

Testimony Against SB2450

My name is Daria Creed Puana. I majored in accounting and finance. I like numbers and I like analyzing information. My professional work entails project, contract, and cost management. I have worked in fields that support the construction industry for over 20 years. I have also cared for homeless cats for over 20 years. Here is what my experience has taught me.

The Human Imprint

Humans love options, we love things. For food alone, we have supermarkets, convenience stores, fast food and fine dining restaurants. We have stores just for coffee. In acknowledgement that our continuous need to consume / to expand has effects, most projects these days are required to have environmental impact studies conducted and yet, few projects are ever stopped for environmental concerns. The protestors at Maunakea will tell you that it takes great effort to stop new construction. The term *carbon footprint* – popular in past decades – referred to only one side-effect of our behavior and has now been replaced with the more comprehensive term *human imprint* – which refers to our total effect on the environment. An article by National Geographic titled *Our Imprint Deepens as Consumption Accelerates* states “Humans have altered the face of the Earth more than any other species and the pace of change is increasing.”¹ If there are endangered species with limited space, there is no other creature more responsible for this condition than humans. Over the years I have picked up many shearwaters – some alive, some dead – from our roadways. These birds become confused by street lights. In all but a few areas, we (humans!) refuse to change – refuse to give up such lights as we favor our own comfort/safety.

The authors of this proposed bill are vain if they believe anyone other than humans are responsible for the problems we face. The authors want other species, far less accountable for today’s situation, to be starved, killed – punished for our behavior.

Predators

The proposed bill states “*Predators* means animals destructive of wildlife by nature of their predatory habits, including mongooses, cats, dogs, and rodents.” Humans, by DLNR’s own statements, are predators. In December, a number of albatrosses were killed at Kaena Point and *Hawaii News Now* quoted DLNR staff on the incident.

Thomas Friel, head of DLNR’s enforcement division, said several of the birds had their feet cut off, most likely with a blade. “It was in such a way that we believe it not to be predation from wild animals, but rather from humans,” he said.²

I repeat ‘Predation from humans’ was the cause.

This bill would make it unlawful to release, feed, water, or otherwise care for unrestrained predators on state lands. As DLNR has spoken of predation from humans, humans must be included in this category. It would therefore be illegal to feed, water, or care for any unrestrained humans on state land and all hikers, campers, and picnickers should be fined for their activities. I grant not all humans are directly responsible for the deaths at Kaena Point, but certainly most cats and dogs without homes never come into contact nor prey on endangered wildlife so if we are going to take a broad brush approach to a given species, we would have to take the same approach with humans.

The chicken or the egg?

This bill implies that caring for homeless animals has created or perpetuates the situation. Mark Twain, when he visited Hawaii, noted the thousands of stray cats in Honolulu. This problem has existed for many generations, long before managed care options were available. Homeless animals simply gravitate to sources of food and water such as trash bins and bathrooms.

Unless DLNR finds a way to keep every trash can and toilet sealed, DLNR itself will continue to attract such animals and will be responsible for providing sources of food and water. DLNR as an entity would be finable under this bill.

Caretakers are not responsible for this problem (and in fact are the only reasonable solution)!

There are places in Hawaii where there are very strict policies against caring for homeless animals such as Bellows in Waimanalo. This is an Airforce base with sentries and patrols. Every time I have camped at Bellows, I have heard cats fighting at night and seen them going through people's trash. You can stop people from actively caring for the animals but this will not get rid of the animals. I will let others speak about the vacuum effect or the rate at which one unfixed, abandoned cat can produce offspring but I will say that criminalizing caretakers or destroying any animals you can see and reach now would be no more logical than Don Quixote fighting windmills (read: attacking imaginary enemies).

