



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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April 4, 2024

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

House Bill 2328 HD2 SD1 – Relating to Affordable Housing

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) offers comments on House Bill 2328 HD2 SD1 – Relating to Affordable Housing.

This bill addresses the housing crisis by appropriating funds to the Hawaii Public Housing Authority to acquire and renovate parcels and buildings located between Bethel Street, Pauahi Street, Fort Street, and Chaplain Lane in Honolulu, Oahu, for affordable housing purposes. It requires units to be affordable to households having an income that does not exceed an unspecified percentage of the area median income.

The housing crisis is magnified for people with disabilities as many units are not designed to be accessible. In addition to addressing the housing shortage, legislation should address the quantity of supportive housing units that are accessible to people with mobility and communication disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design (ADA Standards) specifies the minimum percentage of accessible housing units in public facilities. The ADA Standards only requires five percent of units to be accessible for mobility disabilities and two percent of units to be accessible for communication disabilities. The Fair Housing Act (FHA) design and construction requirements specifies the minimum number of adaptable housing units in public and private buildings containing four or more units. The FHA requires all dwelling units to be adaptable for mobility disabilities in buildings with an elevator, but only requires ground floor units to be adaptable for mobility disabilities in buildings without an elevator. The FHA does not require units to be adaptable for communication disabilities.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 Disability Characteristics for the State of Hawaii, 19.1 percent of Hawaii's residents that are sixty five years and older have mobility difficulty, 12.6 percent have hearing difficulty, and 4.7 percent have vision difficulty. The following adjustments that exceed minimum accessibility and adaptability requirements would provide Hawaii residents with disabilities the opportunity to live independently:

- In public facilities with residential dwelling units, at least twenty percent, but no fewer than one unit, of the total number of residential dwelling units shall provide mobility features that comply with applicable technical requirements in the ADA Standards.
- In public facilities with residential dwelling units, at least thirteen percent, but no fewer than one unit, of the total number of residential dwelling units shall provide communication features that comply with applicable technical requirements in the ADA Standards.

- In multi-story buildings with four or more residential dwelling units, an elevator shall connect each story and all dwelling units shall comply with the FHA design and construction requirements.

Investing in accessible housing would ensure that more residential units would be available for individuals with disabilities and their families.

Thank you for considering our position.

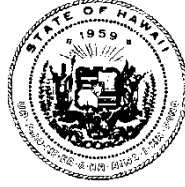
Respectfully submitted,



KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR



DEAN MINAKAMI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM
HAWAII HOUSING FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
677 QUEEN STREET, SUITE 300
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
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Statement of DEAN MINAKAMI

Hawaii Housing Finance and Development Corporation
Before the

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

April 04, 2024 at 10:15 a.m.
State Capitol, Room 211

In consideration of HB 2328 HD2 SD1 RELATING TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the Committee:

HHFDC **supports the intent** of HB 2328 HD2 SD1, so long as it does not adversely impact priorities identified in the Executive Supplemental Budget Request for FY2025.

This bill appropriates funds to HHFDC to acquire and renovate three commercial properties located in the Downtown/Chinatown district of Honolulu for affordable housing purposes, among other things. HHFDC supports adaptive reuse of existing buildings as one of many policies that could help to address the undersupply of housing units across the state.

The SD1 blanked out the \$30 million appropriation included in the bill's original draft. Because HHFDC has not held any discussions with the property owner about its sales price expectation, no market value appraisal report has been provided, and acquisition due diligence must be undertaken, it's unclear whether \$30 million would be sufficient to undertake the project.

We estimate that due diligence and acquisition costs for legal services, property condition assessment, environmental site assessment, survey work, title insurance, and the like would cost up to \$750,000. A contingency of \$250,000 should be allowed for asset and property management services that may be required from the time of acquisition until full-scale renovations are underway.

Respectfully, HHFDC requests the following **amendments**:

We request that Section 2, subsection (b), Section 2 of the bill be deleted. This mandates that contracts awarded pursuant to this use the competitive sealed proposal method of procurement pursuant to Section 103D-303, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), also known as the Procurement Code.

- Most of the due diligence services described would be procured using either the professional services or small purchases methods, and not the competitive sealed proposal method.
- Should HHDC acquire the properties, it would issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) from qualified developers to renovate the buildings for affordable housing use under a long-term ground lease from HHFDC.
- The solicitation of a developer to own and renovate the properties under a ground lease is not subject to the Procurement Code, which governs the acquisition of all goods, services, and construction.
 - The definition of “goods” in HRS Section 103D-104 expressly excludes “land or a permanent interest in land, leases of real property, and office rentals.”
 - To ensure fairness and transparency of process, HHFDC’s RFP process is closely aligned with the competitive sealed proposals process specified in HRS Section 103D-303 and the related administrative rules. However, real estate transactions often require negotiations and other factors that may not be permitted under the Procurement Code, and HHFDC requires some deviation from the statutory process for goods, services, and construction.

Additionally, we request removing the provision on page 2, lines 8-9, requiring the housing units “remain affordable in perpetuity.” Affordability terms should be tied to the expected useful life of the building improvements currently being financed. It’s unreasonable to require the use of real property to be limited to affordable-housing purposes in perpetuity due to a financing transaction for improvements that are not perpetual in their longevity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

4-2-24

Aloha Chair, Vice-Chair and Committee members,

I am writing in opposition of HB2328. While it is true that the state is in need of affordable housing, converting the “Bethel Block” is far from the only tenable solution. There are swaths of empty buildings in our neighborhood, and utilizing an unoccupied building for conversion would not displace dozens of small businesses and put 100+ people out of their jobs, which *will* be a consequence of HB2328.

The Blaisdell Hotel is a historic building. It has a storied past, and was home to Hawaii’s first liquor license. It is also especially significant in Hawaii’s LGBTQIA+ history – it was home to the Gay Community Center and the ACLU’s office in decades past, which were instrumental in legalizing gay marriage not just in Hawaii but across the entire country. In addition to it’s history, the Blaisdell currently serves as studios and offices for dozens of creatives. Chinatown is recognized island-wide as a hub for artists and entertainers, and the present-day Blaisdell is crucial in supporting working artists.

As a historic building, the Blaisdell is over 100 years old – meaning it’s electric, plumbing and ‘bones’ are over a century old as well. I may not be a contractor, but I have hired many electricians and plumbers to fix issues in the building, and can say with absolute certainty that this building cannot be converted to affordable housing. Implementing affordable housing on this property would require the complete tear-down of a historic and important building.

I urge you to consider the drastic negative economic and social effects HB2328 would have on the entire neighborhood, and vote against this bill.

Thank you,

Jasmine Mancos
Owner, Proof Social Club

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 2:46:42 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacob Carreira	Testifying for Skull-Face Books and Vinyl	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello, my name is Jacob Carreira. I am the General Manager of Skull-Face Books and Vinyl, on 1148 Bethel Street. We are a new bookstore located right across the street from these proposed affordable housing units. Not only would building this destroy long standing, successful businesses and a community, but it would severely hurt surrounding businesses like ours. If you want to destroy a large portion of downtown Honolulu's economy, this is the way to go. There are many abandoned and unused buildings scattered across the area, and yet the choice to destroy an area that is bustling with people and local artists and buildings is baffling. The construction alone would block parking and traffic from all the businesses in the surrounding area. I have been an active part of the downtown "Arts District" for about 16 years, and can see nothing good coming from this except a broken economy, and higher crime rates. Ive seen several "Boom of bust" situations in this area, and I believe this would "bust" it permanently. I urge you not to let this pass, or you will destroy our business that we just worked so hard on bringing to life, and so many others.

Thank you, Jacob Carreira

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 3:41:24 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jonathan Isabelo	Testifying for Proof Social Club	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am opposing this Bill as Rep. Saiki and those supporting it have seemingly refused to meet with businesses being affected by the proposals. These businesses are LGBTQ+ safe spaces that also provide venues of entertainment for locals and tourists.

The Blaisdell has historic as well as modern significance, which is why it is disheartening to hear of proposed “conversions”. Such proposals for lodging often bring about demolitions, not retrofitting old structures. This would displace at least 100 employees and tenants. Taking away that many jobs for residential units is not an economically viable proposal.

It would also behoove Rep. Saiki and his supporters on this proposal to consider that this is targeting an LGBTQ+ safe space. With Scarlet, Proof Social Club and other businesses proudly run by, employing and catering to LGBTQ+ residents, it provides an area of relief for marginalized communities in a fractured political climate. As they have not met with the owners or managers of these businesses, unintentionally or not, residents may infer that Rep Saiki and his supporters are displacing these venues with no quarter or proposed alternative is only a way to erase them.

Honolulu residents have also not been provided a list of vacant properties or units that are currently available. The conjecture being that “affordable housing” proposals have inflated purpose and that this proposal is only demolishing local eateries, entertainment venues and other small businesses for an opaque purpose with no detailed public plan.

