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JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

Testimony of **John Mizuno**
Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness
Before the
House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs
February 13, 2024
2:00 p.m., Conference Room 325

In consideration of
House Bill No. 2328 HD1
RELATING TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Takayama, and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support and to offer comments for HB2328 HD1 which appropriates funds to the Hawai'i Public Housing Authority to acquire and renovate parcels and buildings located between Bethel Street, Pauahi Street, Fort Street, and Chaplain Lane for affordable housing purposes. It requires units to be affordable to households having income that does not exceed an unspecified percentage of the area median income.

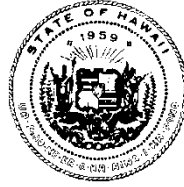
The average area median income is **30% and below** for individuals experiencing homelessness in Hawai'i. I recommend that the percentage specified in section 2(b) reflect this, to ensure that units are affordable to those experiencing homelessness or at risk.

This measure will allow our state to reduce and prevent homelessness by investing and increasing our inventory of affordable housing. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of this bill.

Mahalo,

John Mizuno
Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



HAKIM OUANSAFI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BARBARA E. ARASHIRO
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

STATE OF HAWAII
HAWAII PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY
1002 NORTH SCHOOL STREET
POST OFFICE BOX 17907
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817

IN REPLY, PLEASE REFER TO:

Statement of
Hakim Ouansafi, Executive Director
Hawaii Public Housing Authority

Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Tuesday, February 13, 2024
2:00 PM – Room 325, Hawaii State Capitol

In consideration of
HB 2328, HD1
RELATING TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Honorable Chair Tarnas, and members of the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill (HB) 2328, HD1, relating to affordable housing.

The Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA) **supports** HB 2328, HD1, which appropriates moneys to the Hawai'i Public Housing Authority to acquire and renovate parcels and buildings located between Bethel Street, Pauahi Street, Fort Street, and Chaplain Lane for affordable housing purposes. Requires units to be affordable to households having an income that does not exceed an unspecified percentage of the area median income, as determined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, in perpetuity. Exempts contracts from low-bid requirements. Declares that the appropriation exceeds the state general fund expenditure ceiling for 2024-2025.

The HPHA believes in increasing affordable housing to combat our current housing crisis and we support measures that promote the adaptive reuse of existing, underutilized buildings for affordable housing purposes. Please be advised that should this measure becomes law, consultant services, legal services, and other costs will be incurred prior to the purchase to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. The HPHA will perform the necessary due diligence, prior to finalizing the purchase, including making sure that:

- 1- These properties can be converted into affordable housing at a reasonable cost.
- 2- Appraisals, inspections and cost comp analysis will be conducted to determine the fair value.

Please know that the HPHA stands ready to assist the Legislature in this endeavor and looks at this measure as an opportunity to be part of the overall solution needed to address all housing related issues in Hawaii.

The HPHA appreciates the opportunity to provide the Committee with the HPHA's testimony. We thank you very much for your dedicated support.

HB-2328-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/10/2024 2:12:56 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/13/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dana Ha	Individual	Oppose	In Person

Comments:

I oppose HB2328 because Fort Street Mall has been an important part of Downtown Chinatown's history and places like Scarlet's and Proof Social Club have been spaces for LGBTQ+ to go to. If these developers don't have these places in mind, then where would we go? Hawaii is one of the most LGBTQ+ accepting states, so tearing these spaces down would not be true to that sentiment.

HB-2328-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/9/2024 5:51:55 PM

Testimony for JHA on 2/13/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kayla Marie	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm writing to voice my strong opposition to this bill. Closing the old Blaisdell hotel will be highly detrimental to the vibrant China town community. The businesses located within the buildings that would be converted into housing provide a home a variety of working artists and queer people. It's a space for us to come together and create the community that makes this neighborhood so wonderful. The old Blaisdell itself is also a historic part of downtown. It would be a tragedy to see it torn down. It also doesn't make sense to force those small local businesses to close when so many other buildings in the neighborhood remain vacant. I also take issue with a representative introducing legislation that would fundamentally change the culture of a district he does not represent.

