

Jan. 31, 2025, 9:15 a.m.
Hawaii State Capitol
Conference Room 430 and Videoconference

To: House Committee on Housing
Rep. Luke Evslin, Chair
Rep. Tyson Miyake, Vice-Chair

From: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii
Ted Kefalas, Director of Strategic Campaigns

RE: HB1321 — RELATING TO THE HAWAII STATE BUILDING CODES

Aloha Chair Evslin, Vice-Chair Miyake and other members of the Committee,

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii **supports** [HB1321](#), which would remove the authority of the counties to amend the state building codes, except that counties with a population of more than 500,000 would be allowed to adopt energy-conservation codes stricter than the state's codes.

The bill would also mandate the counties adopt the state building codes within one year of their adoption by the State Building Code Council.

Grassroot believes this measure would help fix the state's convoluted building code-adoption process, since it would balance the objectives of safety and cost.

State law currently requires the State Building Code Council to adopt every iteration of the International Building Code and related codes within two years of their release; the counties have an additional two years to adopt and make their amendments to the state code.

But the Council and counties often struggle to meet these deadlines. For example, it was only in April 2021 that the State Building Code Council adopted the 2018 Interim Building Code¹ and not until early 2023 that Honolulu fully adopted those amendments.²

Because of this staggered adoption process, county building officials and architects must constantly re-learn the building code's requirements.

The almost-constant nature of the building code updates also stresses already understaffed county planning and permitting departments and can exacerbate permitting delays, which research shows can affect the price of housing.³

As measured by the Honolulu Construction Cost Index, the cost for single-family homes in 2024 was 2.6 times higher than the cost in 2020. For highrises, the cost was 2.5 times higher.⁴

The state's strict land-use, zoning and permitting rules are a key driver of these costs. The Economic Research Organization at the University of Hawai'i has estimated that regulations comprise 58% of the cost of new condominium construction.⁵

While HB1321 would still result in building codes changing every few years, it would remove the counties' authority to change the codes, which could enable knowledge-sharing across counties and ultimately result in a smoother adoption process.

A simpler building code process would maintain health and safety standards while contributing to the repair of a broken system.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ted Kefalas
Director of Strategic Campaigns
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

¹ ["State Building Code Adoption,"](#) State Building Code Council, April 20, 2021, p. 1.

² ["Interim Building Code \(2018 IBC\) Takes Effect,"](#) Honolulu Department of Planning and Permitting, April 20, 2023.

³ Paul Emrath, ["How Government Regulation Affects the Price of a New Home,"](#) National Association of Homebuilders, Economics and Housing Policy Group, 2011, p. 5; and Adam Millsap, Samuel Staley and Vittorio Nastasi, ["Assessing the Effects of Local Impact Fees and Land-use Regulations on Workforce Housing in Florida,"](#) James Madison Institute, Dec. 11, 2018, p. 19.

⁴ ["Quarterly Statistical and Economic Report, 4th Quarter 2024,"](#) Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism, pp. 107-108.

⁵ Justin Tyndall and Emi Kim, ["Why are Condominiums so Expensive in Hawai'i?"](#) Economic Research Organization at the University of Hawai'i, May 2024, p. 11.



**HAWAII STATE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
Conference Room 430 & Videoconference
State Capitol
9:15 AM**

January 31, 2025

Subject: HB 1321 - RELATING TO BUILDING CODES

Chair Evslin, Vice Chair Miyake, and members of the Committee:

My name is Roseann Freitas, CEO of the Building Industry Association of Hawaii (BIA-Hawaii). Chartered in 1955, the Building Industry Association of Hawaii is a professional trade organization affiliated with the National Association of Home Builders, representing the building industry and its associates. BIA-Hawaii takes a leadership role in unifying and promoting the interests of the industry to enhance the quality of life for the people of Hawaii. Our members build the communities we all call home.

BIA-Hawaii is in opposition to HB 1321, Relating to the Hawaii State Building Codes. This bill would require the counties to adopt the Hawai'i state building codes no later than one year after its adoption, and authorizes a county with a population in excess of 500,000 to amend its building energy conservation code to require more stringent energy-saving performance.

In order to make meaningful changes to the current process of homebuilding in Hawaii, we need to slow the code process to a more manageable level. This will promote greater stability in construction prices and the design process. The current volatility goes against the very intent of the state building code as people are working on different codes simultaneously depending on the project type.

The current building code is made of 7 different codes, each of which is being updated every three years. This 3 year cycle is not mandated by any government agency at the federal, state or local level. Instead, the 3 year cycle is self-selected by non-government organizations (NGOs). These same NGOs derive their income stream from the sale of these codes and training on their modifications.

Further, Hawai'i's individual counties have unique geographic, economic, and environmental considerations that require flexibility in adopting and modifying building codes. Mandating a one-size-fits-all statewide building code disregards local expertise and forces counties to comply with regulations that may not align with their specific needs.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our comments on this matter.

Testimony of
Pacific Resource Partnership

Hawai'i State Legislature, House Committee on Housing
The Honorable Chair Luke Evslin and the Honorable Vice Chair Tyson Miyake
Friday, January 31, 2025

Subject: Strong Opposition for HB1321 – Relating to County Adoption of State Building Codes

Aloha Chair Evslin, Vice Chair Miyake, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Pacific Resource Partnership (PRP), which represents Hawai'i's 6,000 unionized carpenters and more than 250 general contractors, we strongly oppose HB1321, which would accelerate the adoption timeline for new building codes and allow counties to impose additional regulatory burdens on homebuilders.

A Regulatory Barrier to Housing Development

Hawai'i is already grappling with a severe housing shortage, and increasing the regulatory burden on homebuilders will only exacerbate this crisis. By reducing the time frame for counties to adopt new state building codes from two years to one year, this legislation creates an undue burden on local governments and the construction industry alike. The shortened timeline:

- Forces builders to quickly adapt to new codes, increasing costs and uncertainty.
- Limits opportunities for meaningful industry input, potentially resulting in impractical or overly restrictive regulations.
- Adds another layer of bureaucracy, further slowing down much-needed housing development.

Unintended Consequences for Affordable Housing

The housing crisis in Hawai'i is not due to a lack of regulations—it is due to an overwhelming amount of them. Builders already navigate a complex web of permitting requirements, zoning laws, and environmental reviews, all of which contribute to skyrocketing construction costs. Increasing regulatory hurdles will:

- **Drive up home prices** by forcing developers to comply with shifting standards on an accelerated timeline.
- **Reduce housing supply** as some projects become financially unfeasible or delayed due to compliance issues.
- **Increase risks for lenders and investors**, leading to potential hesitancy in financing new developments.

Path Forward

Rather than accelerating the adoption of new building codes, PRP urges the Legislature to focus on streamlining the development process and reducing barriers to housing production. This includes:



- Extending the timeline for adopting new building codes to allow for proper industry review and public input.
- Ensuring regulatory changes do not inadvertently discourage private investment in housing.
- Promoting consistency across counties to provide stability and predictability for builders.

Conclusion

Now is not the time to add more layers of bureaucracy to an already overburdened industry. We respectfully urge this committee to reject HB1321 and instead prioritize policies that promote the efficient and cost-effective development of housing for Hawai'i's residents.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Pacific Resource Partnership stands ready to collaborate on solutions that will truly address Hawai'i's housing crisis without imposing unnecessary regulatory roadblocks.

Sincerely,



Andrew Pereira
Director of Public Affairs
Pacific Resource Partnership