I again implore the Hawaii State Legislature to reject this Bill and reach out to the businesses that would be affected by it to further improve Chinatown WITH the community.



CARES

A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT

Dear Chairs, Vice Chairs & the EET and HRE Committee members,

LATE

My name is Angela Melody Young and I'm in opposition to HB 2328 that seeks to appropriate funds to the Hawai'i Housing Finance and Development Corporation for the acquisition and renovation of parcels and buildings located in the downtown district for affordable housing purposes. Although affordable housing a dire need and the pressure to create more density is felt at the County & State level, it cannot be done by eliminating business, restaurants, art businesses & vendors.

The goal in advocating for affordable housing is not about getting businesses & restaurants to leave so land can be developed. Businesses, restaurants, fashion designers & artists are what makes downtown so vibrant. Furthermore, the downtown district is a cultural treasure. The State should not buy out restaurants & businesses to displace employees who have families they have to feed.

Housing development is a pressing issue. I support SB 3202 which has started a healthy & robust discussion at the Honolulu City Council about subdivision & infrastructure. The Honolulu County has responded with a resolution. Working with the counties, addressing zoning & permitting concerns specific to each district, learning about how to build infrastructure together is more practical then trying to develop land with a big buy out deal.

Blessings,

CARES

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 4:43:17 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kristen Allspaw	Testifying for J. Dolan's	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I opposed this bill.

There are plenty of other empty billings to consider in the Chinatown area. Why were these three picked? Prior to the bill being introduced, did anyone speak to the community and the tenants who have businesses in these buildings?

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 9:51:17 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
lynne matusow	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is a plan to destroy landmark, historical establishments, social spaces, medical offices, art galleries, museums, eateries, used by the thousands who live in the area as well as commuters, tourists and others all in the name of more affordable housing. We have block parties. We who live and/or work here are blessed with a vibrant, active community, which patronizes the area day and night. Recently added is a local hotel, with one or two more planned.

Utter madness. Don't come in and destroy something valuable. Instead, find another location, nearby or further away. We do not need affordable housing (which will probably be like most of the other affordable housing, truly unaffordable, and quoted in terms of a formula instead of actual dollar amounts.

What the area really needs, for the health and welfare of those who live and work and transit, is a public, active park, with trees, benches, pickle ball and tennis courts. The area has been plagued with a big deficiency in this amenity, since before I came to live here more than 35 years ago. You should take a holistic look and plan accordingly, instead of listening to the chant of more affordable housing and all else be damned.

Please kill this bill now. It is as misguided as others which fortunately died this session, i.e., letting HCDA take over Lahaina redevelopment, killing funding for the arts, to name to. This bill deserves to be added to that list.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 5:29:43 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

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

Comments:

I oppose this measure the old Blaisdell hotel is a historic building and I do not support the gentrification of China town

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 9:38:37 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anna Kelly	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The location and specific blocks being selected in this measure include small businesses and community spaces that contribute to the history and culture of our downtown Honolulu home. It would be a disservice to an already struggling local economy to convert these places, rather than others, into affordable housing. Convert old office space. Old warehouses in kakaako and kalihi kai. Don't tear down functioning gathering spaces that our community, particularly our young community, values.

Thank you.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 9:44:55 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rebekah Ellis	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Do not destroy the historic Bethel Block! Find another unoccupied location for this project that will not compromise an historic structure, displace dozens of beloved small business, and cost 100+ workers their jobs.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 9:46:42 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gino Ramos	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Oppose

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 9:50:13 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Austin Mills	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I want to voice my strong opposition to this bill. I work next door to the proposed site, on Bethel street, and am a frequent customer to several of the businesses there.

I believe affordable housing is important but the legislature should find less impactful sites. There is no shortage of vacant buildings and choosing to displace iconic Chinatown businesses is outrageous.

Mahalo for your consideration.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 9:52:11 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jonathan Yeater	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello,

My name is Jonathan Yeater and I'm submitting testimony as a patron of the businesses potentially affected by this bill. My concern is in regard to the intent of the bill for affordable housing; several small, locally owned businesses reside on the premises which might cause the employees of said businesses to require the housing themselves if their livelihood as taken. I am a proponent of government services as I've utilized them as a child living with a single parent and as an adult during unemployment in the COVID era. That said, I believe those services should not come at the cost of others and potentially exacerbate the condition which the bill seeks to alleviate.

Besides the businesses that reside in the Blaisdell Hotel, the building is a vital source of creative incubation as several musicians occupy the rooms as rehearsal spaces and recording studios. I'm trying to remain objective, but it feels as if the arts and creativity are being treated as an afterthought as this bill comes off the heels of another bill which would have shuttered the Honolulu Museum of Art. I implore the session to recognize the vital nature of these communities to flourish and nurture rather than neglect these artists.

in closing, this bill has good intentions but is seeking the wrong residence for its purpose. Please allow the entrepreneurs, the artists, the creatives and the patrons that reside and pay taxes to this government to continue shaping this great island and city.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 9:54:15 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jonathan	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is a misguided decision that puts the local culture and history of Chinatown at risk. These are historical buildings, many of which foster the arts and businesses that employ dozens and dozens of people. This is simply a "band-aid" solution that does not take into full consideration the short term and long term effects. Please reconsider this.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 9:56:31 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James Ludewig	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

There are plenty of vacant/underused buildings and land in and around Honolulu that could be considered for affordable housing. Attempting to convert or tear down a historic building that currently houses many local businesses is simply unnecessary. Please do not allow this plan to move forward!

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 10:06:20 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Soumyajeet Chattaraj	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Blaisdell is a historic building! This building has a storied past, and held the state's first liquor license. It is also over 100 years old - there's not a contractor on Earth who would attempt to convert the building's century old plumbing and electric; which would make this a tear-down, not a conversion.

Further, there are swaths of unoccupied buildings in our neighborhood - the Bethel Block is not the only option for affordable housing conversions. HB2328 would displace dozens of operational businesses, putting 100+ folks out of a job.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 10:28:01 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megahn Chun	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose because this would close many small businesses, putting many people out of work. And secondly because this would require tearing down a historic building instead of converting it into anything else.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 10:30:37 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Trevor	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose the this bill

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 10:31:21 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda Morris	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I as a community member in the downtown and Chinatown arts community oppose this bill.

The business and places this historic building has and still houses has its part of the bigger community it serves.

As much as affordable housing is a great idea the displacement of businesses such as proof social club, scarlet, and the many spaces that provide artists to practice is removing the life line of spaces for artists in this area would be a detriment to its community.

If improvement is what is needed looked to incorporate the history of the historic building; and I'm not meaning a plaque slapped on but by keeping the actual spaces that the businesses already existing and doing well provide.

There are many other empty spaces to fill in and create affordable housing. Please look at those empty spaces instead.

Please save the history, the historic building, and the many creative spaces its holds.. Thank you for your time and consideration in opposing this hb2328 bill.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 10:46:33 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Theresa Fune	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Do not replace the businesses currently in place ! This is a historic building ! Do not turn it into affordable housing, choose somewhere else ! Lots of other businesses have been there for a long time , you'd be ruining A LOT of peoples lives

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 10:55:09 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Miller Royer	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill because of the hardship it would cause to small local businesses, some of them who have been there for over a decade, and survived covid only to be forced to move or close. I do not feel that this project would properly address the housing crisis, and there are other properties or office buildings which could be converted.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 11:11:32 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Julia Cornell	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I worked in the downtown district in the corner of Nu'uauu and Pauahi for almost a decade. The businesses and store fronts on the Bethel block serve as cultural hubs for many communities and destroying them will devoid the downtown district of anything desirable. That block is not a logical spot for a residential building as it is surrounded by business towers and the Theater. As a low income citizen who cannot afford low income housing, I doubt the integrity of this bill and I think it is just another thoutless attempt on city planning.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 11:19:10 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
KEALA FUNG	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha!

My name is Keala Fung and I live here in Honolulu and I strongly oppose HB2328!

The Blaisdell is a historic building! This building has a storied past, held the state's first liquor license, and has significant importance to LGBTQ+ history in Hawaii. It is also over 100 years old - the infrastructure is so old they would have to tear it down and rebuild. No way!!

The Blaisdell Hotel building houses Proof which is a cornerstone of Chinatown's art scene and one of the foundational spaces that has kept Chinatown alive and kicking and gives people a reason to come down here.

There are so many unoccupied buildings in our neighborhood - the Bethel Block is not the only option for affordable housing conversions. HB2328 would displace dozens of operational businesses, putting 100+ folks out of a job.

I strongly urge you to NOT pass this bill. There are so many other buukdings nearby that can be considered for affordable housing. Please leave this block alone.

