

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
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**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB1232
RELATING TO WASTEWATER SYSTEMS**

SENATOR DONNA MERCADO KIM, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

SENATOR MIKE GABBARD, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

January 31, 2025, 1:50 pm, Room Number: 224

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health (“Department”) requests that this measure be
2 considered as a vehicle to provide this needed funding so long as it does not supplant the
3 priorities and requests outlined in the Governors executive budget request.

4 **Department Position:** The Department supports this measure.

5 **Department Testimony:** The Environmental Management Division, Wastewater Branch (EMD-
6 WWB) provides the following testimony on behalf of the Department.

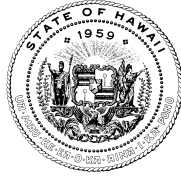
7 The Department supports this measure to facilitate the certification of new wastewater
8 technologies in Hawai'i that could reduce the costs of cesspool conversions by establishing and
9 appropriating funds for a new wastewater system technology testing pilot program within the
10 University of Hawai'i Water Resources Research Center.

11 **Offered Amendments:** None

12 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
STATE OF HAWAII
*Ke Kia'āina o ka Moku'āina 'o
Hawaii*

SYLVIA J. LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR
STATE OF HAWAII
*Ka Hope Kia'āina o ka Moku'āina
'o Hawaii*



KALI WATSON
CHAIRPERSON, HHC
Ka Luna Ho'okele

KATIE L. LAMBERT
DEPUTY TO THE CHAIR
Ka Hope Luna Ho'okele

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HAWAIIAN HOME LANDS
Ka 'Oihana 'Āina Ho'opulapula Hawaii

P. O. BOX 1879
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96805

TESTIMONY OF KALI WATSON, CHAIR
HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON HIGHER EDUCATION & AGRICULTURE
AND ENVIRONMENT
HEARING ON JANUARY 31, 2025 AT 1:50PM IN CR 224

SB 1232, RELATING TO WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

January 30, 2025

Aloha Chairs Kim and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Kidani and Richards, and Members of the Committees:

The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) **supports** this bill which establishes a three-year New Wastewater Technology Testing Pilot Program within the University of Hawaii Water Resources Research Center to test and evaluate new wastewater technology systems in coordination with the University of Hawaii Sea Grant College Program, College of Engineering, Department of Health, Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, and the appropriate county agencies.

Approximately 2,500 cesspools exist on Hawaiian Home Lands. Pursuant to Act 125 (SLH 2017), these cesspools are required to be converted to a septic system or aerobic treatment unit system or connected to a sewerage system before January 1, 2050.

DHHL supports the establishment of a three-year New Wastewater Technology Testing Pilot Program within the University of Hawaii Water Resources Research Center because it will provide the opportunity to test new wastewater technology systems and review and evaluate the affordability, feasibility, and efficiency of the treatment technologies for DHHL, current lessees residing on Hawaiian Home Lands, and potential beneficiaries to understand the challenges and financial costs of cesspool conversions and wastewater technologies.

DHHL understands that there is no simple, one method fits all ahupua'a (land division) solution toward addressing the cesspool conversion and wastewater needs of the State of Hawaii and we stand ready to work collaboratively on this issue.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committees on Higher Education and Agriculture and Environment
Friday, January 31, 2025, 1:50 PM.

By

Tao Yan

Director, UH Water Resources Research Center

And

Michael Bruno, Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 1232 – RELATING TO WASTEWATER SYSTEMS

Chairs Kim and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Kidani, and Richards and members of the committees:

The University of Hawai'i Water Resources Research Center (WRRC) **stands in strong support of SB - 1232**, which establishes a pilot program to evaluate and certify new wastewater treatment technologies in Hawai'i. This initiative is a critical step in addressing the State's cesspool conversion challenges by expanding affordable and effective treatment options.

Hawai'i's commitment to improving water quality and public health is evident in the legislative mandates requiring the transition away from cesspools. However, the currently approved replacement options pose challenges—advanced treatment units (ATUs) are highly effective but costly, while septic systems, though more affordable, have limited nutrient removal efficiency in Hawai'i's coastal environments. The lack of viable, cost-effective solutions is a major barrier to meeting the State's water quality goals and could lead to substantial investments with limited impact.

