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IN REPLY PLEASE REFER TO:

25:OED

Statement of
Hakim Ouansafi, Executive Director
Hawaii Public Housing Authority

Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Wednesday, February 26, 2025
2:00 p.m. – Room 325, Hawaii State Capitol

In consideration of
HB 1096, HD1
RELATING TO TENANT SELECTION

Honorable Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and members of the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs, the Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support** of House Bill (HB) 1096, HD1, 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, HD1 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:

- 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.
- 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.
- Provides Greater Flexibility to Address Hawaii'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, HD1 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.



HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION **KOMIKINA PONO KIWILA O HAWAI‘I**

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Wednesday, February 26, 2025

2:00 p.m.

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

To: COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS
Rep. David A. Tarnas, Chair
Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

From: Dr. William J. Puette, Chair
and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

Re: H.B. 1096 H.D. 1 Relating to Tenant Selection **Testimony in SUPPORT**

The Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) carries out the Hawai‘i constitutional mandate that no person shall be discriminated against in the exercise of their civil rights. Art. I, Sec. 5. HCRC enforces laws protecting the people of Hawai‘i from discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, public accommodations, and in state and state-funded services.

The purpose of H.B. 1096 H.D. 1 is to make Hawai‘i State law consistent with federal public housing requirements by repealing the tenant selection preferences for disabled veterans and the spouses of deceased veterans in the State low-income public housing program and is aimed at increase the availability of low-income public housing for Hawaii’s most vulnerable populations. HCRC acknowledges that further flexibility and equitable distribution of public housing and rental assistance programs will benefit low-income individuals, individuals with disabilities, and elders in our state, providing more stability and opportunity in our community.

HCRC supports H.B. 1096 H.D. 1.



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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February 26, 2025

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

House Bill 1096 HD1 – Relating to Tenant Selection

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 1096 HD1 – Relating to Tenant Selection. This bill repeals the tenant selection preferences for disabled veterans and the spouses of deceased veterans in the State Low-Income Housing Program. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

DCAB is committed to advancing policies that promote equal access to housing for all individuals with disabilities, including veterans and non-veterans alike. Accessible and affordable housing remains one of the most significant barriers for people with disabilities in Hawai'i, where the availability of units that meet the diverse needs of this community is already critically limited.

This measure does not eliminate housing assistance for disabled veterans; rather, it modernizes the system to ensure that all individuals with disabilities – regardless of veteran status – have equal opportunities to secure accessible housing. By removing rigid tenant selection preferences, House Bill 1096 HD1 enables a more flexible and needs-based approach, ensuring that resources are distributed based on the urgency of an individual's housing situation rather than categorical distinctions.

Thank you for considering our position.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director