Mahalo,

Keala Fung

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 11:27:36 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janelle annese	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is a Chinatown staple for small business

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 11:35:52 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abigail Elder	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to oppose this bill on behalf of the multitude of businesses and lives that will be affected if this bill is passed. This area of Chinatown is a beloved historic area as I'm sure you're well aware of. To try to convert this area into affordable housing will be a large challenge in itself that will benefit very little. The cost alone that it would take to try to convert the Blaisdell itself far outweighs the benefits, not to mention there is not a single plumber that you could scrounge up that would take that job without paying a very pretty penny. Money that could very likely be used on more suitable buildings that are vacant. It would be an atrocity to rid this island of a large part of its history. This place is a hub for the whole island and helps circulate and build the economy that this island needs, giving countless people the means to live. Turning it into affordable housing would take away many viable, beneficial businesses which would ultimately take away from the hypothetical residents of this housing. I strongly urge you to ere on the side of logic, compassion, and humility when making this decision. I'm willing to bet that this would benefit your pockets, but it will not affect you the way it would the businesses and employees that work here and have been here for a very long time. Make this decision remembering this fact: we rely on this place, you do not.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 11:41:18 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leoven Mariano	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Opposing

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 11:54:50 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angel Giesen	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I do not support this bill. This would be destroying the few buildings left that bring history to the area. This building houses history. The loss of business and the loss of a local establishment that can support local artists would be lost too. I do not support this bill. This is NOT a good location for affordable housing.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 11:55:29 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Umipeg	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Michelle Umipeg and I oppose HB2328. I'm currently the assistant to the producers for an internationally televised TV show. I've had experience with community theatre and college radio. In the years I've performed in Chinatown at the Arts at Marks Garage and Kumu Kahua theatre, we would often go to what was formerly called the Mercury Bar (now called Proof Social Club) located at 1154 Fort Street Mall after performances. We would bond over drinks, enjoy the live music, as well as the music selected by DJs. I've also performed there, including DJ sets from KTUH FM Honolulu, the radio station at UH Manoa. I've befriended and formed strong bonds with the creative folks who would gather there.

I still go to Proof Social Club to support the creatives with their events, including Drag Brunch and Trivia Night. I've also gone to Scarlet to support the drag queens that performed there. Losing places like Proof and Scarlet would be a terrible blow to the creative scene, especially the LGBTQ+ community that I'm part of. Proof and Scarlet are sanctuaries and safe spaces for creative LGBTQ+ folks. Trivia Night is hosted by a trans man. Many creative types go to First Fridays at Capitol Modern then go to Proof and Scarlet after the Capitol Modern events close.

I've also fostered relationships with people from the performing arts and filmmaking communities over conversations we've had at Proof. We've been able to network and help each other out with our creative projects. I wouldn't have been able to get professional equipment for my upcoming short film if my friend who works at a film equipment company if we didn't have conversations about our projects at places like Proof. Also, I was able to meet a director who is friends with a local director, who later became a mentor to me and other emerging filmmakers at the 'Ohina Filmmakers Lab last year. I want to tell stories by marginalized people, and feature places like Proof and Scarlet as a backdrop to our wonderful, vibrant, and diverse creative community.

The Blaisdell hotel is a historic building. Losing a one hundred year old building will negatively impact the business owners and the patrons of these businesses.

Please consider my testimony as one of many who will be deeply affected by the loss of the cultural significance of the Bethel Block. Mahalo for your time.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 12:23:14 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Duncan Dalzell	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Many jobs would be lost, some of my favorite restaurants and buisnesses would be closed, and some of the only LGBTQ safe spaces would be eliminated.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 12:26:11 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christopher Natale	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This area is a second home to many artists, employees, business owners, and even the LGBTQ community. My band and I use the Blaisedell to rehearse every week, along with many other bands. I play shows at Proof Social Club, along with many other musicians. People migrate here to interact, socialize, and be their complete selves in a place they feel safe doing so. Please do not tear down these buildings and ruin things for our LOCAL COMMUNITY. Mahalo

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 12:28:59 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Julia Stowe	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This proposal for the state to buy the Bethel Block in Chinatown to create affordable housing would be a detriment to the culture, especially of the LGBTQ community, in the area. This area is a safe haven for a community of people and workers who strive to make these businesses a great place to spend time and keep money in Honolulu. Losing these historic buildings to affordable housing would have a negative impact on the neighborhood as a whole and its culture. I strongly urge the state to consider abandoned buildings for affordable housing with little historic value rather than an area with active, thriving businesses and architectural history.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 1:28:21 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alex Rosen	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As a born and raised voter who grew up in Chinatown and whose family has had businesses in Chinatown for 60 years I strongly oppose this bill. Beyond the many long time successful businesses that will struggle to find a home in the neighborhood. The properties in question will require upkeep that will be very expensive due to age, location and building style. If they are demolished and new construction is planned why is this the location being pursued? The parking situation will also be an issue considering this part of town already has a considerable lack of parking.

Mahalo

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 4:59:45 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Thoai Nguyen	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I opppse this bill. I oppose displacing all the local businesses that make this area unique. I oppose the destruction of a historical building that makes Chinatown., Chinatown. I would like this legislative body to be better and support small businesses and not destroy them.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 6:13:10 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jonathan Padwe	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this measure. Creating affordable housing while at the same time eliminating the key business/entertainment/commerce sectoe in that area will only lead to a further hollowing out of the downtown/Chinatown area. As a business owner who rents space in this area (on Horel St) I am strongly opposed to the measure.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 6:51:23 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jim Haba	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

One of my friends has a club where he does gigs and rehearsals on the Bethel Block. I've also heard that this building is about 100 years old. Renewing this building to create affordable housing would be like destroying the Iolani Palace. This is not worth destroying such buildings to create affordable housing.

Other high rises are being built as we talk about this, and most of those buildings have unoccupied rooms, yet locals cannot afford and purchase such rooms in these buildings.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 6:56:58 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patrick Thompson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good morning,

This bill will close many businesses in an historic area of Chinatown. These businesses have been established for decades and to remove and destroy the buildings and businesses would be a slap in the face for what the State of Hawaii and its people believe and stand for. Please find it in your heart not to destroy these places to build affordable housing but to protect these places and the Aina.

Thank you

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 7:27:41 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cameran	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This bill will destroy local queer/LGBTQ+ venues and hangout places and historic buildings over a hundred years old. It would displace 100+ local employees within the small businesses. While creating affordable housing should be a priority, please consider the impact this would have on more marginalized communities.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 7:32:57 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patricia Jette	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am gravely concerned about the redevelopment of the historic Blaisdell building on Fort Street. As a regular patron of local businesses including Proof Social, J. Dolan's, and Scarlett Nightclub, I believe this bill seriously threatens their longevity, and the character and community of that neighborhood. This beautiful, historic building needs to be updated and preserved - not destroyed in the name of "affordable housing." As a low-income resident of Oahu, I am witness to the fact that what has been established here as "affordable" housing is far from it. I oppose this project as it will take away beloved establishments that give me joy in the midst of the stress of affording to live here. These businesses generate income for the state, have held up a neighborhood that at times has been infected with blight, and are still struggling to survive post-pandemic. Please don't turn even more of urban Oahu into a hostile environment for our local bars and restaurants.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 7:36:03 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emi	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Blaisdell is a significant historic building with incredible value to Hawaii. It would be extremely inefficient to replace due to its age and plumbing/piping conditions so it would have to be torn down. There are many building in the area that would be free to use as well so its worth saving. The bill would put hundreds of people out of a job and shut down businesses that bring in traction as it is a big part of the Chinatown area. This bill lacks innovation and logic. While affordable housing is an important concern, it does not need to replace a historic building to take place. There are more optional locations that can make both parties happy. Do not pass this bill.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 7:48:54 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laken Barber	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

While affordable housing is necessary, destroying a beautiful historic building with dozens of operational businesses while there are other options would be a travesty. Over a hundred people would be out of jobs, which could likely worsen the need for affordable housing. A historic building with rich history, especially LGBTQ+ history

I oppose the conversion of the the Blaisedell into affordable housing, please go with another option and don't destroy history or over a hundreds people's lives that they've built for themselves with these businesses.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 7:57:21 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
cheryl burghardt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I SUPPORT HB 2328 HD2 SD1 which appropriates funds to the Hawaii Housing Finance and Development Corporation to acquire and renovate parcels and buildings located between Bethel Street, Pauahi Street, Fort Street, and Chaplain Lane in Honolulu, Oahu, for affordable housing purposes. Requires units to be affordable to households having an income that does not exceed a percentage of the area median income. Effective 7/1/3000.

As a state retiree who lives in this neighborhood, someone who will be soon priced out of a studio rental at Kukui Plaza and who has found it a challenge to qualify by the "area median income", I welcome the acquisition and renovation of parcels in that area. It is inconceivable to most of us that there is not housing that we can afford in areas that should be filled with people like this area of Kou. It would be also my hope that through this action, this historical treasure in our history will be treated with respect and the honor it deserves, renovations etc. should reflect the location.

