

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'ŌIHANA OLAKINO  
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**Testimony COMMENTING on SB0675  
RELATING TO CESSPOOLS**

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

SENATOR MIKE GABBARD, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

January 31, 2025, 1:00 pm; Room Number: 225

1 **Fiscal Implications:** None

2 **Department Position:** The Department of Health ("Department") comments on this measure

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

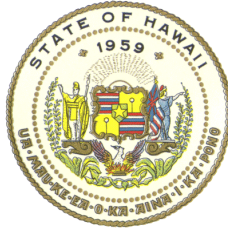
5 The Department appreciates that this measure creates a new cesspool conversion  
6 section within the Department's wastewater branch and appropriates moneys for three (3)  
7 fulltime permanent positions. The Department has concerns that the time and effort to  
8 reorganize the branch to include a new cesspool conversion section would detract the existing  
9 management from addressing actual cesspool conversion actions. The reorganization is  
10 required before the development and establishment of the new positions. This delay may cause  
11 impacts to human health and the environment.

12 By placing the new positions within the existing organizational structure of the  
13 wastewater branch, the responsibilities identified in Section 2 may begin sooner than the

1 approximate year to reorganize the branch. The position descriptions for the new positions will  
2 reflect the duties and responsibilities listed in the measure.

3 **Offered Amendments:** None

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



**STATE OF HAWAII  
HAWAII CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION & ADAPTATION  
COMMISSION  
POST OFFICE BOX 621  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809**

**Co-Chairs:**  
Chair, DLNR  
Director, OPSD

**Commissioners:**  
Chair, Senate AEN  
Chair, Senate WTL  
Chair, House EEP  
Chair, House WAL  
Chairperson, HTA  
Chairperson, DOA  
CEO, OHA  
Chairperson, DHHL  
Director, DBEDT  
Director, DOT  
Director, DOH  
Chairperson, DOE  
Director, C+C DPP  
Director, Maui DP  
Director, Hawaii DP  
Director, Kauai DP  
The Adjutant General  
Manager, CZM

**Testimony of  
LEAH LARAMEE  
Climate Change Coordinator on behalf of  
Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission Co-Chair Mary Alice Evans and  
Co-Chair Dawn N.S. Chang**

**Before the Senate Committee on  
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
and  
AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT**

**Friday, January 31, 2025  
1:00 PM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 225 & Videoconference**

**In consideration of  
SENATE BILL 675  
RELATING TO CESSPOOLS**

Senate Bill 675 creates within the Department of Health's Wastewater Branch a Cesspool Conversion Section, which shall be responsible for facilitating the conversion of cesspools within the State. Establishes and appropriates funds for positions within the Cesspool Conversion Section. **The Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission (Commission) supports this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Budget request.**

The Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission consists of a multi-jurisdictional effort between 20 different departments, committees, and counties. Cesspools are little more than holes in the ground that discharge raw, untreated human waste. Cesspools in Hawai'i release approximately 53 million gallons of untreated sewage into the ground each day. Cesspools can contaminate ground water, drinking water sources, streams and oceans with disease-causing pathogens such as bacteria, protozoa and viruses that can cause gastroenteritis, Hepatitis A, conjunctivitis, leptospirosis, salmonellosis and cholera.

Removal of cesspools for all properties within the Sea Level Rise Exposure Area (SLR-XA), is imperative to the health of nearshore waters and for members of the public accessing coastal resources. Removal may not be achievable by 2050 as directed by Act 125, Session Laws of

Hawai‘i 2017, without financing support for replacement. The Commission’s 2022 update to the *Sea Level Rise Vulnerability and Adaptation Report* Recommended Action 6.4 counsels that the State should expand policy directives beyond the existing income tax credits and requirement for removal by 2050. Cesspools on the shoreline and in the coastal zone will be an increasing source of nonpoint source pollution as groundwater rises and coastal erosion accelerates. The capacity this bill provides is needed to support cesspool conversion and protect our waters.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



# Environmental Caucus of The Democratic Party of Hawai'i

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January 31, 2025

## Testimony in Support of SB675: Relating to Cesspools

Aloha Chairs San Buenaventura and Gabbard, Vice Chairs Aquino and Richards, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services and Committee on Agriculture and Environment,

We, Melodie Aduja and Alan Burdick, are testifying on behalf of the Environmental Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i in strong support of SB675, which aims to address the critical issue of cesspools in our state. This bill is essential for protecting public health and the environment by facilitating the conversion of cesspools to more sustainable wastewater management systems.

