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GOVERNOR OF
HAWAII



**STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES**

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**Testimony of
SUZANNE D. CASE
Chairperson**

**Before the Senate Committee on
WAYS AND MEANS**

**Thursday, February 20, 2020
1:00 P.M.
State Capitol, Conference Room 211**

**In consideration of
SENATE BILL 2788
RELATING TO DISASTER RELIEF**

Senate Bill 2788 proposes to extend the lapse date of the appropriation for Kauai flooding disaster relief made by Act 12, Session Laws of Hawaii 2018, to June 30, 2021. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure.**

The Department sustained substantial damage to its facilities on Kauai and Oahu due to the heavy rains and flooding events in April 2018. The Department received Act 12 funds for recovery response for several locations and facilities and is currently implementing these projects. The additional time to perform the flood response work will be appreciated.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

SUZANNE D. CASE
CHAIRPERSON
BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMISSION ON WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

ROBERT K. MASUDA
FIRST DEPUTY

M. KALEO MANUEL
DEPUTY DIRECTOR - WATER

AQUATIC RESOURCES
BOATING AND OCEAN RECREATION
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LAND
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STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
HAWAII EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 2788,
RELATING TO DISASTER RELIEF

Before the House Committee on
WAYS AND MEANS

By

Thomas L. Travis
Administrator, Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA)

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Keith-Agaran and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA) **supports** Senate Bill 2788.

Senate Bill 2788 extends the lapse date of the appropriation for Kauai flooding disaster relief made by Act 12, Session Laws of Hawaii 2018, to June 30, 2021.

The County of Kauai has identified projects in collaboration with HI-EMA, taking advantage of these funds. Extending the lapse date will ensure these projects are executed in a deliberate fashion, taking advantage of opportunities for possible federal funding on the larger projects.

Note: My comments represent HI-EMA concerns at the state emergency management level only. I would defer to the separate comment/testimonies of the county emergency management agencies, as they would be the jurisdictions impacted by this legislation at the local level.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 2788.

Thomas L. Travis: Thomas.L.Travis@hawaii.gov; 808-733-4300

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

ATTN: CHAIR DONOVAN M. DELA CRUZ &

VICE-CHAIR GILBERT KEITH-AGARAN

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF S.B. 2788

Relating to Disaster Relief

February 20, 2020 1:00 p.m.

Conference Room 211

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Keith-Agaran and Members of this Honorable Committee,

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Wai'oli Valley Taro Hui on the very important issue of disaster relief for our County of Kaua'i. Since the devastating floods of 2018, our small Hui of about a dozen farmers has been working closely with staff at the Department of Land and Natural Resources ("DLNR") and County of Kaua'i (in addition to rehabilitating our own farms) to resume the important work of kalo cultivation. Despite everyone's best efforts, the contract for vital repairs to our Native Hawaiian irrigation system and mānowai in particular (water intake from Wai'oli Stream) has not yet been finalized, even with the cooperation of federal, state, and county agencies and multiple emergency proclamations. Senate Bill 2788 is critical to enable the restoration envisioned by Act 12 in 2018. Unless this bill passes, the necessary repair work to our water system will not likely be completed before funding lapses.

Immediately after the first flood in April 2018, our water supply was totally cut off. Luckily, we were able to restore some flow to our system with the help of numerous volunteers, which allowed us to continue farming, but in no way was the volume close to the pre-flood conditions. As with many issues in our community, we all work together to collectively steward our irrigation system and land. But, we now have boulders the size of trucks impeding our water supply, and we cannot remove those by hand. Over the last two years, we have continued to have weather events that cut off the water supply because the overall system was so heavily damaged. This has created a lot of problems as the low water flow at times has made it hard for our farmers to replant, which in turn makes it even harder to recover from the 2018 floods. Those floods damaged all of our equipment, and many of us were not able to prepare new fields for planting for 3-4 months and some farmers have still not repaired some of their fields. With the water/equipment issues and the silt that was deposited in the fields, the crop yields since the floods have been very low. I am currently down 40% when compared to my pre-flood production. Due to these and other impacts, I have had to go back to my career as an engineer for a contractor on Kaua'i, which is why I am unable to be there in person today. It was not my plan or my wish to do so. But with my farm being relatively small and the loss of production, it was a decision I needed to make to financially support my family. I still continue to work the farm on a part time basis with the hope that once our water system is repaired, I can complete the recovery and return to farming full time. Other farmers in our Hui have similar stories.

As you may know, many of us here in Wai‘oli Valley are Native Hawaiian and small family farmers who were born and raised on Kaua‘i and continue to care for the same ‘āina that our families have stewarded for more than a century, my own ‘ohana included. For others, however, it has been many centuries of stewardship, which we aim to continue. As a Hui, it is our mission to support and enhance the ma uka to ma kai biocultural resources in the Wai‘oli Stream and Hanalei Valley watersheds, protect the natural and cultural resources that enable traditional and customary Native Hawaiian practices, maintain habitat for endangered Hawaiian waterbirds, and engage the greater Kaua‘i community through educational outreach programs and initiatives relating to the farming of taro and community-based stewardship of water resources. Although our community has always been close, we did not formally organize as a non-profit until 2019, after the devastating floods made it painfully clear that our entire community and way of life was at risk.

We submit this testimony today to ask for your kōkua. The ‘ohana in our Hui are incredibly hard working and determined to continue the traditions that have maintained our quality of life in Wai‘oli and supplied our community -- and indeed much of Hawai‘i -- with kalo and poi for centuries. Despite our resilience, the 2018 floods devastated our mānowai, po‘owai, and ‘auwai system and Wai‘oli River completely changed course in some areas. Given the extent of the damage, we need help to clear the flood debris and restore our system and way of life. Again, despite best efforts, the contract for critical work on our irrigation system has not yet been finalized. So, two years after the floods, repairs with funding via Act 12 have not yet begun. Senate Bill 2788 is critical to enable the restoration envisioned in 2018.

Please pass Senate Bill 2788. Doing so will undoubtedly impact our farms, families, and livelihoods for generations to come.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Reid Yoshida
President, Wai‘oli Valley Taro Hui
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