

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
P. O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

WRITTEN
TESTIMONY ONLY

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB0879 HD1 SD1
RELATING TO CESSPOOL CONVERSIONS.**

SENATOR DONOVAN M. DELA CRUZ, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

April 2, 2025; 10:01 am; Room Number: 211

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 with comments and
5 amendments.

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

8 The Department is supportive of this proposed measure with comments and
9 amendments.

10 The Department received many inquiries about whether the grant award is tax exempt.
11 The Department requested approval in December 2023 from the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture
12 and U.S. Secretary of the Treasury to approve the Hawai'i Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant
13 Program as a tax-exempt incentive program, but has not received confirmation of federal
14 approval from either Secretary. It is the Department's understanding that the Hawai'i
15 Department of Taxation is waiting for the federal Secretaries to make a determination before
16 making a State-level determination.

Offered Amendments: The Department respectfully suggests the following revisions to proposed measure. Additions appear as double underlined and deletions appear as bracketed strikeouts.

SECTION 2, Page 3, lines 12-17: “(f) The department of health shall grant awards not to exceed [~~\$20,000~~] \$30,000 based on receipts of payment submitted under subsection (e)(4); provided that property owners that have previously received a grant award under this Act to upgrade or convert cesspools to a director of health-approved wastewater system shall be eligible for additional grant awards under this Act in an amount not to exceed \$30,000 for the same cesspool. [~~cesspools~~]Cesspools that have been upgraded or converted to a director of health-approved wastewater system before the passing of this Act shall not be eligible for this grant.”

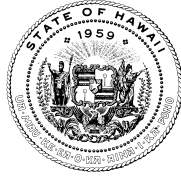
SECTION 3, Page 4, lines 3-8: “There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$5,000,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to fund the cesspool compliance pilot grant project.”

SECTION 4, Page 4, lines 11-17: “There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$251,070 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to establish three full-time equivalent (3.0 FTE) permanent positions within the department of health for the purposes of this Act.”

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
Hawai'i*

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



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 Hawai'i

P. O. BOX 1879
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96805

TESTIMONY OF KALI WATSON, CHAIR
HAWAIIAN HOMES COMMISSION
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS
DECISION MAKING ON APRIL 2, 2025 AT 10:01AM IN CR 211

HB 879, HD 1, SD 1, RELATING TO CESSPOOL CONVERSIONS

April 2, 2025

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) **supports** this bill which 1) increases the maximum grant amount for the Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project and 2) appropriates funds.

Approximately 2,500 cesspools exist on Hawaiian Home Lands and majority of which are ranked as priority level 1 or priority level 2 cesspools to be upgraded, converted, or connected to a sewerage system. DHHL understands the urgency to complete these conversions and connections before the year 2050.

DHHL supports increasing the maximum grant amount, given the increase in costs to cover all upgrade or conversion costs. DHHL also supports providing funds for the cesspool compliance pilot grant project.

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 support this measure that increases the maximum grant amount for the Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project and appropriates funds for the cesspool compliance pilot grant project.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony

OFFICE OF CLIMATE CHANGE SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY

KE KE'ENA LOLI ANIAU MĀLAMA 'ĀINA A ME KE OLA LOA

CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR
MEIA



BENJAMIN SULLIVAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR &
CHIEF RESILIENCE OFFICER
PO'O HO'OKŌ & KAHU OLA LOA

KEALOHA FOX
DEPUTY DIRECTOR &
CHIEF RESILIENCE OFFICER
HOPE PO'O & HOPE KAHU OLA LOA

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 2, 2025, 10:01 A.M.

STATE OF HAWAII
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 879, HD1, SD1
RELATING TO CESSPOOL CONVERSIONS

BY,

KEALOHA FOX, Ph.D.
DEPUTY DIRECTOR AND DEPUTY CHIEF RESILIENCE OFFICER
OFFICE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

The City and County of Honolulu ("City") Office of Climate Change, Sustainability and Resiliency ("Resilience Office") **supports** HB879, HD1, SD1, which increases the maximum grant amounts for the Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project.