### Key Points of Support:

1. **Protecting Public Health:** Cesspools pose significant health risks by contaminating groundwater and surface water with harmful pathogens and chemicals. SB675 will help mitigate these risks by promoting the conversion of cesspools to more advanced and environmentally friendly wastewater treatment systems.
2. **Environmental Protection:** Cesspools contribute to the pollution of our precious water resources, including streams, rivers, and coastal waters. By facilitating cesspool conversions, SB675 will help protect Hawaii's unique ecosystems and marine life from the harmful effects of wastewater pollution.
3. **Supporting the Department of Health:** The bill creates a Cesspool Conversion Section within the Department of Health's Wastewater Branch, which will be responsible for overseeing and facilitating the conversion of cesspools across the state. This dedicated section will ensure that the conversion process is efficient and effective.
4. **Funding and Resources:** SB675 establishes and appropriates funds for positions within the Cesspool Conversion Section. This funding is crucial for providing the necessary resources and personnel to support the successful implementation of cesspool conversion projects.

### Examples of Harm Due to Cesspools:

- **Groundwater Contamination:** Cesspools are a major source of groundwater contamination in Hawaii. The pollutants from cesspools can seep into the groundwater, which is a primary source of drinking water for many residents. This contamination poses serious health risks, including gastrointestinal illnesses and other waterborne diseases.

- **Impact on Coastal Waters:** The pollutants from cesspools can also reach coastal waters, affecting marine life and recreational activities. High levels of nutrients from cesspools can lead to harmful algal blooms, which can have devastating effects on coral reefs and other marine ecosystems.
- **Community Health Concerns:** Communities with a high concentration of cesspools often face increased health risks due to the proximity of these outdated wastewater systems. Converting cesspools to modern wastewater treatment systems will significantly improve the quality of life and health outcomes for these communities.

In conclusion, the Environmental Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i strongly supports SB675 and urges the committees to pass this important legislation. By addressing the issue of cesspools, we can protect public health, preserve our environment, and ensure a sustainable future for all residents of Hawaii.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this critical bill.

Sincerely,

Melodie Aduja and Alan Burdick  
Co-chairs, Environmental Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawaii

**LATE**



January 30, 2025

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment  
Hawai'i State Legislature  
Via Electronic Transmission

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 675, Relating to Cesspools  
Hearing: Friday, January 31, 2025, 1:00 pm CR225

To: The Honorable Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the Health and Human Services committee, The Honorable Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and members of the Agriculture and Environment Committee

The Surfrider Foundation, Hawai'i region, is testifying in **strong support of SB 675** Relating to Cesspools. This bill establishes a Cesspool Conversion Section within the Department of Health's (DOH) Wastewater Branch to facilitate cesspool conversions statewide and funds key positions within this new section.

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'ohe bay at Kahalu'u. Due to these cesspools, the water near and around Kahalu'u regularly exceeds state public health standards.

Without mechanisms to facilitate compliance with 342D-72, Hawai'i Revised Statutes, we will continue to pollute our coastal and freshwaters, threatening both environmental and public health. A Cesspool Conversion Section will help expand capacity at DOH and expedite cesspool conversions and new wastewater treatment systems.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony in support of HB749, submitted on the behalf of the Surfrider Foundation's three Chapters in Hawai'i and all of our members who live in the state and visit to enjoy the many coastal recreational opportunities offered by all of the islands' coastlines.