Save the arts in China town and don't pass this bill

HB-2328-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/11/2024 11:14:09 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/13/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Regina Gregory	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

support

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Takayama, and JHA Committee Members,

My name is Adele Balderston, I live in Pu'unui and I **vehemently oppose** this measure in its current form. As a kama'aina and lifelong renter living under constant threat of being displaced or priced out of my home, I understand the need for more affordable housing in Hawai'i all too well. However, as an urban planner, former service industry worker, and longtime member of Chinatown's creative community, I cannot support a project that risks the destruction of historically significant buildings and the displacement of half a dozen or more small business tenants.

In addition to being the home of Chinatown staples Proof Public House, J. Dolans, and Scarlet Honolulu--businesses that managed to stay afloat through the pandemic and consistently bring crowds of patrons to the neighborhood--the three buildings targeted by this measure are all historic and cultural resources. Though they are located just outside the Chinatown Historic District (see attached map for reference), all three are considered "Historic Property" as defined by HRS Chapter §6E-2 and would therefore require SHPD review before any renovation or development project could begin.



[The old Blaisdell Hotel building](#) is individually eligible for the State and National Registers under multiple criteria. The building is at least 110 years old and was designed by celebrated architects Emory & Webb who also designed the Hawai'i Theater, the State Art Museum, Princess Ruth Ke'elikolani Middle School, and several other NRHP listed buildings. It was originally owned and operated by Cora Blaisdell whose grandson, Neal Shaw Blaisdell, served as Mayor of Honolulu from 1955 until 1969. Since the building was converted to office space in 1980, it has provided affordable workspaces for artists, musicians, startups, community organizations, and nonprofits--[it even served as the ACLU headquarters in 1990 during the Baehr v. Lewin litigation.](#)

If this measure included provisions guaranteeing the buildings would be preserved and current business tenants would not be displaced, I might support this bill. Still, this block is a strange choice for affordable housing--why not purchase the undeveloped lot a few yards away on Bethel and Beretania instead? Surely a vacant lot owned by a single entity (as opposed to three) would be cheaper and easier for the state to acquire and turn into affordable housing. Or if the state is committed to adaptive reuse, it would make more sense to select a building which could accurately be called "underutilized," unlike the lively and active sites targeted by this bill. For instance, just two blocks makai on Bethel Street the 108,000 square-foot former Walmart building is sitting completely vacant. [When it closed last April, City Councilmember Tyler Dos Santos-Tam spoke to Hawaii News Now and suggested turning the space into affordable housing.](#) In the same story, real estate expert Stephany Sofos told HNN "When you have a boarded up space, it brings in bad elements. Not only homeless, but drug problems, gangs -- it's not a safe place."

Isn't the point of adaptive reuse projects to convert *vacant* spaces into active ones in order to cut down on crime and urban blight? If so, why target active spaces instead? In the interest of efficiency--because there is no denying the urgent need for more affordable housing--I strongly advise the legislature to adopt a more transparent selection process for potential adaptive reuse sites.

Mahalo for taking the time to read my testimony **opposing** this measure and for considering the information and alternatives I have provided.

Respectfully,

Adele Balderston

HB-2328-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/12/2024 11:59:01 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/13/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ben Lowenthal	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Although affordable housing is necessary and a crisis in Hawaii, the Bethel Block has buildings of significant historical importance. If the housing authority is able to purchase the block, the historic nature of these buildings will bring in a new set of complications to building or refurbishing them to create affordable housing. It could cause unexpected delays and expenses. All the while, the housing crisis will worsen and it could end up costing more money than another site in the neighborhood.

We should not have to choose between historic preservation and affordable housing. There are vacant lots nearby and other more appropriate sites in the area. I respectfully oppose this bill and urge the Legislature to find other sites that do not endanger historic buildings. Mahalo.