The City's climate adaptation strategy, *Climate Ready O'ahu*, recognizes the critical need to increase partnerships and investments to support cesspool conversions across O'ahu. A recent study commissioned by the Resilience Office found that of the 11,000 cesspools on O'ahu, over 1,000 of those cesspools are located within the sea-level rise exposure area (SLR-XA). Experienced and future climate change impacts increase the urgency of this need to support cesspool conversion in high priority areas to protect our drinking water and the health of nearby environments.

The demand for support is so high that the five million dollars initially appropriated for the grant project by Act 153 (2022) was accounted for within weeks. This rapid depletion of funds underscores the immense need for and interest in this grant program. Accounting for inflation, we estimate the average conversion cost in 2025 to be over \$28,000. This presents a tremendous financial burden on top of the already increasing costs of living across the state.

Support for this program can mean the difference for the success of any cesspool conversion project on O'ahu, particularly for our low- to moderate-income households. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB879, HD1, SD1.

**Testimony of The Nature Conservancy
Supporting HB879 HD1 SD1, Relating to Cesspool Conversions.
Committee on Ways and Means
April 2, 2025 at 10:01 am
Conference Room 211 & via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Hawai'i and Palmyra supports HB879 HD1 SD1, which would appropriate funds to and increase the maximum grant amount for the Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project.

Science conducted by TNC and partners has shown that wastewater, particularly cesspools, are detrimental to the coral reefs which protect our coastlines and underpin our economy. Without clean coastal waters reef ecosystems are put at even greater risk in the face of growing global stressors including climate change.

Cesspools cause harm to water quality within adjacent groundwater, anchialine, coral reef systems and fisheries by introducing elevated amounts of organic nitrogen and phosphorus, pathogens, and other contaminants. Contaminants emitted from cesspools can harm aquatic ecosystems by encouraging excess algal and bacterial growth and can also pose a threat to human health. Our research in He'eia, Maunaloa, Olowalu, Hana and South Kohala has shown direct evidence of cesspool contamination in streams and coastal waters using a variety of bioindicators and chemical signatures.

Effectively upgrading cesspools to technologies that can remove nutrients and contaminants that are harmful to reefs is critical for their long-term health. However, our state faces major barriers to adopting these technologies. One of the primary limitations for cesspool upgrade, conversion or connection at scale is the high-cost of conversion property owners, especially those that are low- and moderate-income. HB879 HD1 SD1 is one possible avenue to provide valuable financing options.

Mahalo again for the opportunity to provide comments on HB879 HD1 SD1.

Guided by science, TNC is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the lands and waters upon which all life depends. The Conservancy has helped protect more than 200,000 acres of natural lands in Hawai'i and Palmyra Atoll. We manage 40,000 acres in 13 nature preserves and have supported over 50 coastal communities to help protect and restore the nearshore reefs and fisheries of the main Hawaiian Islands.

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April 2, 2025

The Honorable Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

State Capitol, Conference Room 211 & Videoconference

RE: House Bill 879, HD1, SD1, Relating to Cesspool Conversions

HEARING: Wednesday, April 2, 2025, at 10:01 a.m.

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Lyndsey Garcia, Director of Advocacy, testifying on behalf of the Hawai'i Association of REALTORS® ("HAR"), the voice of real estate in Hawaii and its over 10,000 members. HAR **supports** House Bill 879, HD1, SD1, which increases the maximum grant amount for the Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project. Appropriates funds. Effective 12/31/2050.

Hawai'i REALTORS® supports the goal of protecting our drinking water, streams, ground water, and ocean resources. We recognize that cesspool conversion is important to preserve our environment. There are approximately 83,000 cesspools divided into three priorities¹ across the State and to convert 83,000 cesspools by 2050, at least 3,320 cesspools would need to be converted per year. It is crucial that we properly plan and find ways to assist communities and homeowners as resources and manpower are limited, especially on the neighbor islands. Costs will vary greatly depending on resources, labor, permitting delays, property terrain, and other variables. According to the Cesspool Conversions Finance Research Report prepared for the Department of Health, "historical costs of cesspool upgrades to approved systems range widely from approximately \$9,000 to \$60,000 or more depending on the wastewater system capacity (based on bedroom count), technology, and location or site constraints."²

In 2022, the Legislature passed Act 153 to offer rebates of up to \$20,000 to help homeowners with the costs of conversion. Demand was so great that that \$5 million in grants ran out in just two weeks.³ With the high demand of Act 153, HAR supports reestablishing a pilot grant project to help homeowners who are unable to afford to