Mahalo for passing this bill and asking that additional housing possibilities be pursued before more of us end up with no housing available.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 8:08:18 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Itago	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

While I believe we need more affordable housing solutions, I also believe in protecting the historical buildings and small businesses in the area. Will the new design incorporate the look and feel of the historical building, similar to the old Advertiser building? Will the small businesses be offered spots to continue operations during construction and after the new housing is up? We need to protect small businesses and historical buildings, too.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 8:17:53 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Travis Wiggins	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This bill is so out of touch! Of all the places on island that could use affordable housing, Bethel Street makes no sense. Chinatown, Fort Street Mall and Specifically the Blaisdell Hotel represent the home and incubation center for many local artists. While so much of arts and music on Oahu is targeted at tourism, the history, music and arts scene that has existed on Bethel Street for years truly represents DIY art made for and by a community of artists. It would be absurd to erase that part of the Chinatown arts history. Go put up some affordable housing literally anywhere else on island. Pretty much every chain store in Ala Moana mall has a website. Turn the mall into apartments. Or maybe the walmart? There are plenty of sites on island that represent soulless consumerism and greed. Why not reimagine one of those places as somewhere positive that people can live and work instead of steam rolling over historic spaces in Oahu's art and music history? This is ridiculous to even consider.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 8:28:59 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Leary	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Members of the legislature,

I write to you today to express my strong opposition to Honolulu Legislation Bill HB2328. As a long time visitor of Honolulu and a patron of many of the small businesses in the are, I believe that this bill poses more harm than good to the community.

First and foremost, HB2328 fails to address the root causes of the issues it purports to solve. Instead of offering meaningful solutions to the challenges facing our community, this bill resorts to heavy-handed, big business favoring tactics that are more likely to exacerbate existing problems than resolve them.

Additionally, the implementation of HB2328 would place undue burden and strain on local businesses and organizations. The proposed regulations and requirements outlined in this bill would impose significant costs and administrative hurdles, hindering economic growth and innovation in our city.

Moreover, HB2328 lacks sufficient consideration for the diverse needs and perspectives of our community. The one-size-fits-all approach outlined in this bill fails to account for the unique circumstances of different neighborhoods and populations within Honolulu, further underscoring its inadequacy as a legislative solution.

In conclusion, I urge you to reject Honolulu Legislation Bill HB2328 in its entirety. Instead of resorting to ineffective and intrusive measures, I implore you to seek alternative solutions that respect the rights and dignity of individuals while addressing the underlying issues facing this community.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Erin Leary

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 9:06:15 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sugki Suguitan	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Subject: Testimony Against House Bill 2328 - Preservation of Queer Spaces, Livelihoods, and Historic Cultural Spaces in Honolulu's Chinatown District

Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Legislature, I am writing to express my strong opposition to House Bill 2328, which proposes the appropriation of funds to the Hawai'i Public Housing Authority for the acquisition and renovation of parcels and buildings in Honolulu's Chinatown district. While I understand the pressing need for affordable housing in our community, I urge you to consider the multifaceted impact this bill would have, including on the vibrant queer community, the livelihoods of those who work in the affected establishments, and the preservation of historic cultural spaces such as the Blaisdell Hotel.

As a queer individual who has frequented the establishments targeted for redevelopment, including those within the historic Blaisdell Hotel and the Bethel block, I can attest to the invaluable role they play in providing safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals in Honolulu. These establishments are not only havens where members of the queer community can gather, but they also serve as vital pillars of support, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance that is often elusive in mainstream society.

Furthermore, the Blaisdell Hotel, situated within the proposed development area, is a historic building that holds significant cultural value for our community. Its potential redevelopment would not only displace queer individuals and their allies but also uproot the livelihoods of numerous artists and musicians. Losing such a significant cultural space would be a blow to the entire community and erase an important part of Honolulu's history.

The proposed development threatens to erase these crucial spaces and livelihoods, leaving the queer community and local artists without dedicated venues where they can feel truly welcomed, understood, and economically supported. This loss would not only be cultural but also economic, as many queer individuals, artists, and musicians rely on these spaces for employment and income.

Instead of prioritizing the development of affordable housing at the expense of queer spaces, livelihoods, and historic cultural spaces like the Blaisdell Hotel, I urge you to explore alternative solutions that address both the housing crisis and the preservation of LGBTQ+ cultural heritage and artistic expression in our community. This could include incorporating affordable housing

components into existing buildings while retaining the unique character and identity of the neighborhood, including the historic Blaisdell Hotel.

In conclusion, I respectfully request that you reconsider House Bill 2328 and take into account the voices and concerns of the LGBTQ+ community, local artists, and musicians, as well as the preservation of historic cultural spaces in your decision-making process. Let us work together to create a Honolulu that is inclusive, diverse, and supportive of all its residents, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or artistic pursuits. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Sugki Suguitan

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 9:16:17 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Casey Ishitani	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am still opposing this Bill as Rep. Saiki and those supporting it have seemingly refused to meet with businesses being affected by the proposals. These businesses are LGBTQ+ safe spaces that also provide venues of entertainment for locals and tourists.

The Blaisdell has historic as well as modern significance, which is why it is disheartening to hear of proposed “conversions”. Such proposals for lodging often bring about demolitions, not retrofitting old structures. This would displace at least 100 employees and tenants. Taking away that many jobs for residential units is not an economically viable proposal.

It would also behoove Rep. Saiki and his supporters on this proposal to consider that this is targeting an LGBTQ+ safe space. With Scarlet, Proof Social Club and other businesses proudly run by, employing and catering to LGBTQ+ residents, it provides an area of relief for marginalized communities in a fractured political climate. As they have not met with the owners or managers of these businesses, unintentionally or not, residents may infer that Rep Saiki and his supporters are displacing these venues with no quarter or proposed alternative is only a way to erase them.

Honolulu residents have also not been provided a list of vacant properties or units that are currently available. The conjecture being that “affordable housing” proposals have inflated purpose and that this proposal is only demolishing local eateries, entertainment venues and other small businesses for an opaque purpose with no detailed public plan.

I again implore the Hawaii State Legislature to reject this Bill and reach out to the businesses that would be affected by it to further improve Chinatown WITH the community.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 10:02:20 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Victoria Assad	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB2328, while affordable housing in our community is desperately needed, the area proposed for this housing is not well suited. The proposed area serves as a safe haven for marginalized communities in our city and is the site of small businesses that are of great community importance. There are swaths of unoccupied buildings in the neighborhood that do not hold this level of community value and could be used instead.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 10:11:31 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dustin Malama	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose the bill because it is vague and leaves into question the future of locally-owned business occupying the buildings. These small businesses have no means of influencing policy in the ways large companies do, and have no say in what government will decide to do. Businesses like these are a reflection of the people in the community and I believe government-owned buildings would not rent to businesses it finds controversial, especially in regards to the LGBTQIA+ community, regardless of its popularity with the people who use the area. Government officials should have no say in which of these businesses should stay, and should only be passing policy that allows the community to decide what they want in the area, not people of higher status who don't live or visit the area.

I also doubt the effectiveness of the "affordable" housing since the units these buildings would provide would hardly put a dent in an issue that is systemic in nature. We need bills that address existing housing, and yes, retrofit older buildings, to not only add units for people, but reduce the cost of existing units. Adding a few hundred units will not solve the problem, especially if the cost is destroying historic buildings and kicking locally-owned businesses out, which this bill has no assurance that won't happen.

In conclusion, I don't believe this bill will be effective with its goal, puts local business owners at risk, and isn't reflective of the community it will affect. Bills that put local people, especially marginalized populations, that lower rent and increase income should be the top priority.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 10:32:41 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cindy Dasilva	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

If this bill passes, the number of people losing their jobs will probably be higher than the homeless people it would provide housing for. Not to mention the historical importance that the building has so to use it for that purpose wouldn't be the best move - I don't picture any contractor wanting to redo the plumbing without tearing it down! I am sure there are many other options in the area that would be perfect to fit this purpose. All those businesses are part of Honolulu and it is very disrespectful to even think about destroying them.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 10:45:19 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
adele balderston	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo for the opportunity to **VEHEMENTLY OPPOSE** this bill. I would like to reiterate all of the previous testimony expressing concern for the existing businesses that currently occupy these buildings, and remind committee members that the buildings targeted by this bill are all historic properties and will require Chapter 6E review and SHPD approval which will likely delay any major renovation for the foreseeable future. [See Ben Lowenthal's excellent Civil Beat article for more information about why this project is a terrible idea.](#)

In previous committees legislators received assurance from former Governor Abercrombie that the existing businesses will not be displaced, yet the text of the bill has not been updated to reflect this. Moreover, what exactly is Abercrombie's role in this project and what authority does he actually have here? Does he stand to benefit financially from this project in some way or does he represent the Public Housing Authority now?

As many previous testifiers have pointed out, there are a plethora of nearby locations--such as the unimproved vacant lot literally across the street--that would be infinitely more appropriate for an adaptive reuse project than this historically important and actively used block, so why target this location? What is really going on here?

This bill doesn't even indicate a baseline AMI the rents must be affordable to, so, in its current form, it offers no assurance that any housing resulting from its passage will effectively be "affordable" in any sense of the word.

Please stop wasting time on this bill and kill it.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 10:52:23 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Candace Silva	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Upon visiting Proof Social Club, I can attest that this establishment is not just a restaurant, but a pillar in the local community. This business has allowed not only residents of Hawaii to come and enjoy themselves in a special way, but it has become a beacon of light in the queer community as well. Proof Social Club has been able to provide a safe space for people who want to be themselves, enjoy a moment in time just for them and help build the surrounding community as a place of celebration. Not just Proof, but the surrounding businesses as well, these businesses need to stay and flourish.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 10:59:18 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zea Billet	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee Members,

I am IN OPPOSITION of HB2328 HD2 SD1.

My name is Zea Billet and I am tesitifying against as an individual citizen.

My reasons for tesitifying are as follows:

The Blaisdell is a historic building. This building and its bussiness have significant importance to LGBTQ+ community and our history in Hawai'i.

Further, there are swaths of unoccupied buildings in this neighborhood - the Bethel Block is not the only option for affordable housing conversions. HB2328 would displace dozens of operational businesses, putting 100+ folks out of a job.

These small bussinesses provided necessary arts and cultural spaces as well as those for LGBTQ+ community. To remove these spaces would be a huge loss. Please consider this.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Zea Billet

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 11:17:29 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chad Fujihara	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am opposing this Bill as Rep. Saiki and those supporting it have seemingly refused to meet with businesses being affected by the proposals. These businesses are LGBTQ+ safe spaces that also provide venues of entertainment for locals and tourists.

The Blaisdell has historic as well as modern significance, which is why it is disheartening to hear of proposed “conversions”. Such proposals for lodging often bring about demolitions, not retrofitting old structures. This would displace at least 100 employees and tenants. Taking away that many jobs for residential units is not an economically viable proposal.

It would also behoove Rep. Saiki and his supporters on this proposal to consider that this is targeting an LGBTQ+ safe space. With Scarlet, Proof Social Club and other businesses proudly run by, employing and catering to LGBTQ+ residents, it provides an area of relief for marginalized communities in a fractured political climate. As they have not met with the owners or managers of these businesses, unintentionally or not, residents may infer that Rep Saiki and his supporters are displacing these venues with no quarter or proposed alternative is only a way to erase them.

Honolulu residents have also not been provided a list of vacant properties or units that are currently available. The conjecture being that “affordable housing” proposals have inflated purpose and that this proposal is only demolishing local eateries, entertainment venues and other small businesses for an opaque purpose with no detailed public plan.

I implore the Hawaii State Legislature to reject this Bill and reach out to the businesses that would be affected by it to further improve Chinatown WITH the community.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 11:27:54 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shaz	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am opposing this Bill as Rep. Saiki and those supporting it have seemingly refused to meet with businesses being affected by the proposals. These businesses are LGBTQ+ safe spaces that also provide venues of entertainment for locals and tourists.

The Blaisdell has historic as well as modern significance, which is why it is disheartening to hear of proposed “conversions”. Such proposals for lodging often bring about demolitions, not retrofitting old structures. This would displace at least 100 employees and tenants. Taking away that many jobs for residential units is not an economically viable proposal.

It would also behoove Rep. Saiki and his supporters on this proposal to consider that this is targeting an LGBTQ+ safe space. With Scarlet, Proof Social Club and other businesses proudly run by, employing and catering to LGBTQ+ residents, it provides an area of relief for marginalized communities in a fractured political climate. As they have not met with the owners or managers of these businesses, unintentionally or not, residents may infer that Rep Saiki and his supporters are displacing these venues with no quarter or proposed alternative is only a way to erase them.

Honolulu residents have also not been provided a list of vacant properties or units that are currently available. The conjecture being that “affordable housing” proposals have inflated purpose and that this proposal is only demolishing local eateries, entertainment venues and other small businesses for an opaque purpose with no detailed public plan.

I again implore the Hawaii State Legislature to reject this Bill and reach out to the businesses that would be affected by it to further improve Chinatown WITH the community.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 11:37:48 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Naomi Grosse	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Blaisdell Hotel opened in 1913 and was marketed as “Honolulu’s newest and most modern hotel.” This now 100+ year old building houses key staples of the Chinatown community that draw locals and tourists alike to explore, dine and shop at this charming spot and neighboring blocks. "Charming" perhaps being the key. Why are some communities able to maintain their historic character and quality of life in the face of a rapidly changing world, while others have lost the very features that once gave them distinction and appeal? How can communities, both big and small, grow without losing their heart and soul? This community is already successful. It capitalizes on the distinctive assets – their architecture, history, natural surroundings, and home grown businesses – rather than trying to adopt a new and different identity.

This is not the space for affordable housing. The new hotel and new bank in Chinatown were potential missed spaces for housing that do not affect the charm of these blocks. What about the empty old walmart space or the river street blocks that need a drastic revamp to improve the quality of the community. This area needs it not only aesthetically, but to increase the road quality, decrease crime and loitering/homeless, and the improve the canal and pollution. Just a bit further up this waterway, old housing was knocked down and new housing/business is in construction.

Kakaako/Salt neighborhood was mostly warehouses and homeless a few years back. It's been drastically improved with houses and businesses since. Its welcoming and safe for community outings. It is supposed to be affordable housing, however, affordable is relative. They may have rent control in many building but many are condos that are owned independently and are not actually accessible or affordable housing.

Proper planning is needed for developing affordable housing. The old Blaisdell Hotel and neighboring blocks have 100+ year old structure and plumbing. For housing that meets today's standards it would mean complete teardown and destruction of this historic area. To maintain its charm and quaintness, this is not a simple remodel. The cost effectiveness is not there to then actually present affordable housing to locals.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 11:41:32 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brianna Blackburn	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The proposal to demolish existing local businesses that call the historic Blaisdell building home is not a solution that empowers the local economy nor supports locally owned businesses. In fact, two of the businesses impacted by this proposal are LGBTQIA+ cornerstones of the community. There are only so many places where my community is visible and comfortable to gather and celebrate. It is a scary prospect to see these doors close and is a backwards "solution" to our housing crises.

There are empty buildings within the downtown/chinatown area that can be repurposed to create more affordable housing in the neighborhood. There continues to be luxury condos built and remain empty majority of the calendar year that directly effect our unaffordable housing problem. I cannot take this as a serious solution when one continues to be allowed to develop and the other will impact our local economy and business.

I also want to raise the issue that with the closing of the Walmart on Bethel there is no accessible source of groceries or food to sustain the community currently--creating a food desert. How will we address this problem when it becomes exacerbated with the new residents. We also need an accessible and reasonable solution to that major gap if we plan to create more affordable housing in the area.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 12:06:45 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emma Druckman	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The blaisdell is historic, a hub for artists and houses so many small family businesses!! Please don't pass this bill.

LATE

Testimony in Opposition to HB2328

Dear Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Tiffany Mullaney, and I come before you today with a deep love for the historic Blaisdell Hotel in Honolulu, Hawaii. This building, standing proudly at 1154 Fort St., embodies a century of history, culture, and memories that are irreplaceable.

The Blaisdell Hotel (or “Blaisdell Building ” as mentioned in the Bill) is not just a structure; it is a living testament to Honolulu's past. Its neo-classical architecture whispers stories of days gone by, of a time when Honolulu was a bustling hub of trade and culture. As I walk through its corridors, I feel a connection to the generations that have passed through its doors.

Originally built in 1912 by the esteemed architectural firm Emory & Webb, the Blaisdell was heralded as "Hawaii's Handsomest Hostelry." The Blaisdell has stood witness to countless moments in Honolulu's history, from its heyday in the 1920s, when it was a favorite among sailors and travelers seeking refuge, to its role in post-Prohibition Honolulu nightlife. Reportedly, in April 1933, following the end of Prohibition the Blaisdell Hotel was the first establishment in Hawaii to obtain a liquor license.

The Blaisdell holds within its walls the echoes of the past—the clinking of glasses in its bar, the laughter of guests enjoying meals in its Mural Room, and the bustling energy of a city in motion. It was here that the young Neal Blaisdell, before his mayoral days, walked the halls, learning the value of hard work.

Today, the Blaisdell continues to be a vibrant hub of activity, housing a diverse array of businesses and offices. It is home to the last human-operated elevator in Hawaii, lovingly tended to by the incomparable Javier “Javi” Fombellida. This building is not just a collection of bricks and mortar—it is a living, breathing embodiment of Honolulu's history.

Within its walls, one finds the heartbeat of Honolulu's culture. Fort Street Café, a Vietnamese and local-food haven, beckons visitors with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and the sizzle of flavorful dishes. The Chaleunxay family's dedication to their craft has made this café a cherished part of downtown Honolulu, a place where locals and visitors alike gather to share stories and savor delicious meals.

