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Testimony of
DAWN N. S. CHANG
Chairperson

Before the Senate Committee on
PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Monday, March 24, 2025
3:05 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 225 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of
SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 209
SENATE RESOLUTION 184
RELATING TO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS, EVACUATION ROUTES
AND LARGE TREES

Senate Concurrent Resolution 209 and Senate Resolution 184 request that the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency identify existing large trees along evacuation routes and trim, spray, or remove trees having the potential to obstruct the evacuation route; conduct comprehensive risk assessments for specific high-risk trees; implement best practices in urban forestry; and strengthen community-based disaster preparedness initiatives. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) offers comments.**

The Department supports the creation of safe and efficient evacuation routes for disaster preparedness and appreciates the proposal of comprehensive risk assessments and implementation of best management practices related to arboriculture. The Department encourages solutions ensuring community health, safety, and resilience in disaster and non-disaster conditions. Careful consideration in identifying and managing high-risk trees will avoid sacrificing the many benefits provided by large trees. Comprehensive risk assessments can help to ensure that scientific justification – criteria such as tree species, root structure, and strength of branch attachment – is used to determine which trees pose a legitimate hazard. Mature trees provide numerous benefits and evaluation should consider the following benefits and impacts of removal:

- **Mitigating Environmental and Climate Impacts**

Trees are critical in reducing urban heat, absorbing carbon dioxide, and mitigating climate change. Large trees provide essential shade, reducing surface temperatures and energy costs while improving air quality. Removing mature trees without a clear replanting strategy would negatively impact Hawai'i's environment and residents' well-being.

- **Erosion and Stormwater Management**

Large trees stabilize soil and reduce erosion risk, particularly in coastal and low-lying areas prone to flooding. Their removal could increase runoff, sedimentation in waterways, and vulnerability to storm surges, exacerbating disasters.

- **Negative Impact on Community Aesthetics and Cultural Significance**

Many of Hawai'i's tree-lined roadways are functional and hold cultural and historical significance. The arbitrary removal or restriction of tree planting could diminish the scenic beauty of our state and erode the sense of place that is so important to locals and visitors.

- **Lack of Acknowledgement of Invasive Trees**

The resolution refers exclusively to 'planted' trees but does not acknowledge the existence of invasive trees growing voluntarily along roads. These are far more likely to pose risks than purposefully planted trees. Albizia, for example, are not planted along roadways but grow along roadways across the state in large numbers. Albizia can grow 15 feet per year and have shallow root structures and weak branch attachments, making them prone to failure. Albizia trees have blocked roadways and trapped community members, for example, on Hawai'i Island following Hurricane Iselle in 2014. A more discerning approach to tree removal that prioritizes the removal of Albizia and other invasive trees could be more effective in achieving the intention to safeguard communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this resolution.



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COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Senator Brandon J.C. Elefante, Chair

Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair

DATE: Monday, March 24, 2025

TIME: 3:05 PM

PLACE: Conference Room 225

SCR 209 / SR 184 HiEMA & Trees

OPPOSE

Aloha Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Wakai and Members of the Committee

Life of the Land is Hawai`i's own energy, environmental and community action group advocating for the people and `aina for 55 years. Our mission is to preserve and protect the life of the land through sound energy and land use policies and to promote open government through research, education, advocacy and, when necessary, litigation.

ALTHOUGH "trees, streetlights, utility poles, and other objects all have the potential to obstruct roads that are "the only means by which to flee an evacuation zone" and all of these objects "may also prevent emergency response vehicles and personnel from getting to or returning from an evacuation zone," the resolution only focuses on trees.

"Hawaii Emergency Management Agency is requested to identify existing large trees along evacuation routes and trim, spray, or remove trees having the potential to obstruct the evacuation route."

CONCERNS: The Hawaii Emergency Management Agency kuleana does not include cooling communities, protecting endangered flora, or overseeing herbicide use.

Mahalo

Henry Curtis, Executive Director

SCR-209

Submitted on: 3/21/2025 8:07:06 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/24/2025 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jodi Akau	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this Bill.