

**SB-2379**

Submitted on: 2/16/2020 12:44:46 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/20/2020 10:35:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Carmie Spellman	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Dear Honorable Legislators:

Aloha. My name is Carmie Spellman, I live in Lahaina, Maui. In my neighborhood there are few cesspools extremely close to the ocean and have been there for a very long time. They would benefit this study greatly by perhaps using your research to improve the current conditions. Perhaps a case study that would benefit all parties. I believe them to be over a 100 years old. But I may be mistaken about the length of time. Of great importance, I know you do not want to hear this but, we must eliminate cess pools completely. Of course that would be a slow process and probably not favorable but absolutely necessary with the inevitable sea rise. It is not healthy for residents or tourist. I support this SB2379 wholeheartedly. Preparedness through scientific research is awesome!



**SB-2379**

Submitted on: 2/19/2020 10:25:41 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/20/2020 10:35:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Henri Etta Schmitz	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

**SB-2379**

Submitted on: 2/18/2020 11:50:34 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/20/2020 10:35:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Phaethon Keeney	Individual	Support	No

Comments: