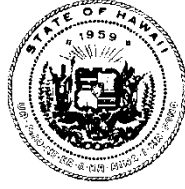


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



HAKIM OUANSAFI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BARBARA E. ARASHIRO
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

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

Statement of
Hakim Ouansafi, Executive Director
Hawaii Public Housing Authority

Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

Wednesday, February 5, 2025
9:00 a.m. – Room 430, Hawaii State Capitol

In consideration of
HB 1096
RELATING TO THE HAWAII PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY

Honorable Chair Evslin, Vice Chair Miyake, and Members of the House Committee on Housing, the Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support** of House Bill (HB) 1096, which seeks to ensure a fair, flexible, and a needs-based approach to tenant selection within the State Low-Income Housing Program by aligning admission preferences with best practices.

The HPHA is dedicated to providing safe, affordable housing and fostering equitable living environments free from discrimination. Through our public housing and rental assistance programs, we serve some of the most vulnerable members of our community, including:

- Families earning less than 30% of the area median income (AMI)
- Individuals with disabilities
- Elderly residents on fixed incomes
- Veterans in need of housing assistance

We recognize the sacrifices made by veterans and their families, and HPHA remains deeply committed to ensuring that they receive the housing support they need. HPHA already provides direct, targeted assistance to veterans through the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH)

program, which combines rental assistance with essential case management and clinical services provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Currently, tenant selection preferences for the State Low-Income Housing Program are codified in statute, making it difficult to adjust policies in response to evolving housing needs. HB 1096 does not eliminate housing assistance for veterans or their spouses but instead ensures that preferences can be managed through HPHA's Administrative Rules, just as they are in all other state and federal housing programs we administer.

This measure:

1. Aligns the State Low-Income Housing Program with Best Practices
 - The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) gives public housing agencies the ability to establish, amend, or remove selection preferences based on local housing needs.
 - By shifting tenant selection preferences to HPHA's Administrative Rules, the agency can be more responsive and adaptable to changes in the housing landscape.
2. Ensures Veterans Continue to Receive Dedicated Support
 - HPHA administers rental assistance for 411 veteran families (composed of 519 individuals) under the VASH program as of February 1, 2025.
 - Unlike traditional public housing, VASH includes VA-provided case management and clinical services to better support veterans in achieving long-term housing stability and self-sufficiency.
 - This measure does not impact VASH or any other federally funded veteran-specific housing initiatives.
3. Provides Greater Flexibility to Address Hawai'i's Affordable Housing Crisis
 - With thousands of families on waitlists for affordable housing, HPHA must have the ability to prioritize assistance for those in greatest need.
 - Adjusting tenant selection policies through Administrative Rules—rather than through statute—ensures that preferences remain fair, equitable, and reflective of the state's changing housing needs.

HPHA remains firmly committed to supporting veterans and all vulnerable populations in Hawaii. HB 1096 does not remove housing assistance but rather modernizes how preferences are managed, ensuring greater flexibility and responsiveness in addressing housing needs statewide. We strongly support this measure and respectfully urge its passage.

Mahalo for your time and consideration of this important legislation, and for your continued commitment to increasing affordable housing opportunities for the people of Hawaii.