Venture further, and you'll discover the vibrant energy of Chinatown Music Studios. This space transforms nightly from creative offices to a symphony of musical rehearsals. Bands flock to these studios, where creativity knows no bounds and the walls reverberate with the sounds of Honolulu's music scene.

And let us not forget Proof Social Club, a cultural epicenter within the Blaisdell. From drag shows to punk performances, this bar embodies the spirit of inclusivity and artistic expression,

and continues the legacy the Blaisdell started in 1933. It is a space where artists of all stripes come together to share their talents and celebrate the diversity of Honolulu's community.

I must also emphasize the profound significance of Scarlett Hawaii. Recently awarded "Best of Honolulu 2023" for "Best Club for Dancing" and "Best LGBTQIA+ Bar/club," Scarlett Hawaii stands as a beacon of inclusivity and acceptance on our island. Shuttering these vital safe spaces, along with the Blaisdell Hotel, Fort Street Café, Chinatown Music Studios, and Proof Social Club, would not just be a loss of physical spaces—it would be a loss of safe havens for our LGBTQIA+ community.

The optics of closing these inclusive spaces are deeply concerning. Safe spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community are already scarce on our island, both Proof Social Club and Scarlett Hawaii have served as a sanctuary for many, offering a place of celebration, expression, and solidarity. To consider erasing this vital piece of our community would send a chilling message to our LGBTQIA+ neighbors—that their spaces, their history, and their presence are not valued.

While I wholeheartedly agree that we are facing a housing crisis, and I commend our government for taking steps to address it, I must express that this area is not worth converting. The Blaisdell Hotel, Fort Street Café, Chinatown Music Studios, Proof Social Club, and Scarlett Hawaii hold too much cultural and historical significance to be replaced. To consider tearing down a building with such a rich history, one that has stood the test of time for over a century, is to erase a piece of our city's soul.

I urge you to consider the significance of these spaces, not just as buildings, but as symbols of our shared history and havens of inclusivity. They represent the resilience of our city, the stories of those who have come before us, and the culture that makes Honolulu truly unique.

In closing, I ask that you preserve these historic landmarks and safe spaces, allowing future generations to walk their halls and feel the weight of their history. Let us honor the Blaisdell Hotel, Fort Street Café, Chinatown Music Studios, Proof Social Club, and Scarlett Hawaii, and all that they represent.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Mullaney

808-724-1667

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 12:49:58 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Von Kaanaana	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose this bill as I am employed by Scarlet Honolulu as an entertainer for the last 9 years and many more to come. We are globally recognized and scarlet is an international stage. Rep Saiki claims to support the LGBTQIA+ community but clearly does not care about our community as Scarlet employs a hundred of us! All of these businesses MAKE Chinatown worth living in. These buildings are HISTORIC! They should be untouched by developers! There's a numerous buildings sitting vacant and empty that are a better choice. An investigation into Rep Saiki is necessary considering the choice of location for this project. This is clearly a conflict of interest and this bill should be killed. If this is retaliation from the liquor commission lawsuit it's not be hidden very well. It's totally obvious!

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 1:00:56 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deirdre Madrid	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose the "conversion" of Bethel block into affordable housing.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 1:16:16 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lindsay	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB2328. The building in question holds a significant place in our state's history, and its preservation is paramount. Not only does it serve as a historic landmark, but it also houses vital safe spaces for marginalized communities, such as Scarlet and Proof Social Club. These spaces are essential for providing support and refuge to those who need it most.

It is also crucial to consider the economic impact of this proposed legislation. Displacing operational businesses within the building would result in a loss of many jobs for our community. It is imperative that we prioritize the preservation of existing businesses and the livelihoods they support.

There are numerous empty buildings throughout our communities that could be repurposed without causing harm to existing establishments. By exploring these alternatives, we can ensure that progress is made without sacrificing the integrity of our history, the well-being of our communities, or the livelihoods of our citizens.

I urge you to reconsider HB2328 and instead seek solutions that preserve our heritage, protect the vulnerable among us, and support our local economy.

Sincerely, Lindsay Jones

LATE

To Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair, Moriwaki, and members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

My name is Kelsea Armstrong, and I am writing as an individual to express my strong opposition to HB 2328 bill that seeks to appropriate funds to the Hawai'i Housing Finance and Development Corporation for the acquisition and renovation of parcels and buildings located in the historic Chinatown district of Honolulu, Oahu, for affordable housing purposes.

While the intention behind this bill may seem noble at first glance, it fails to address the underlying issues plaguing affordable housing initiatives in our community. Instead, it risks exacerbating the already-existing problems with homelessness and crime in the area, much like what has occurred with other affordable housing projects in Honolulu's Downtown.

There are significant flaws in the current approach to affordable housing projects in Honolulu. Existing initiatives have faced major challenges, including high vacancy rates, disproportionate representation of local residents, and the displacement of low-income tenants from their homes. This has led to grassroots organizing efforts, such as those by the Honolulu Tenants Union, advocating for fundamental change to these initiatives and their methodologies.

Affordable housing projects should not be exacerbating the problem they aim to solve. The issue of Hawai'i's high cost of living is an issue that we agree cannot wait to be addressed. Yet, reports from Civil Beat indicate that tenants facing displacement due to redevelopment are shocked to find that the rent for affordable units can be double the cost of their previous rent. This not only fails to address the needs of our community but actively harms those it purports to help.

Furthermore, the historic Chinatown district is a cultural and architectural treasure that must be preserved, not desecrated. We have seen the consequences of similar mistakes in the past, such as the destruction of historic sidewalks without proper review by the State Historic Preservation Division. I reiterate the public calls of District 13's constituents when I say that we cannot afford to repeat these errors.

Moreover, the proposed bill ignores the voices of the people and businesses that call this neighborhood home. These individuals are workers and patrons of beloved local establishments and deeply care about preserving the rich history and cultural legacy of Chinatown.

Addressing homelessness and crime in the Downtown area requires a comprehensive approach that tackles root causes rather than simply displacing the issue. This bill fails to do so and will only push these problems into tighter corners, ultimately costing the state and city more in the long run.

Instead, I urge the legislature to redefine affordability for housing and redirect efforts towards a restorative approach that maintains the integrity and richness of Hawai'i's landmark historical neighborhoods. This is an opportunity to enact meaningful change that truly serves the needs of our community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kelsea R. Armstrong

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 3:40:20 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Robert Thompson Tilley	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Blaisdell is a historic building! This building has a storied past, held the state's first liquor license, and has significant importance to LGBTQ+ history in Hawaii. It is also over 100 years old - there's not a contractor on Earth who would attempt to convert the building's century old plumbing and electric; which would make this a tear-down, not a conversion.

Further, there are swaths of unoccupied buildings in our neighborhood - the Bethel Block is not the only option for affordable housing conversions. HB2328 would displace dozens of operational businesses, putting 100+ folks out of a job.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 4:05:33 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Kapua	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To whom it may concern,

I oppose bill HB2328 which states that "Bethel Block" will have its current tenants removed and replaced with affordable housing.

while I do agree that affordable housing is necessary, I think you find a different place for it!!
J.Dolans, Scarlets, etc. are supporting our economy and the community by providing us spaces to spend our time.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 4:36:59 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tricia Manzano	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose the passing of this bill because the businesses on that street are locally owned companies that did their best to survive through the pandemic. They were not only responsible for the rent of their businesses but they provided long standing supporters through such hard times. Scarlet is also one of the LGBT+ community's home to go to. That street is enriched with Hawaii's history that make Oahu what it is today. It is significant and shouldn't be shut down.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 4:44:18 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Candace Walker	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please do not tear down the bethel block or displace the businesses and workers that have been there so long. Affordable housing can go elsewhere. This is an important community and culture in our downtown to keep.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 4:54:11 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaleiheana-a-Pohaku Stormcrow	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou,

I am writing to strongly oppose HB2328. The Blaisdell is an historic building. Due to its age, this will likely be a tear down instead of a remodel, and it would also displace multiple small, locally owned businesses. As someone who grew up on Oahu, I have memories of that place. While I strongly agree that Hawai'i needs more affordable housing, I do not think this is the answer.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

me ka ha'aha'a,

Kaleiheana Stormcrow

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 5:02:58 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

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

Comments:

There are plenty of surrounding unoccupied buildings that could be renovated, leave these ones alone, they're historic and a large safe space for lgbtq in oahu.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 5:03:13 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Natasha	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I work in chinatown and would be out of a job if this bill were to pass.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 5:23:48 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Benjamin Anderson	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Not only is this area historically significant it houses some of Hawaii's best nightlife which may not be of interest to everyone, but it is an core part of many communities on the island of Oahu.

This bill will displace 100s of workers and ruin one of the few good nighttime destinations around.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 5:37:41 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sam Peck	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Oppose. Buy a different, vacant block that does not house so many businesses

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 5:40:44 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaitlyn Victorino	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As much as affordable housing is something that should be considered, it should not be of sacrifice of the historical and economic integrity of the location.