¹ University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program. *Hawai'i Cesspool Prioritization Tool*. <https://seagrant.soest.hawaii.edu/cesspools-tool/>

² Carollo. (January 21, 2021). *Cesspool Conversion Finance Research Report*. <https://health.hawaii.gov/wastewater/files/2021/02/financefinalreportr.pdf>

³ Spectrum News Hawaii. (July 6, 2023). 83,000 Hawaii Homes Dispose of Sewage in Cesspools. Rising Sea Levels Will Make Them More of a Mess. spectrumlocalnews.com/hi/hawaii/news/2023/07/06/83-000-hawaii-homes-dispose-of-sewage-in-cesspools--rising-sea-levels-will-make-them-more-of-a-mess



808-733-7060



1259 A'ala Street, Suite 300
Honolulu, HI 96817



808-737-4977

convert without assistance. Additionally, a higher grant amount can help address rising costs of cesspool conversion.

HAR would also note that the grant money received would be considered income and homeowners would be taxed on that amount.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.





To: The Honorable Chair Donovan DelaCruz, the Honorable Vice Chair Sharon Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee on Ways and Means.

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

Re: **Hearing HB879 HD1 SD1 RELATING TO CESSPOOL CONVERSIONS**

Hearing: Wednesday April 2, 2025, 10:01 a.m. Rm. 211

Aloha Chair DelaCruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee on Ways and Means!

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 Hawai'i's coral reefs and ocean.

The Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition STRONGLY SUPPORTS HB879 HD1 and proposes amendments on page 4!

There are about 83,000 cesspools in Hawai'i that are dumping about 50 million gallons every day into Hawai'i'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.

The Legislature has recognized that the requirement to upgrade or convert a cesspool imposes a financial burden on low- and moderate-income families. In Act 153, session laws of 2022, the legislature established in the Department of Health a **pilot grant project to assist with conversion costs for low- and moderate-income property owners**, including lessees on Hawaiian home lands, located in an area identified as priority level 1 or 2 in the University of Hawai'i's 2021 Hawaii cesspool hazard assessment and prioritization tool. Act 153 (2022) provided grants up to \$20,000 to

qualifying low- and moderate-income homeowners. The demand was high for these grants, and it was fully subscribed within weeks. The appropriation under Act 153 lapsed as of June 30, 2024.

Hawai'i has an excellent opportunity to **save some low- and moderate-income owners money by approving this grant program**, at a time when many residents are struggling to make ends meet. This bill would appropriate funding for grants under the program established in Act 153, session laws of 2022, to assist with conversion costs for certain low- and moderate-income property owners.

Most importantly, the bill would provide needed funding for the grant program in each of the next two fiscal years. Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition recommends an appropriation of \$5 million in FY26 and in FY27, consistent with Act 153 (2022).

This bill increases the maximum grant per upgrade to a blank amount. Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition recommends **a maximum grant of \$30,000** based on recent experience.

The bill requires reports before the 2024 and 2026 sessions. Please amend this to the "sessions of 2024 [.] and 2026 and 2027."

Please pass this bill with these amendments to enable a sizable number of low- and moderate-income owners to upgrade their cesspools!

Mahalo!

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



TO: Senate WAM Committee
Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Moriwaki, Vice Chair

FROM: Lynn Miyahira representing Public Access to SunScreens (PASS) Coalition
DATE: April 2, 2025

Re: HB 879 HD1 SD1

Position: SUPPORT

The [Public Access to SunScreens](#) (PASS) Coalition is a multi-stakeholder coalition composed of public health groups, dermatologists, sunscreen manufacturers, and leading advocates for skin cancer patients. We also support efforts that protect our coral reefs.

We support this measure.

Hawaii faces a severe cesspool pollution problem, with over 83,000 cesspools discharging approximately 50 million gallons of raw sewage daily into our groundwater, streams, and oceans. This not only threatens our drinking water but also harms coral reefs that are vital to Hawaii's ecosystem and tourism economy.

Cesspool upgrades are expensive, and we must find ways to make them more affordable for homeowners and governments. This bill would increase grants for qualifying low- and moderate-income homeowners. Past demand for these grants was overwhelming, with funds being fully subscribed within weeks.

