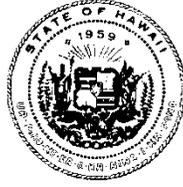


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Statement of
Hakim Ouansafi, Executive Director
Hawaii Public Housing Authority

Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

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

In consideration of
HB 1097
RELATING TO PUBLIC HOUSING EVICTIONS

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) 1097, which seeks to reduce the time required to store unclaimed personal property following an eviction, ensuring that vacant units can be repaired and reoccupied more quickly by families in need.

The HPHA is committed 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

With thousands of families currently on the waitlist for public housing, it is essential that HPHA is able to efficiently prepare and turn over vacant units so that more individuals and families can secure stable housing.

Under current procedures, when a tenant is evicted and leaves personal belongings behind, HPHA must store the items within the vacated unit, as none of HPHA's public housing properties have dedicated storage facilities on-site. This delays essential repair work and prevents new families from moving in, extending the time units remain vacant and unavailable for eligible low-income applicants.

From years of experience, we have found that the vast majority of items left behind are not valuable personal belongings, but instead, broken furniture, trash, and other discarded materials. The current requirement to store these items for extended periods unnecessarily delays the ability to prepare the unit for new tenants and diverts resources from more critical housing needs.

HB 1097 addresses these challenges by:

1. Reducing the Required Storage Period for Unclaimed Property
 - Prior to an eviction, HPHA provides tenants with multiple warnings (both in-person and in writing) that all personal belongings must be removed from the unit.
 - Shortening the required storage timeframe allows HPHA to make units available to new residents more quickly, reducing extended vacancy periods.
2. Ensuring Fairness While Improving Housing Availability
 - This measure strikes a reasonable balance by ensuring that former tenants are given ample notice to retrieve their belongings while also prioritizing the urgent need to house new families on the waitlist.
 - Every day a unit remains vacant is another day a family remains unhoused—HB 1097 will help minimize unnecessary delays in placing families into stable, affordable housing.
3. Increasing Operational Efficiency
 - With no dedicated storage space, HPHA is often required to store unclaimed property in the unit itself, preventing much-needed repairs, maintenance, and turnover efforts.
 - Since most of what is left behind is junk, reducing the storage timeframe will help HPHA efficiently remove debris, restore units, and house new families faster.
 - By reducing storage time, HPHA can free up resources, accelerate unit rehabilitation, and ensure that state and federal housing assets are utilized as efficiently as possible.

With thousands of families in need of housing, HPHA must maximize the availability of every unit while ensuring that former tenants are treated fairly and given appropriate notice. HB 1097

provides a practical solution that allows for timely reoccupation of public housing units, ensuring that low-income families can access stable housing without unnecessary delays. 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.