If acquired, the buildings will need to be closed for renovation, which will be detrimental to many local businesses that occupy the commercial that are in these buildings as they will need to stop operations for this project. The businesses in the proposed locations are some of the established local businesses that fuel our economy in Hawaii and keep revenue Within the state. Making these businesses close just for the sake of a project that will see results only an average of 5-10 years is not going to solve the immediate need of both affordable housing, and economic prosperity.

As a constituent, I believe that affordable housing should not be made out of sacrifice of the cultural and economic significance of our local businesses. Instead, the processes of the existing Affordable Housing projects should be improved by making information available to those in need, adjusting the requirements and income based brackets to accommodate for the eligible candidates, and having more manpower and management to make these applications processed faster and efficiently in order to see affect in the Affordable Housing mission of our state.

Too many variables will be of detrimental with this current bill to the health of our local socioeconomic chain and other changes within existing Affordable Housing Programs must be made instead.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 6:08:58 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shazlyn Canada-Chong	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose HB2328. This area of town is crucial to activities and establishments for locals and tourists. As someone who frequents this area for good eats or good time with friends, I would be disappointed to see this become another "affordable housing" construction as we are already seeing throughout the island. The infrastructure of new residences are still of those that many locals can NOT afford. Tearing down this part of town will equate to tearing down history of our beloved Hawai'i having been 100+ years old. The destruction and revamp of this area will be heartbreaking.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 6:14:19 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nikki	Testifying for Honolulu Tenants Union	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair, Moriwaki, and members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

My name is Nikki Nakamura , and I am writing as an individual and also as a volunteer with the Honolulu Tenants Union to express my strong opposition to HB 2328 bill that seeks to appropriate funds to the Hawai'i Housing Finance and Development Corporation for the acquisition and renovation of parcels and buildings located in the historic Chinatown district of Honolulu, Oahu, for affordable housing purposes.

While the intention behind this bill may seem noble at first glance, it fails to address the underlying issues plaguing affordable housing initiatives in our community. Instead, it risks exacerbating the already-existing problems with homelessness and crime in the area, much like what has occurred with other affordable housing projects in Honolulu's Downtown.

There are significant flaws in the current approach to affordable housing projects in Honolulu. Existing initiatives have faced major challenges, including high vacancy rates, disproportionate representation of local residents, and the displacement of low-income tenants from their homes. This has led to grassroots organizing efforts, such as those by the Honolulu Tenants Union, advocating for fundamental change to these initiatives and their methodologies.

Affordable housing projects should not be exacerbating the problem they aim to solve. The issue of Hawai'i's high cost of living is an issue that we agree cannot wait to be addressed. Yet, reports from Civil Beat indicate that tenants facing displacement due to redevelopment are shocked to find that the rent for affordable units can be double the cost of their previous rent. This not only fails to address the needs of our community but actively harms those it purports to help.

Furthermore, the historic Chinatown district is a cultural and architectural treasure that must be preserved, not desecrated. We have seen the consequences of similar mistakes in the past, such as the destruction of historic sidewalks without proper review by the State Historic Preservation Division. I reiterate the public calls of District 13's constituents when I say that we cannot afford to repeat these errors.

As an active member of Honolulu’s music scene, losing the Blaisdell Hotel would be a devastating hit to our already fragile creative infrastructure. Within the walls of the hotel are various music studios where our local bands rehearse, record, and store their music gear. These spaces are where we refine our arts to present to the public and it is through our art that we share the experience of our hometown to the world at large. The hotel also is home to dance and photography studios and various other local businesses. Overall the hotel is an active incubator for our creatives. The bottom floor of the building is home to Proof, which has been a staple in the music scene, offering fair pay rates for musical acts, and showcasing local talent throughout the week. This venue has transformed Fort Street and there is a strong sense of community amongst the patrons. Also on the bottom level on the makai side of the building stands Scarlet night club, a queer establishment that has gained recognition for its drag showcases and for their commitment to fighting for queer visibility in Hawaii. Both venues are vital to the creative network and to lose them would mean the loss of performance spaces where our creatives can get compensated to share their art with the public. Another notable mention is JJ Dolan, although they don’t directly support our creatives, they are still an important institution that we will fight for. ALL these spaces deserve to be preserved. It is also worth mentioning the history of the building during WW2, used to provide medical aid for soldiers and eventually turned into a brothel which was a place where Beth O’ Hara penned her essay “Honolulu Harlot”. So much history and present day utilization, we MUST preserve this space for future generations.

Moreover, the proposed bill ignores the voices of the people and businesses that call the neighborhood home. These individuals are workers and patrons of beloved local establishments and deeply care about preserving the rich history and cultural legacy of Chinatown.

Addressing homelessness and crime in the Downtown area requires a comprehensive approach that tackles root causes rather than simply displacing the issue. This bill fails to do so and will only push these problems into tighter corners, ultimately costing the state and city more in the long run.

Instead, I urge the legislature to redefine affordability for housing and redirect efforts towards a restorative approach that maintains the integrity and richness of Hawaii’s landmark historical neighborhoods. This is an opportunity to enact meaningful change that truly serves the needs of our community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nikki Nakamura (YOLO ONO)

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 6:18:23 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
lance arinaga	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose this bill for many reasons. As a long time advocate (20 years+) for the arts and chinatown in general this is an atrocity. I have had a magazine business in the Blaisdell hotel that supported the local art and music scene for 6 years. The Blaosdell and its surrounding business are integral to keeping the community together. The loss of a 100 yr old historical building along with the loss of jobs the are provides is reason enough to keep it secure for the future. Rep Scott Saiki recent intagram post as of 4-3-2024 states that " Honored to stand in solidarity with Hawaii's vibrant transgender community at the capitol, waving signs high for the transgender day of visibility. Their resilience, strength, and visibility inspire us all. Let's keep championing equality and acceptance everyday." end quote. The Bethel block houses the only full time Lgbt club in Honolulu "Scarlett" and "Proof" which supports lgbt and regularly has drag brunches. Without these places it would leave a hug gap in the lgbt community. He is clearly contradicting himself with his post by destroying what little the community has left. The area is already sketchy with the homeless and low income as it is. Bringing more low income people in this area will only make it worse for the business in the surrounding area. I am all for low income housing but putting it DIRECTLY in this business district so close to places like the Hawaii theater and the like will make it even more unsafe and undesribale for future and current business alike. Rep Scott Saiki not akamai and is not for the Chinatown Community,

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 7:05:14 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Crystal Rosa	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill. There are other areas in the same neighborhood that could be used as affordable housing. Do not tear down the Bethel Block. You will be forcing hundreds of people out of their jobs, and you will be tearing down two major LGBTQ spots where the queer community feels safe. Please find other buildings to convert.

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 8:07:03 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
nicole	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Scott is an inhumane "man" - if you want to call him that. To proposition a plan to get rid of history in China town is evil. As someone who is suffering from job loss, and the struggle to find new work, how dare Scott take away more jobs from us? We are running out of resources and options, but what does Scott care, he couldn't wrap his head around the struggles the every day person deals with.

There's a special place in hell for Scott.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 8:56:00 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amelia Keefe	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to oppose the proposed bill that would potentially cause for the alteration or demolition of The Blaisdell Block in China Town.

The area houses many LGBTQ+ safe spaces and employments that are vital to our community. These spaces help and serve all and provide space for marginalized communities. It is important that this is taken into consideration and that community members are consulted before decisions are made.

Again, I oppose this bill and hope that the communities represented are consulted and listened to.

Amelia Keefe

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 9:03:07 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Hallie Hernandez	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose HB2328. Bethel Block is not the only option for affordable housing conversions. There are many unoccupied buildings in other areas. The businesses in this area contribute too much to the community. It would be a devastating loss that would greatly impact many lives.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 9:24:34 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaiqing Su	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

My name is Kaiqing Su, and I am writing as an individual to express my strong OPPOSITION to HB 2328 that seeks to appropriate funds to the Hawai'i Housing Finance and Development Corporation for the acquisition and renovation of parcels and buildings located in the historic Chinatown district of Honolulu, Oahu, for affordable housing purposes. While the intention behind this bill may seem noble at first glance, it fails to address the underlying issues plaguing affordable housing initiatives in our community. Instead, it risks exacerbating the already-existing problems with homelessness and crime in the area, much like what has occurred with other affordable housing projects in Honolulu's Downtown.

There are significant flaws in the current approach to affordable housing projects in Honolulu. Existing initiatives have faced major challenges, including high vacancy rates, disproportionate representation of local residents, and the displacement of low-income tenants from their homes. This has led to grassroots organizing efforts, such as those by the Honolulu Tenants Union, advocating for fundamental change to these initiatives and their methodologies. Affordable housing projects should not be exacerbating the problem they aim to solve. The issue of Hawai'i's high cost of living is an issue that we agree cannot wait to be addressed. Yet, reports from Civil Beat indicate that tenants facing displacement due to redevelopment are shocked to find that the rent for affordable units can be double the cost of their previous rent. This not only fails to address the needs of our community but actively harms those it purports to help.