HB879 strengthens the Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project by increasing the maximum grant amount from \$20,000 to \$30,000. Given the rising costs of conversion, this adjustment is essential to ensuring homeowners can afford the necessary upgrades. Moreover, this bill funds administrative support within the Department of Health, ensuring effective implementation and outreach for the program.

I support HB 879 for its efforts to improve regulations that promote a healthier future for our state's residents.

Mahalo you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Lynn Miyahira
Public Access to SunScreens (PASS) Coalition

HB-879-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/28/2025 4:56:30 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eileen Hilton	Testifying for Windward Coalition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

March 28, 2025

RE: HB 879

Aloha Chairman Dela Cruz and Fuji and committee members

The Windward Coalition supports Hawaii House Bill 879 which addresses cesspool sewage issues in the state. We strongly agree with the need for:

1. Cesspool Upgrades Deadline: Requiring all cesspools in Hawaii to be upgraded or converted to an approved wastewater system or connected to a sewerage system.
2. Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project: to assist low- and moderate-income property owners by increasing the maximum grant to \$30,000, and including lessees on Hawaiian home lands.
3. Funding Appropriation: Appropriating additional funds to support the Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project, which likely may still be insufficient to meet demand given the scale of conversions required statewide.

We fully support HB 879 and appreciates the technical and logistical challenges and possible public resistance because of cost concerns. The Windward Coalition is acutely aware of the current coastal water pollution as we participate in the Surfrider's Blue Water Initiative which highlights the need for robust planning, adequate funding, and public outreach to ensure successful implementation.

Mahalo for considering our submission,

Eileen Hilton

President, Windward Coalition



Date: Apr 1, 2025

To: Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the Committee on Ways and Means

Re: HB 879 HD1 SD1, Relating to Cesspool Conversion
Wednesday April 2, 2025
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 211
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

From: Erica Perez- Program Manager and Head of Sanitation
eperez@coral.org
Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL)

Subject: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 879 HD1 SD1, Relating to Cesspools

I am testifying in Support of HB 879 HD1 SD1 relating to cesspool conversion on behalf of the Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL) and a concerned citizen of Moku o Keawe.

CORAL has been working to remove cesspools across Hawaii for over ten years. We watch as communities like Puako, Kahalu'u, Hana, and Keaukaha, invest millions of dollars and countless hours to identify solutions for these outdated systems, only to be stalled due to lack of available funding and capacity at the State and County levels. Cesspool upgrades are expensive. We must find ways to make them affordable to homeowners and governments.

HB 879 strengthens the Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project by increasing the maximum grant amount from \$20,000 to \$30,000. Given the rising costs of conversion, this adjustment is essential to ensuring homeowners can afford the necessary upgrades. Moreover, this bill funds administrative support within the Department of Health, ensuring effective implementation and outreach for the program.

Our coral reefs and oceans are vital to Hawaii's identity and future. By addressing this pressing issue, we protect ecosystems that define our islands and ensure the health of our waters for future generations. The time to act is now—our oceans cannot wait.



We are a member of The Ocean Legislative Task Force, a group of over 100 individuals from diverse environmental organizations, working together to safeguard marine ecosystems. Our collective expertise allows us to craft impactful strategies to protect Hawaii's waters.

In closing, CORAL Supports HB 879 HD1 SD1. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important measure,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Erica Perez'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Erica Perez
Program Manager and Head of Sanitation
eperez@coral.org
Coral Reef Alliance



April 1, 2025

Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Hawai'i State Legislature
Via Electronic Transmission

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of HB879, Relating to Cesspool Conversions
Hearing: Wednesday, April 2, 2025, 10:01 AM CR 221 & Via Videoconference

To: The Honorable Chair Donovan, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the
Committee

Surfrider Foundation Hawai'i Region supports House Bill 879 which increases financial assistance for cesspool conversions and expands resources to assist homeowners in meeting state wastewater compliance requirements.

Surfrider Foundation is a grassroots activist network dedicated to the protection of our oceans, waves, and beaches. As part of our water quality initiative, we maintain a citizen-science water quality monitoring program called the Blue Water Task Force (BWTF) on Kaua'i, Maui, and O'ahu that tests for enterococcus, a fecal indicator bacteria at 80 sites regularly. BWTF sites are often selected to monitor water quality around sites with high concentration of coastal cesspools such as Kāne'ōhe bay at Kahalu'u. Due to these cesspools, the water near and around Kahalu'u regularly exceeds state public health standards.

Hawai'i faces public health and environmental threats due to outdated wastewater management systems, particularly the extensive use of cesspools. Currently, more than 83,000 cesspools across the state discharge approximately 52 million gallons of untreated sewage daily into our groundwaters and nearshore waters. Their contamination jeopardizes drinking water supplies, public health, and our marine ecosystems, including coral reefs, which are essential to Hawaii's environmental health and economy.

HB879 strengthens the Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project by increasing the maximum grant amount from \$20,000 to \$30,000. Given the rising costs of conversion,

this adjustment provides essential support to low- and moderate-income homeowners, helping them meet state-mandated cesspool conversion deadlines while alleviating financial strain. Additionally, this bill funds administrative support within the Department of Health, ensuring effective implementation and outreach for the program.

Surfrider Foundation Hawai'i urges you to support HB879 and prioritize the health of the public and marine ecosystems through more accessible and affordable cesspool conversion.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Hanna Lilley
Hawai'i Regional Manager
Surfrider Foundation



March 31, 2025

In Support of HB879 Relating to Cesspool Conversions

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Hearing on Wednesday, April 2nd, 2025, 10:01 am - Conference Room 211

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee,

Reef Guardians Hawai'i / Nā Kia'i Āpapa strongly supports HB879, which expands financial assistance and resources for cesspool conversions. Support for this statewide infrastructure improvement is essential to protect our reefs and nearshore waters.

Cesspools continue to be a major source of pollution, threatening public health and marine ecosystems. HB879 takes a necessary step in addressing this issue by increasing grant funding to help homeowners comply with wastewater regulations while partially easing financial burdens. The bill also strengthens program administration, ensuring efficient implementation and outreach.

Investing in cesspool conversions is an investment in Hawai'i's future. Cleaner water benefits our communities, environment, and economy. We urge the committee to pass HB879 and advance solutions that protect our islands for generations to come.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robin Mazor

Executive Director

(808) 482-7263

robinmazor@reefguardians.org



LATE

April 1, 2025

In Support of **HB879 SD1 Relating to Wastewater Systems**
Senate Committee on Ways And Means (WAM)
Hearing on Wed., April 2, 2025, 10:01am, CR211

Aloha, Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Moriwaki, & Committee Members:

On behalf of the non-profit WAI: Wastewater Alternatives & Innovations, I am writing in **strong support of HB879 SD1**. This bill would expand on the successful pilot program under Act 153 to help eligible homeowners by providing grants of \$30,000 to help pay the cost of converting their cesspools. The bill would also allot appropriate funding to the Department of Health to manage the program and the grants to homeowners.

Cesspool conversions can be costly, and we need to try to find ways to make upgrades more **affordable** while also making them **effective**. Under Act 125, all cesspools need to be converted by 2050, and the price of conversion is only getting more expensive with time. With prices ranging from \$25k to \$50k (depending on site conditions, soil types, etc.), the amount of these grants need to be raised from \$20k to \$30k to help homeowners in Priority Areas 1 & 2. Because many people can't afford the upfront costs or wait to be reimbursed, I would suggest that the rebates be done as grants that can be paid in installments so they can pay engineers and contractors.

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. Many places like Puako in Hawaii County and Ma'alaea in Maui have lost most of their coral reefs. Degraded reefs are not only bad for the environment, but they are bad for tourism, the economy and the protection of the Islands from storms, floods, hurricanes and tsunamis.

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 would build on a successful pilot program and allow the Department of Health to give grants to eligible homeowners and help them with the cost of converting their cesspools. Mahalo for your leadership on this issue and support of this bill.

Aloha,

Stuart Coleman

Stuart H. Coleman, Executive Director

HB-879-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/28/2025 11:00:43 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Douglas Perrine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The cesspool grant program is a successful method of incentivizing citizens to convert cesspools. The program deserves to be extended, enlarged, and funded. I support HB879.

HB-879-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 8:25:33 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good idea, especially to help the low and moderate income property owners. Mahalo!

