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GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE  
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STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

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FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
KAHOOLAWE ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION  
LAND  
STATE PARKS

Testimony of  
DAWN N. S. CHANG  
Chairperson

Before the House Committee on  
TRANSPORTATION

Tuesday, February 13, 2024  
11:00 AM

State Capitol, Conference Room 312 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of  
HOUSE BILL 2650  
RELATING TO INVASIVE SPECIES

House Bill 2650 appropriates funds to the Department of Transportation (DOT) for the coordinated removal of *Albizia* and other invasive trees, and requires matching funds from public utilities. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure.**

The Department recognizes the threat invasive *Albizia* poses to natural areas, neighborhoods, and infrastructure because of the large, brittle limbs that are prone to breaking and falling in windy, rainy, or stormy weather conditions.

The need for extensive *Albizia* removal has already been made clear after the impacts of hurricane Iselle on the Big Island in 2014 where downed trees blocked roads and evacuation routes, cut utility lines, and damaged homes.

This situation is made worse as *Albizia* trees are one the faster growing trees in Hawai'i, growing up to 15 feet in one year. *Albizia's* large canopy shades out the sun for native Hawaiian flora, and its presence alters the soil content making it easier for invasive weeds to take hold.

Forests of *Albizia* are a problem across Hawai'i, and HISC is supportive of this bill which will help to address this invasive tree by incentivizing matching funds from utility providers to remove trees that threaten public roadways and utility infrastructure right-of-ways on public and private land.

We greatly appreciate the work of legislators on this measure and the opportunity to testify in support.

TESTIMONY OF  
LEODOLOFF R. ASUNCION, JR.  
CHAIR, PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
STATE OF HAWAII

TO THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION

February 13, 2024  
11:00a.m.

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Kila, and Members of the Committee:

**MEASURE:** H.B. No. 2650  
**TITLE:** RELATING TO INVASIVE SPECIES.

**DESCRIPTION:** Appropriates funds to the Department of Transportation for the coordinated removal of albizia and other invasive trees. Requires matching funds from public utilities.

**POSITION:**

The Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”) offers the following comments for consideration.

**COMMENTS:**

The Commission appreciates the intent of this measure to enhance public safety by supporting vegetation management to reduce threats to utility infrastructure and to enhance the Department of Transportation’s capacity to coordinate invasive tree removal with the added support of public utility matching funds. The Commission notes that, assuming matching funds are provided from a utility’s current vegetation management program, this cross-collaborative effort to manage vegetation would benefit ratepayers while also reaffirming the Commission’s commitment to reducing hazards to utility infrastructure and public safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



**Hawaiian  
Electric**

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION**

**HB 2650  
Relating to Invasive Species**

Tuesday, February 13, 2024  
11:00 AM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 312

Jennifer L. Zelko  
Director, Government and Community Affairs  
Hawaiian Electric

Dear Chair Todd, Vice Chair Kila, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jennifer Zelko and I am testifying on behalf of Hawaiian Electric in **strong support** of HB 2650, Relating to Invasive Species.

HB 2650 proposes to appropriate funds for the removal of albizia and other invasive trees that potentially threaten public roadways and utility infrastructure rights of way on public and private land, provided that the funds are matched by a public utility.

Albizia trees are a hazard to public safety and critical infrastructure. Strands of brittle, invasive trees up to 250 feet tall grow on many public and private properties. Tropical Storm Iselle brought down many Albizia trees, blocked roadways, and caused millions of dollars in damage to homes and important electric utility lines. Broken tree trunks continue to send out new growth creating even more unstable conditions, while seedlings are rapidly germinating in disturbed areas.

The Kona Low storm in December 2021 brought down many hazardous trees in east and west Hawaii on Hawaii island, which resulted in extended outages to many customers.

HB 2650 proposes to appropriate out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$1,000,000 for fiscal year 2024-2025 for the department of transportation to coordinate the removal of albizia and other invasive trees that potentially threaten public roadways and utility infrastructure rights of way on public and private land, provided that a public utility provides matching funds.

Accordingly, Hawaiian Electric strongly supports HB 2650. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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February 12, 2024

Hearing: Committee on Transportation  
RE: HB2650

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Kila, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express support for HB2650, which appropriates funds to the Department of Transportation for the coordinated removal of albizia and other invasive trees that threaten roadways. This bill is crucial in addressing the significant threat posed by albizia trees to our island's infrastructure and to public safety. Since 2013, the Big Island Invasive Species Committee (BIISC) has been actively involved in efforts to mitigate the impacts of albizia. These invasive trees have proven to be a serious problem, capable of causing widespread damage to property, infrastructure, and natural ecosystems.

The aftermath of Tropical Storm Iselle in 2014 highlighted the urgent need for coordinated action to address the albizia threat. The storm's impact was catastrophic, with fallen trees blocking roads making them impassable for emergency response personnel, motorists, and residents. People were left stranded for hours, and many endured weeks without power, causing immense hardship and economic losses. Iselle underscored the critical importance of proactive measures to mitigate the risk posed by albizia trees. Without intervention, we face the very real possibility of similar disasters occurring in the future, with potentially even more severe consequences.

HB2650 represents a significant step forward in efforts to combat the albizia threat. By providing funding for the coordinated removal of these invasive trees, the bill will help safeguard our communities, infrastructure, and natural environment. Furthermore, the requirement for matching funds from public utilities demonstrates a commitment to shared responsibility in addressing this issue.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this matter.

Na' u nō me ka mahalo,

Kawehi Young  
Community Engagement Liaison  
Big Island Invasive Species Committee

**HB-2650**

Submitted on: 2/13/2024 8:58:42 AM

Testimony for TRN on 2/13/2024 11:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Christy Martin	Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS)	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Kila, and Members of the Committee,

The Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS) is in support of this bill. Albizia and other fast-growing trees have inherently weaker limbs and structures and many also have shallow roots. Combined, these characteristics put them at a high risk for failure during high-wind and storm events. Providing support to the Department of Transportation to address these protects vital transportation corridors. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and we apologize for being late.

**HB-2650**

Submitted on: 2/11/2024 8:42:48 AM

Testimony for TRN on 2/13/2024 11:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
josephine tanimoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha. Mahalo for the opportunity to SUPPORT this Bill.

I would ask your consideration to provide funding access for ag lands and homeowners with Albizia issues. It is costly, some dangerous and need

government assistance. Mahalo