

DAVID Y. IGE
Governor

JOSH GREEN
Lt. Governor



PHYLLIS SHIMABUKURO-GEISER
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

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**TESTIMONY OF PHYLLIS SHIMABUKURO-GEISER
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

**FEBRUARY 5, 2021
1:00 P.M.
Via Videoconference**

**SENATE BILL NO. 479
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION**

Chairperson Gabbard and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 479, relating to agricultural production. This bill appropriates funds from the general fund to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture for fiscal year 2021-2022 to develop and implement a tropical flower and foliage plant material distribution program. That program requires the Department to collaborate with agricultural growers and researchers to develop and implement a program that obtains and safely distributes disease- and insect-free tropical plant materials to Hawaii farmers. The Department opposes the measure and offers comments.

The bill does not define what would be considered tropical plant materials and would also turn the Department into an importer, breeder, producer, and distributor of tropical plant materials, thereby competing directly with the many existing nurseries both in State and out-of-state that produce plants for sale in Hawaii. The bill does not specify whether farmers will purchase plants from the Department or get them for free, the latter of which would result in taxpayer funds subsidizing farmers. Additionally, as the Department's Plant Quarantine Branch is also the agency charged with regulating the



import of plants, the Department would have a conflict of interest as both the importer and regulator.

The Department concurs with the goal of distributing disease- and insect-free plant materials, as a way to prevent the introduction and movement of harmful invasive species. The department suggests alternative for consideration to work towards this goal. Hawaii could institute a nursery licensing program along the lines of those already in operation in many states. These fee-based programs require periodic inspections for plant pest cleanliness and hold nursery owners accountable for maintaining their stock in a pest-free status. This encourages nurseries to implement quality control programs and to source plants from reputable distributors, with an end result being that consumers benefit by purchasing higher quality and healthier plants and the risk of introduction and spread of invasive species are reduced. Furthermore, a licensing program would encourage business owners to take actions to protect their plants from pests already in the surrounding environment.

Another alternative is to create additional regulations in Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR) 4-70 to specify the plant species and varieties that would need additional regulations, thereby creating the quarantine requirements, diagnostic measures, and import requirements. The industry can already petition the Board to enact a rule change pursuant to HAR 4-1-23. Doing it this way would increase the regulation but put the burden on the importer to comply as opposed to having the state shoulder the burden. It would also limit what can be imported, lessening the likelihood of a new pest introduction.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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February 5, 2021

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON SB 479
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Via Videoconference
1:00 PM

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Nishihara, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawaii Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawaii's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

The Hawaii Farm Bureau supports SB 479, which requires the Department of Agriculture to collaborate with agricultural growers and researchers to develop and implement a program to safely distribute disease- and insect-free tropical plant materials to Hawaii farmers.

Many tropical flower species face new threats from insects and diseases. For example, the ginger coming in the floral trade has succumbed to a new virus on Oahu. Commercial production has significantly declined. As new plantings are installed clean fresh material is needed to prevent its spread. Because the disease is a virus, diseased plants may not be obvious in its early stages. A guaranteed clean source of material is important.

For these reasons, HFB respectfully requests your strong support of this measure.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of this measure.