

STAND. COM. REP. NO. 3071

Honolulu, Hawaii

MAR 13 2024

RE: H.B. No. 2644
H.D. 2

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
Thirty-Second State Legislature
Regular Session of 2024
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Agriculture and Environment, to which was referred H.B. No. 2644, H.D. 2, entitled:

"A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO LITTLE FIRE ANTS,"

begs leave to report as follows:

The purpose and intent of this measure is to appropriate an unspecified amount of funds to support the Hawaii Ant Lab in mitigating the effects of little fire ants in the State, including for the hiring of an unspecified number of staff, community outreach, and operations.

Your Committee received testimony in support of this measure from the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Hawai'i Farm Bureau, Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species, Hawai'i Farmers Union United, Ka 'Ohana O Na Pua, Big Island Invasive Species Committee, Sierra Club of Hawai'i, and three individuals.

Your Committee received comments on this measure from the Department of Agriculture.

Your Committee finds that the Hawaii Ant Lab was established in 2009 to address the overwhelming need for research and assistance to address and eradicate little fire ants and other invasive ants in the State. Your Committee recognizes that little fire ants have caused significant disruption and economic damage on Hawaii Island and that little fire ant infestations on Oahu are



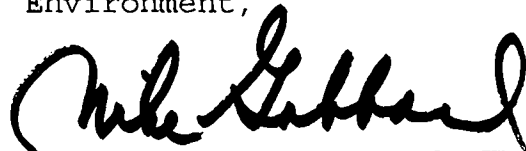
currently on the rise. This measure supports the Hawaii Ant Lab's efforts to add new staff and address the short- and long-term needs to control little fire ants.

Your Committee notes the Department of Agriculture's position that little fire ants cause a serious enough impact to native species and the environment to warrant dedicated, sustained funding to coordinate the diverse needs required for the detection, management, research, and control of invasive ant species and the contextual basis of operational knowledge at federal, state, and local levels to advance the Department's ability to detect, protect, and respond to invasive ant species. Your Committee further notes the following funding requests from the Department of Agriculture:

- (1) \$78,000 for the creation of an exempt entomologist position (SR-26) within the Plant Pest Control Branch to serve as the State's lead on little fire ants and invasive ant issues in recognition of the specialized background and skills required to lead such an effort;
- (2) \$1,000,000 to support the development of new facilities for the Plant Pest Control Branch to allow rigorous research and development into invasive ants; and
- (3) \$500,000 to provide funding to support the Hawaii Ant Lab to work in partnership with Plant Pest Control Branch.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Agriculture and Environment that is attached to this report, your Committee is in accord with the intent and purpose of H.B. No. 2644, H.D. 2, and recommends that it pass Second Reading and be referred to your Committee on Ways and Means.

Respectfully submitted on
behalf of the members of the
Committee on Agriculture and
Environment,



MIKE GABBARD, Chair



