## A BILL FOR AN ACT

MAKING AN APPROPRIATION TO THE HAWAII ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS.

## BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

- SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the Hawaii
  association of conservation districts, through coordination,
- z association of conservation districts, through coordination,
- 3 facilitation, and partnerships assists government agencies in
- 4 identifying and implementing culturally-sensitive projects and
- 5 practices to ensure the protection of Hawaii's environment. The
- 6 Hawaii association of conservation districts is composed of
- 7 sixteen districts representing every community on all major
- 8 islands of Hawaii. Chapter 180, Hawaii Revised Statutes,
- 9 authorizes the soil and water conservation districts to operate
- 10 as government subdivisions to educate the public and construct
- 11 and maintain conservation projects and programs in Hawaii. Each
- 12 of the sixteen districts is governed by five volunteer directors
- 13 and is supported by staff. The department of land and natural
- 14 resources provides administration and maintains oversight
- 15 authority of the soil and water conservation districts.
- 16 The soil and water conservation districts have worked to
- 17 improve Hawaii's environment and economy through major projects

- 1 over the past sixty years. While these projects do not occur in
- 2 all districts every year, collaborative efforts with partners
- 3 and government agencies have brought millions of dollars to
- 4 Hawaii to improve farm practices, reduce erosion, improve ocean
- 5 and drinking water quality, fight invasive species, improve
- 6 public safety, protect property, conserve water, and strengthen
- 7 the economy. The soil and water conservation districts also
- 8 provide educational and community support for conservation
- 9 awareness. The districts participate in resource conservation
- 10 and development projects and statewide high school programs.
- 11 The districts also introduce conservation principles in
- 12 elementary schools.
- In addition, the soil and water conservation districts
- 14 assist with reviewing each county's grading permits and
- 15 conservation plans. County grading permit reviews and
- 16 conservation plans are critical to preserve the environment,
- 17 stimulate the economy, and maintain individual livelihoods. The
- 18 demand and accompanying workload for this service have increased
- 19 dramatically with population growth and land use changes. The
- 20 districts receive hundreds of requests for conservation plans
- 21 and county grading permit reviews each year. As a result,
- 22 districts are currently struggling to keep pace with the demand.



1 The state department of health recently notified the Hawaii 2 association of conservation districts that the current oil 3 pollution funding would end on December 31, 2013, and a new 4 potential, but not guaranteed, funding mechanism will utilize 5 federal "Clean Water Act" funds (Federal Water Pollution Control 6 Act, title 33 United States Code section 1329) for the program, 7 thus limiting services to those entities within priority 8 watershed areas that have approved watershed plans. This is 9 problematic as many of Hawaii's farming areas are not within 10 priority watersheds. On Maui, for example, the breadbasket of Omaopio and Pulehu, including the county agricultural park and 11 the expanding Haiku flower production district, exists outside 12 of these areas. Therefore, a priority of the relevant soil and 13 water conservation district is the identification of solutions 14 that provide continued delivery of services to all farmers and 15 16 ranchers. 17 The legislature also finds that the current department of health-proposed funding mechanism will result in delays within 18 the Maui county department of public works for farm-level 19 grubbing and grading permits. County funding currently 20 21 addresses review and recommendations associated with non-farm 22 The existing department of health-funded soil and water



- 1 conservation district program covered all conservation plan
- 2 requirements on agricultural lands. However, as proposed, the
- 3 new department of health process will exclude many farms,
- 4 causing them to fall under the county grubbing and grading
- 5 permit process. Even as these farmers are referred to the soil
- 6 and water conservation district by the county of Maui department
- 7 of public works, there will be no one to assist them.
- 8 The county of Maui department of planning often requests
- 9 landowners to obtain farm plans. These plans are prepared by
- 10 the conservation specialist. This service would no longer be
- 11 available. Additionally, the department of health has requested
- 12 that the conservation specialist take a more active role in the
- 13 enforcement of conservation plan provisions. The soil and water
- 14 conservation districts have not assumed this role, since
- 15 advocacy and enforcement by the same entity may cause conflicts
- 16 and, more importantly, result in a reluctance by farmers and
- 17 ranchers to participate in conservation programs.
- 18 Finally, the legislature also finds that agriculture in
- 19 Hawaii is rapidly evolving. Many new farmers are immigrants who
- 20 commonly are unfamiliar with United States laws. Educational
- 21 assistance, including education about conservation measures,
- 22 will be important to ensure that these new farmers and ranchers



- 1 adopt good environmental stewardship as a core value while
- 2 seeking economic viability.
- 3 The purpose of this Act is to appropriate funds to the
- 4 Hawaii association of conservation districts to assist with its
- 5 staffing and operating costs to provide time for the districts
- 6 to develop sustainable funding mechanisms.
- 7 SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general
- 8 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$220,000 or so much
- 9 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2014-2015 for
- 10 staffing and operating costs of the Hawaii association of
- 11 conservation districts.
- 12 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
- 13 land and natural resources for the purposes of this Act.
- 14 SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2014.

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## Report Title:

Appropriation; Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts

## Description:

Appropriates funds for the Hawaii association of conservation districts for staffing and operating costs. (SD1)

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