Furthermore, the historic Chinatown district is a cultural and architectural treasure that must be preserved, not desecrated. We have seen the consequences of similar mistakes in the past, such as the destruction of historic sidewalks without proper review by the State Historic Preservation Division. I reiterate the public calls of District 13's constituents when I say that we cannot afford to repeat these errors.

Moreover, the proposed bill ignores the voices of the people and businesses that call this neighborhood home. These individuals are workers and patrons of beloved local establishments

and deeply care about preserving the rich history and cultural legacy of Chinatown. Addressing homelessness and crime in the Downtown area requires a comprehensive approach that tackles root causes rather than simply displacing the issue. This bill fails to do so and will only push these problems into tighter corners, ultimately costing the state and city more in the long run.

Instead, I urge the legislature to redefine affordability for housing and redirect efforts towards a restorative approach that maintains the integrity and richness of Hawaii's landmark historical neighborhoods. This is an opportunity to enact meaningful change that truly serves the needs of our community.

Thank you for your consideration.
Sincerely,

Kaiqing Su

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 9:24:44 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shyun Ueno	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

My name is Shyun Ueno and I am writing as an individual to express my strong opposition to HB 2328 that seeks to appropriate funds to the Hawai'i Housing Finance and Development Corporation for the acquisition and renovation of parcels and buildings located in the historic Chinatown district of Honolulu, Oahu, for affordable housing purposes.

While the intention behind this bill may seem noble at first glance, it fails to address the underlying issues plaguing affordable housing initiatives in our community. Instead, it risks exacerbating the already-existing problems with homelessness and crime in the area, much like what has occurred with other affordable housing projects in Honolulu's Downtown.

There are significant flaws in the current approach to affordable housing projects in Honolulu. Existing initiatives have faced major challenges, including high vacancy rates, disproportionate under-representation of local residents, and the displacement of low-income tenants from their homes. This has led to grassroots organizing efforts, such as those by the Honolulu Tenants Union, advocating for fundamental change to these initiatives and their methodologies.

Affordable housing projects should not be exacerbating the problem they aim to solve. The issue of Hawai'i's high cost of living is an issue that we agree cannot wait to be addressed. Yet, reports from Civil Beat indicate that tenants facing displacement due to redevelopment are shocked to find that the rent for affordable units can be double the cost of their previous rent. This not only fails to address the needs of our community but actively harms those it purports to help.

Furthermore, the historic Chinatown district is a cultural and architectural treasure that must be preserved, not desecrated. We have seen the consequences of similar mistakes in the past, such as the destruction of historic sidewalks without proper review by the State Historic Preservation Division. I reiterate the public calls of District 13's constituents when I say that we cannot afford to repeat these errors.

Moreover, the proposed bill ignores the voices of the people and businesses that call this neighborhood home. These individuals are workers and patrons of beloved local establishments and deeply care about preserving the rich history and cultural legacy of Chinatown.

Addressing homelessness and crime in the Downtown area requires a comprehensive approach that tackles root causes rather than simply displacing the issue. This bill fails to do so and will only push these problems into tighter corners, ultimately costing the state and city more in the long run.

Instead, I urge the legislature to redefine affordability for housing and redirect efforts towards a restorative approach that maintains the integrity and richness of Hawai'i's landmark historical neighborhoods. This is an opportunity to enact meaningful change that truly serves the needs of our community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Shyun Ueno

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 11:05:10 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Simone Ray	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The businesses that have been here for years are what give China Town the charisma that everyone knows and loves. If you take away Bethel Rock you take away the heart and history of the community we all know and love. This is not an act to help better the community. This is an act of greed. The amount of people that would be out of jobs is disheartening. How is this giving back to our community when all you're trying to do is tear it all down.

Affordable housing will destroy community character

Affordable housing will destroy green spaces

Too much traffic!

We need strict height limits!

I worked hard to live here; so can anyone else

The inclusionary rate should be 50%, not 20%!

Affordable housing lowers property values

100% affordable housing projects are nothing but tenements

Honolulu should fight the State of Hawaii's housing laws

The city is suing its residents!

Local government officials are corrupt and doing backdoor deals with developers

I oppose this bill.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2024 11:05:35 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alec Bayer	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

While affordable housing is important, the Bethel area is an extremely important cultural center that should not be removed.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 12:03:28 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shelby McCabe	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is a historic site with amazing local businesses supporting diversity. I oppose!

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 12:55:34 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Samson Weisiger	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

The Bethel Block is home to many local businesses that are important to me. Proof Social Club is a welcoming and inclusive neighborhood bar that showcases local live music. Vintage Barbershop is where I got my hair cut for my wedding. I've enjoyed slices at J Dolan's over the years. The Old Blaisdell Hotel also holds many rehearsal and recording spaces that are critical to the music scene in Chinatown. Compared to these local businesses that provide hundreds of jobs and community for countless people, I don't see the value of another "affordable" housing project that displaces the very people that it is meant to serve. Are there not plenty of abandoned or unutilized spaces in Chinatown that could be converted instead of the Bethel Block? We should strive to create around preexisting community so as to improve it rather than redefine it. The businesses at Bethel Block are too significant to be demolished when there are empty buildings around town that could better serve this purpose.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 12:58:19 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Juvana Soliven	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in opposition of HB2328. There are so many buildings in Downtown that can already be turned into affordable housing as is. To buy and renovate all of Bethel Block which contains a historic building will consume tax payers money to completely demolish and rebuild spaces because of the infrastructure and plumbing and it will shut down many small, locally owned businesses which are run by and for the LGBTQIA+ community.

With so many other viable spaces that are vacant and may be turned into affordable housing just as well, why the spaces on Bethel Block? This feels like a targetted and deliberate attack on the Queer community. We have already seen this type of deliberate, homophobic attack on Scarlet Nightclub by the Liquor Commission, so this move to convert this specific block of buildings is suspicious and seems like a malicious attempt to further harm toward this community.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 1:10:29 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Zach Kaplan	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I believe this proposal to be an unrealistic solution that would displace hardworking business and their employees. This area holds extremely significant artistic influence and is the home to many creatives on island. Destroying this area would be ridiculous and unjust.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 2:59:26 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Mancos	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Downtown Hawaii is the heartbeat of Honolulu. It has a rich historical story and buildings that tell that story, kept alive by the many business owners located there. Many activities and events are held there, making it a great place to visit.

The thought of turning this area into anything else would be tragic!! Jobs lost, tourism lost, history lost!!

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 3:19:02 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alara	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please save the Bethel Block area of Chinatown, it is essential to many artists, musicians and individuals. It is a devoted space for creativity and innovative culture in Hawaii. If this specific corner of Chinatown is cleared away, the repercussions to current and historic local culture will be devastating. It's impossible to list the ways this area means so much to a loyal community, but this is a place with an intense creative energy that has gifted many artists a space to connect, inspire and release. Bethel Block must be preserved and supported, it is an irreplaceable community base.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 6:11:51 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rita	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

No need tear down bethel block to create affordable housing, get plenty vacant homes already that can be made affordable.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 6:49:21 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dylan Davis	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My reasons for testifying are as follows:

1. Limiting rent to 60% of median area prices without providing estimates on median area prices at time of offer does not assure me that the housing created will actually be affordable. It is understood that it is hard to know what housing prices in the area will be before project logistics and timetables have been developed, but the majority of affordable housing provided in the past ten years does not meet the definition of "affordable" to the people most in need. Additionally, "the area" is not defined, nor are current median prices stated.
2. No mention of mixed use zoning is intended or what will happen to existing businesses.
3. Other buildings on Hotel street in the area have seen complete departure of their businesses - conversion of these buildings would not disrupt existing businesses.
4. No indication of by how much this will exceed allocated State budget.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 8:04:14 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ellison Montgomery	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I oppose this bill due to the fact that the state would buy the bethel block. The bethel block is an important foundation of our community, bringing together people of all walks of life, giving them a place to gather and being a cornerstone for the LGBTQ+ community in Honolulu. I support affordable housing but there is no reason to use this area for that sake. Especially with the fact that the Blaisdell building is a historic building with over 100 years of significance. We must preserve Hawai'i's culture and history and not just tear it down to build more apartments. Please consider the importance of this area to the community. Thank you.

LATE

HB-2328-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/4/2024 8:33:03 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2024 10:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shree	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This block is so important for all artist and musicians in Honolulu. We create and have safe environment to perform our art in places we can afford to do so. Most of us live around here and spend most of our time at Blaisdel hotel on bethel street. This is our lively hood and you are trying to take it away from us. We don't perform Waikiki as that's for visitors are financially geared for visitors. We live here, we eat here, we socialize here and we play here. Taking away this block is a mistake. This building is historical. The only one in the nation with an human operated elevator...tearing it down to build affordable housing seems like a plot by this senator and the landlord. There is more to this than just building affordable housing. Please do not pass this bill!!