HB-879-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:04:08 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael W Schwartz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My wife and I own a house that abuts the Moloa'a Stream near where it enters the ocean at Moloa'a Bay. Tests repeated demonstrate bacterial counts well beyond the upper limit of what is considered safe (usually by more than 10-fold), and yet children play in the stream every day. This is but one example of the very unsafe situation created by cesspools that drain into the stream, and it highlights why my wife and I are strongly in favor of HB879 relating to cesspool conversion.

March 31st, 2025

In Support of HB879 Relating to Cesspool Conversions
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Hearing on Wednesday, April 2nd 2025, 10:01 am - Conference Room 211

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz and Vice Chair Moriwaki,

My name is Addison Davis, and I am writing to express **strong support for HB879**, which increases financial assistance for cesspool conversions and expands resources to assist homeowners in meeting state wastewater compliance requirements.

Hawai‘i has over 83,000 cesspools that discharge approximately 50 million gallons of raw sewage into our groundwater, streams, and oceans every day.¹ This poses serious risks to public health, drinking water, and marine ecosystems, including our vital coral reefs. The passage of this bill would provide critical support for low- and moderate-income homeowners, helping them meet state-mandated cesspool conversion deadlines while alleviating financial strain.

HB879 strengthens the Cesspool Compliance Pilot Grant Project by increasing the maximum grant amount from \$20,000 to \$30,000. Given the rising costs of conversion, this adjustment is essential to ensuring homeowners can afford the necessary upgrades. Moreover, this bill funds administrative support within the Department of Health, ensuring effective implementation and outreach for the program.

For decades, cesspool pollution has contributed to the degradation of our nearshore waters, threatening Hawai‘i’s environmental and economic well-being. Providing financial assistance and programmatic support for cesspool conversions is a necessary step toward a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable future for our islands.

The adoption of new regulations will make wastewater system improvements more affordable, improving the accessibility of cesspool upgrades statewide. **I support the committee on Ways and Means to pass HB879**, for its efforts to improve regulations that promote a healthier future for our state’s residents and ecological resources.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Addison Davis

¹ STATE OF HAWAI‘I, DEP’T OF HEALTH REP. ON CESSPOOL CONVERSION WORKING GROUP (2022).

HB-879-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:23:47 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Lamson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Mahalo nūi for your support of this much-needed bill that will help improve water quality for Hawaii's native anchialine, estuarine, nearshore coral-reef species, and shoreline resident/visitor users alike!

HB-879-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2025 11:19:53 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amber Datta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill to increase grant funding for cesspool conversions.

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB879 SD1

Relating to Cesspool Conversions

Submitted by: Zach Lockwood

Hearing Date/Time: April 2, 2025, at 10:00 AM

To: Senate Committee on Ways and Means (WAM)

Chair: Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz

Vice Chair: Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Zach Lockwood, and I am a law student at the William S. Richardson School of Law and currently enrolled in the Environmental Law Clinic. I am testifying in my individual capacity in strong support of HB879 SD1.

This bill plays an essential role in addressing one of Hawai‘i’s most urgent environmental and public health challenges: the continued discharge of raw sewage from over 83,000 cesspools into our groundwater, streams, and coastal waters. Every day, approximately fifty million gallons of untreated wastewater enter ecosystems we rely on for drinking water, cultural practices, and marine biodiversity.

The original pilot grant program created under Act 153 demonstrated both the urgent demand and financial barriers associated with cesspool conversions. The initial \$5 million allocation was depleted in just a few weeks, confirming the strong need for assistance. Since then, conversion costs have only increased—often exceeding \$30,000 per property. The current \$20,000 cap is no longer enough to meaningfully support low- and moderate-income homeowners.

This legislation is also a matter of equity. Many of the property owners struggling to comply with the 2050 conversion mandate live in rural areas, neighbor islands, or on Hawaiian Home Lands. Without robust state support, they risk being left behind—despite facing some of the greatest environmental vulnerabilities.

Upgrading cesspools is not just about compliance. It’s about investing in clean water, healthy communities, and the long-term sustainability of our islands. HB879 SD1 helps us move from mandates to meaningful action.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Zach Lockwood

HB-879-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/1/2025 9:59:25 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/2/2025 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Becker	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I fully support this bill.