Sincerely,

Hanna Lilley  
Hawai'i Regional Manager  
Surfrider Foundation



Jan., 30, 2025

In Support of **SB675 Relating to Cesspools**  
Sen. Comm.'s on Health & Human Serv. (HHS) & Agricult. & Environment (AEN)  
Hearing on Fri., Jan. 31, 2025, 1:00pm, CR225

Aloha, Chairs Buenaventura & Gabbard, Vice-Chairs Aquino & Richards, and Committee Members:

On behalf of the non-profit WAI: Wastewater Alternatives & Innovations, I am writing in **strong support of SB675**. This bill would create a new Cesspool Conversion Section at the Department of Health to work with the state, counties, communities and individual homeowners to convert cesspools across the state. I was a member of the State's Cesspool Conversion Working Group for four years (2018-2022), and the creation of a new Cesspool Section was one of the highest priorities in our Final Report.

Cesspool conversions can be costly, and we need to try to find ways to make upgrades more **affordable**. The bill would appropriate funds for three positions within the new Cesspool Conversion Section who would help with expediting the permitting process, updating old regulations, applying for federal grants and finding funds to help homeowners with the costs of conversion. Due to limited staffing in the Wastewater Branch, DOH needs these dedicated positions to help meet the state mandate under Act 125 (2017) to convert all cesspools by 2050.

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.

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 create a new Cesspool Conversion Section at DOH to help the state, the counties, communities and individual homeowners with the process, while also reducing the time, obstacles and costs of upgrading cesspools. Mahalo for your leadership on this issue and support of this bill.

Aloha,

*Stuart Coleman*

Stuart H. Coleman, Executive Director







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To: The Honorable Representative Mike Gabbard, Chair the Honorable Herbert M. “Tim” Richards, III, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee on Agriculture and Environmental Protection.

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

Re: Hearing **SB675 RELATING TO CESSPOOLS**

Hearing: Friday January 31, 2025, 1:00 p.m. Rm. 224

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Agriculture and Environment Committee Members:

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 Hawaii's coral reefs and ocean.

**The Hawai'i Reef and Ocean Coalition STRONGLY SUPPORTS SB675!**

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

The Department of Health will need to facilitate compliance, and to administer thousands of cesspool upgrades in the coming years. Overseeing the upgrading of thousands of cesspools is a huge task. The Department will need to seek and manage grants and other financing, develop and manage comprehensive public information and outreach, and form partnerships with counties, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector relating to the department's responsibilities under this section.

**The existing DOH Wastewater Branch is not able to take on these major additional tasks. A new section is needed with additional personnel dedicated to facilitating the conversion of cesspools within the State.**

This Act will create a **new cesspool conversion section** within the Department's wastewater branch and establish and appropriate moneys for new positions within the new section. The bill proposes a modest funding increase for **three full-time equivalent employees** dedicated to working on cesspool upgrades.

Given the serious pollution caused by cesspools, **this bill is needed to protect public health and the environment by helping the Department to manage the huge cesspool upgrade effort.**

Please pass this bill!

Mahalo!

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

**SB-675**

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 2:53:51 PM

Testimony for HHS on 1/31/2025 1:00:00 PM

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

## Comments:

Hawaii's DOH does not currently have the capacity to do the vital work of evaluating new wastewater treatment technologies and otherwise overseeing the urgent conversion of Hawaii's 80,000+ cesspools to more sanitary and environmentally friendly treatment methods. I urge you to approve SB675 to create a Cesspool Conversion section within the Wastewater Branch of the DOH and fund positions within it.

**SB-675**

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 5:25:06 PM

Testimony for HHS on 1/31/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacqueline S. Ambrose	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

YES to - Creates within the Department of Health's Wastewater Branch a Cesspool Conversion Section, which shall be responsible for facilitating the conversion of cesspools within the State. Establishes and appropriates funds for positions within the Cesspool Conversion Section.

**LATE**

**SB-675**

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 1:41:21 PM

Testimony for HHS on 1/31/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sina Pruder	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this measure. The Department of Health's Wastewater Branch needs additional staff and resources to manage cesspool conversions.