My comments as an accountant

From doing lots of data analysis over the years I will offer this. There are two types of financial statements. One type looks at a company at a point in time – it's like a snap shot. The other type looks at a period of time. If one were to take the point-in-time approach with cat colonies, one might count a lot of cats. Perhaps the number of cats measured today would be similar to the number of cats measured at some previous point in time. However, managed colonies decrease the total number of cats that live in an area over the course of time. There is not the constant cycle of new births and new bodies taking the place of the sickly and dying. When my friend and I noticed cats at a state park more than 20 years ago, we were young and full of energy and started to capture the many sick kittens we saw, give them medical care, and find them homes but we could not keep up with the perpetual new kittens that kept appearing. In that first year, we probably found homes for close to 50 cats and still did not make a dent in the total population. That's when we researched and found out about the Human Society's trap neuter release program. I have seen this same colony shrink for a number of years after an area resident, Lowell Hussey, organized a large spay neuter event in the community. I have also seen the colony swell some years with lots of dumppees. But over time, I know that there have been far fewer cats overall because of my work. I recently brought home a cat I have been caring-for for nearly 20 years. She died in my boyfriend's arms from old age, nothing more.

The message we send to the community

There are people out there who are not informed enough, or who do not have the resources, or who are too lazy to get their animals fixed. If we lessen the status of animals in our community – lessen our collective regard for them – we do nothing to convince this segment of the population that animals are worthy of our long-term care, our long-term commitment and respect. It is only when

we convince the community at large that these animals deserve better that we will solve this problem.

Respectfully signed,

Daria Creed Puana
Kailua, Hawaii

Sources for quotes:

1. <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/earthpulse/human-impact.html>
2. <http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/30857266/albatross-killed-nests-smashed-at-kaena-point-reserve>

Testimony on SB2450

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TO THE HONORABLE MIKE GABBARD, CHAIR, AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, AND AGRICULTURE; AND TO THE HONORABLE GLENN WAKAI, CHAIR, AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT, AND TECHNOLOGY

My name is Carolyn Naun, DVM. I have been a practicing veterinarian for over fifteen years. I have cared for pets, feral animals, and wildlife. As a student, I participated in research focused on the impact of human activity on native wildlife. For the past five years, I have regularly assisted the Hawaiian Humane Society in their population control efforts by performing spay and neuter surgeries. I have also worked alongside individuals in the community, some of whom have been feeding free-roaming cat for as long as twenty years, and helped them use trap, neuter and return programs to humanely reduce the number of cats in their colonies.

I thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on Senate Bill 2450, which I **strongly oppose**. I would like to offer the following comments.

The community cat situation is the most serious and widespread animal welfare problem that we face in Hawaii today. It is a complex issue to which there is no single easy solution. I am sympathetic to the frustration over the impact that feeding these cats may have on the environment and the surrounding communities.

However, criminalizing the feeding of free-roaming cats on state lands is an overly simplistic and inhumane response.

These are just some of the specific problems with this strategy:

1. First and foremost, abruptly cutting off a food supply to innocent animals who have grown to depend upon it is cruel. Period.
2. It is equally cruel to the caregivers of these cats, many of whom have been tending to them for decades. Motivated out of kindness, they have in many cases developed a strong bond with the colony. It will be just as distressing for these individuals to see their

charges starving and begging for food as it would be for you or I to watch a family pet, or even our own child, go hungry.

3. Cats in maintained colonies have been conditioned to expect food from humans, and their behavior will likely become more intrusive to the surrounding communities as they desperately seek out new food sources.
4. To date, the most effective humane method that we know of to reduce community cat populations is to employ trap, neuter and release programs. The success of such programs depends upon the assistance and cooperation of the very people who would be criminalized by this bill.

For these reasons, I strongly oppose SB2450. I warmly invite members of the committee and interested parties to work with all stakeholders, including the numerous animal welfare organizations in Hawaii, to address this problem in a humane and respectful manner. I am also providing, for your reference, a copy of the American Veterinary Medical Association's position statement on free-roaming cats.

Appropriately and thoughtfully managing this problem will not be easy work. A commitment of significant resources and an extended, ongoing effort are mandatory to achieving meaningful control of our cat population, but I believe that a solution is still within reach.

Thank you again for this opportunity. You are welcome to contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Carolyn Naun