This bill leverages WRRC's expertise in wastewater research to implement a pilot program that will rigorously test and evaluate new wastewater treatment technologies. By identifying and validating solutions that are both effective and financially feasible, WRRC will provide the Hawai'i Department of Health with the necessary scientific basis for approving new, lower-cost alternatives for cesspool conversion. This research is essential to ensuring that the State's approach is data-driven, efficient, and tailored to Hawai'i's unique environmental conditions.

As the designated implementing entity, WRRC has extensive experience in wastewater research and policy development. Our previous work includes:

- The Hawai'i Cesspool Prioritization Tool, developed in collaboration with the Hawai'i Department of Health to assess cesspool risks statewide.

- A long-term wastewater outflow biomonitoring program conducted with the City and County of Honolulu, contributing critical data on wastewater impacts.
- Numerous faculty-led studies on wastewater treatment and its environmental effects, which inform local and national policy discussions.

We strongly support the appropriation of funds for WRRC to establish and implement this pilot program, including necessary infrastructure, equipment, and administrative support, provided its adoption does not impact priorities as indicated in our Board of Regents Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



To: The Honorable Chairs Donna Mercado Kim and Mike Gabbard, the Honorable Vice Chairs Michelle Kidani and Herbert M. “Tim” Richards, III, and Members of the Committees on Higher Education and Agriculture and Environmental Protection.

From: Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition (by Ted Bohlen)

Re: Hearing **SB1232 RELATING TO WASTEWATER SYSTEMS**

Hearing: Friday January 31, 2025, 1:50 p.m. Rm. 224

Aloha Chairs Kim and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Kidani and Richards, and Higher Education and Agriculture and Environment Committee Members:

The Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition (HIROC) is a group of scientists, educators, filmmakers and environmental advocates who have been working since 2017 to protect Hawaii's coral reefs and ocean.

The Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition STRONGLY SUPPORTS SB1232!

There are about 83,000 cesspools in Hawaii that are dumping about 50 million gallons **every day** into Hawaii's groundwater, drinking water, streams, and ocean and harming our coral reefs. By law (the mandate of section 342D-72, Hawaii Revised Statutes), all 83,000 cesspools must be upgraded to a system approved by the Department by 2050.

Cesspool upgrades are expensive. The cost depends on site-specific conditions, but the cost to convert a cesspool to a septic system or an aerobic treatment unit system is often over \$30,000. We need to try to find ways to make upgrades more **affordable** to homeowners and governments.

At a time when many residents of Hawaii are struggling to make ends meet, our State has an excellent opportunity to **save cesspool owners and governments money by introducing new wastewater technologies**. There are new wastewater technologies in cluster sewers, in individual wastewater systems, and in other wastewater systems that can potentially reduce the costs of cesspool upgrades substantially without harming water quality and protect coral reefs by reducing nutrients.

The Department of Health must certify the new technology systems. The Department does not have sufficient resources and expertise to perform those certifications promptly and effectively, however.

The University of Hawaii's Water Resources Research Center (WRRC) has previously had a testing program for wastewater systems. **Guidance and studies by a revived UH WRRC testing program for new technologies can facilitate and accelerate DOH's certification of new technologies. The cost of the testing program is modest (estimated at under \$1 million) and the benefits in reducing costs will be many times larger.**

The bill funds a three-year pilot program to test wastewater systems and individual wastewater systems technology at UH WRRC. UH WRRC, in coordination with other departments at UH, DOH, county agencies and others will review, document, and evaluate the affordability, feasibility, and efficiency of treatment technologies, perform tests and studies and submit results to the Department.

This bill will enable Hawaii to achieve its goal of upgrading cesspools more affordably without compromising water quality.

Please pass this bill!

Mahalo!

Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition (by Ted Bohlen)



Jan., 30, 2025

In Support of **SB1232 Relating to Wastewater Systems**
Sen. Comm.'s on Higher Education (HRE) & Agricult. & Environment (AEN)
Hearing on Fri., Jan. 31, 2025, 1:00pm, CR225

Aloha, Chairs Kim & Gabbard, Vice-Chairs Kidani & Richards, and Committee Members:

On behalf of the non-profit WAI: Wastewater Alternatives & Innovations, I am writing in **strong support of SB1232**. This bill funds a three-year pilot program to test wastewater technology at the University of Hawaii Water Resources Research Center (WRRC). The goal is to introduce more efficient and affordable sanitation technologies to the state. WRRC will work in coordination with other departments at UH and the Dept. of Health to evaluate the efficiency of treatment technologies, perform tests and submit results to the Department.

The Department of Health must certify the new technology systems, but the Department doesn't have sufficient resources and expertise to perform those certifications promptly and effectively. Research and studies by the WRRC testing program can facilitate and accelerate DOH's certification of new technologies. The costs are modest, and the benefits in reducing costs will be many times larger. Based on a previous program run by WRRC, the pilot program will build on existing resources and staff at WRRC and UH. Once the program is up and running again, it will generate revenues from companies that pay testing fees to get their treatment systems approved in Hawai'i. This will bring revenues to the state, be self-sustaining and help solve our cesspool crisis.

Hawaii has more than 83,000 cesspools across the state, discharging 52 million gallons of raw sewage each day into Hawaii's waters. Along with threats to public health and drinking water resources, new research shows that polluted wastewater poses significant harm to coral reefs and the near-shore environment. The people of Hawaii need this law to make sure their wastewater systems aren't polluting the groundwater or nearby surface waters.

WAI is an environmental non-profit dedicated to protecting our water resources by reducing sewage pollution from cesspools. We support more innovative, affordable, and eco-friendly solutions to wastewater management. Better sanitation systems protect public health and valuable natural resources like groundwater, streams, coral reefs and coastal areas.

Hawaii is struggling with serious sewage pollution, and the state has a mandate to make sure all cesspools are converted in the next two decades. This bill will provide the necessary testing of new treatment technologies that are needed to convert cesspools across the state more efficiently and affordably. Mahalo for your leadership on this issue and support of this bill.

Aloha,

Stuart Coleman

Stuart H. Coleman, Executive Director



LATE

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Molokai

Negus Manna
Lana'i

India Clark
North Shore, Oahu

Christian Zuckerman
Wai'anae, Oahu

Ted Radovich
Waimanalo, Oahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, Oahu

Natalie Urminska
Kauai

Aloha Chairs Kim & Gabbard, Vice Chairs Kidani & Richards, and Members of the Committees,

The Hawaii Farmers Union is a 501(c)(5) agricultural advocacy nonprofit representing a network of over 2,500 family farmers and their supporters across the Hawaiian Islands. **HFUU supports SB1232.**

By focusing on innovative wastewater technologies, this bill promises to explore sustainable solutions that are not only essential for public health and environmental protection but also for the agricultural community that relies heavily on clean water resources for irrigation and maintaining healthy ecosystems. For farmers across Hawaii, access to sustainable and efficient wastewater treatment technologies can significantly impact productivity and environmental stewardship. By appropriating funds for this critical initiative, SB1232 not only invests in technological innovation but also in the future of resilient agricultural practices across the state. This pilot program represents a pathway to ensuring that wastewater management aligns with Hawaii's unique cultural, environmental, and economic needs, ultimately benefiting farmers, residents, and the islands' natural resources.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawaii Farmers Union

SB-1232

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 5:19:05 PM

Testimony for HRE on 1/31/2025 1:50:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacqueline S. Ambrose	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

YES to - Establishes a three-year New Wastewater Technology Testing Pilot Program within the University of Hawaii Water Resources Research Center to test and evaluate new wastewater technology systems in coordination with University of Hawaii Sea Grant College Program, College of Engineering, Department of Health, Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, and the appropriate county agencies. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.