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Governor

JOSH GREEN
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Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

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TESTIMONY OF PHYLLIS SHIMABUKURO-GEISER
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2021

1:00 P.M.

Via VIDEOCONFERENCE

SCR 46 / SR 31
REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE TO
ESTABLISH A KONA AREA AGRICULTURAL WORKING GROUP
TO PROMOTE AGRICULTURE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND HOUSING

Chairperson Gabbard and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Resolution 31. This measure requests the Department of Agriculture ("Department") to establish a Kona area agricultural working group to promote agriculture, economic development, and housing. The Department offers comments with strong concerns.

The Department appreciates the intent of this measure, however, given its extremely broad and ambitious scope, we have extremely serious reservations regarding our ability to effectively address the stated objectives and meet the expectations of this resolution. This resolution contemplates a complex collaboration of state, county, and private expertise to devise a comprehensive integration of resources and services to establish a framework that will meet laudable goals for the development of agriculture, affordable housing, and public infrastructure while promoting desirable



environmental and cultural practices. This huge task cannot be accomplished effectively without substantial financial and personnel resources to research all the requested opportunities and options. Regretfully, the Department lacks the resources, staffing, and expertise to oversee this effort that has been compounded by the demands for cutbacks imposed by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as demonstrated by the proposed dramatic reductions in our staff position counts and operating budget. To accomplish an all-encompassing planning effort such as this, the department would require significant additional funding to hire a consultant.

The objectives of this measure are substantially akin to devising a master or regional plan for agriculture, housing, and infrastructure in the Kona area. As such, it may be more appropriate for the County of Hawaii, as the appropriate planning authority, to lead the effort as they have a Kona Community Development Plan which was adopted in 2008. This plan touches on many of the issues listed in this resolution. They would be a better fit as they have more experience in local economic development. The Department respectfully suggests rather than using the Keahole Agricultural Park as the impetus for developing a comprehensive regional development plan, that the County of Hawaii be requested to identify what it believes to be key issues, constraints, and opportunities in economic development, housing, agriculture, and other priorities, with the input of the agencies and organizations identified in this resolution. Then, perhaps, the County can determine what parts of the existing Kona Community Development Plan should be updated to reflect current situations and possible solutions that are realistic from a capital and operating cost perspective. Under this scenario, the department could provide input to the agricultural aspects of the study, without being burdened with oversight of other issues such as energy, housing, homesteading, wastewater treatment, potable use, and transportation, in which it has no expertise.

The Department anticipates that regardless of which agency is designated to lead this effort, it will be difficult to meet the expectations of this resolution without additional funding and possibly, manpower. Additionally, any effort for such a

complicated planning task would require more than the allotted time to complete. We estimate a minimum of 18 months with a starting funding request of \$500,000.