



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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**Testimony COMMENTING on SB0836
RELATING TO WATER CATCHMENT SYSTEMS**

SENATOR JOY SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date, Time, and Room Number: 2/12/25, 1:00 p.m.; Room Number 225

1 **Fiscal Implications:** This measure will impact the priorities identified in the Governor's
2 Executive Budget Request for the Department of Health's (Department) appropriations and
3 personnel priorities.

4 The Department requests general revenues of \$100,000 to solicit the professional
5 services necessary to facilitate the Business Activity Water Catchment System Working Group
6 (Working Group).

7 **Department Position:** The Department offers comments on this measure.

8 **Department Testimony:** The Environmental Health Services Division ("EHSD"), Food and Drug
9 Branch ("FDB") provides the following testimony on behalf of the Department:

10 SB0836 establishes a working group in the Department to assess the feasibility of
11 allowing business owners in the State to utilize water collected by water catchment systems for
12 business activities.

13 The Department recognizes that the State's water resources are fragile and have been
14 recently subjected to significant stressors after the petroleum leaks at the Red Hill bulk fuel
15 storage facility on O'ahu and the Kula and Lahaina wildfires on Maui. Climate change will also

1 affect these resources. Assessing and implementing novel ideas to protect and diversify the
2 State’s water resources is vital.

3 The Department notes that water catchment systems serving individual residential units
4 are privately owned and not regulated under State statute, rule, or County ordinance. However,
5 there are resources which provide guidance to individual homeowners using catchment
6 systems. This guidance is intended to be implementable best management practices and are
7 not a prescription to produce water equitable to federal standards. Water quality from water
8 catchment systems can vary greatly, as demonstrated by a 2024 University of Hawai’i, Hilo pilot
9 study. Preliminary results from the study identified eight (of twenty) water catchment systems
10 with the presence of *Angiostrongylus cantonensis* DNA, which is the DNA of the parasite that
11 causes rat lungworm disease. An additional nine systems had an equivocal result, where the
12 sample could not be clearly determined as positive or negative. Three systems were confirmed
13 negative. Samples also detected exceedances of arsenic and mercury, among other chemicals.

14 Using a water catchment system for a commercial enterprise may necessitate the
15 implementation of enhanced filtration and treatment processes to ensure that the catchment
16 water is free of pathogens, parasites, and any other public health threats. However, this level of
17 treatment typically employs higher levels of chlorine disinfectant which may impart secondary
18 taste and odor qualities. Unfortunately, these unwanted characteristics may be
19 counterproductive to the use of catchment water for particular business activities. Ultimately,
20 strict water quality testing requirements, multiple barrier water treatment and filtration
21 equipment and supplies, and other potential expenses such as reliance on water hauling to
22 supplement demand may negate any possible cost benefits when compared with importing
23 potable municipal water.

24 The Department respectfully requests a clarification of “business activity” in SB0836.
25 There are several programs within the Department that may have jurisdiction and provide
26 expertise for the Working Group, as each program implements specific federal and state

1 regulations, statutes, and rules depending on the anticipated use of treated catchment water.
2 For example, catchment water is not allowed for use by food establishments, unless the source
3 is approved as equivalent to drinking water.

4 The Department also respectfully requests funding of \$100,000 to solicit the
5 professional services of a facilitator to direct the Working Group and assist the Department
6 with developing a report to submit to the Legislature. The Department lacks the staffing
7 resources to manage a Working Group and draft a report, particularly if multiple Department
8 programs and staff are also participating as designees of the Working Group.

9 **Offered Amendments:** None.

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



February 11 2025

To: Chair San Buenaventura , Vice Chair Aquino and the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Subject: **SB 836**, Relating to Water Catchment Systems.

I strongly **support** SB836 and its premise to establish a working group to assess the feasibility of using catchment water for business activities. This initiative addresses a critical need in Hawaii to conserve our limited potable water resources especially during this extreme weather climate such as drought while simultaneously supporting local businesses, particularly in rural areas.

This bill has the potential to significantly expand access to water for agricultural activities that currently rely on potable water. The establishment of a working group is crucial for developing guidelines that ensure the safe and responsible implementation of water catchment systems for business use, especially in areas where access to municipal water infrastructure is limited. This is particularly important for small farms and businesses in underserved rural communities.

Many small farms in remote areas which rely on rainwater catchment for all their water needs. Currently, they are often unable to expand their operations or process their products for market due to restrictions on using catchment water for business activities. This bill could open up opportunities for these farms to engage in value-added activities which would increase their income and contribute to local food security.

The working group's focus on developing a testing program and ensuring compliance with plumbing codes is essential for safeguarding public health and building confidence in the use of catchment water for business purposes. By establishing clear guidelines and standards, the working group can pave the way for the safe and sustainable use of this valuable resource.

I urge the legislature to pass this bill and support the important work of the business activity water catchment system working group. This is a crucial step towards a more sustainable and equitable water future for Hawaii's businesses and communities.

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2025, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.



**HAWAI'I
FOOD+
POLICY**

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Mahalo,
Lea iaea & the Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

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**Testimony from Margaux Solari
IN SUPPORT OF SB836 RELATING TO WATER CATCHMENT SYSTEMS
Before Senate of Health and Human Services
February 12, 2025
1:00 pm, conference room 225**

Aloha Chair Joy A. San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Henry J.C. Aquino, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony. I am writing to express my strong support for SB836, which proposes establishing a Business Activity Water Catchment System Working Group under the Department of Health. This bill is a necessary step toward assessing the feasibility of using properly filtered and treated rainwater for business purposes, particularly in rural and underserved areas of Hawaii.

My name is Margaux Solari. I am a senior student at Hawaii Pacific University, getting a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies, and I am a concerned resident residing in Waipahu for almost 3 years. As someone who relies on a catchment system to water my plants, I have seen firsthand how limited access to county water supplies impacts businesses and community members.

Hawaii's freshwater resources are increasingly under pressure due to climate change and population growth. Encouraging the use of properly filtered and regulated catchment systems reduces reliance on municipal water systems and promotes sustainable resource management. Many businesses and farms in Hawaii, Maui, and other rural areas already depend on catchment systems for daily operations. However, current regulations limit their ability to use this water for business purposes. This bill would allow expert review of filtration standards, creating safe and practical guidelines for business water use.

Small businesses, including agriculture, eco-tourism, and food production, could significantly benefit from access to filtered rainwater. Reducing operational costs and expanding water accessibility fosters business innovation and resilience.

While I support SB 836, I encourage the legislature to include diverse stakeholders in the working group, such as small business owners, water quality experts, and representatives from rural communities. Also, to ensure clear, practical guidelines for water testing and filtration requirements to avoid unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles. Lastly, consider a pilot program to evaluate the effectiveness of proposed filtration and safety measures before statewide implementation.

SB836 represents an important step forward in modernizing Hawaii's water policies while ensuring environmental sustainability and economic viability. By passing this bill, the legislature can support small businesses, promote water conservation, and strengthen our state's resilience against future water challenges.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Margaux Solari