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Testimony of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs

**Before the
House Committee on Energy & Environmental Protection
Thursday, March 24, 2022
10:00 AM
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference**

**On the following measure:
HCR177/ HR177, REQUESTING THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION TO
EXPLORE, THROUGH ITS DOCKET PROCESS, THE FEASIBILITY OF
RELOCATING ABOVE-GROUND ELECTRIC TRANSMISSION LINES AND
DISTRIBUTION LINES UNDERGROUND IN HIGH-RISK AREAS ON THE ISLAND OF
MAUI**

Chair Lowen and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dean Nishina, and I am the Executive Director of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs' (Department) Division of Consumer Advocacy. The Department offers comments on this resolution.

The purpose of this resolution is to request the Public Utilities Commission (Commission) to explore, through its docket process, the feasibility of relocating above-ground electric transmission lines and distribution lines underground in high-risk areas on the island of Maui.

The Department acknowledges the concerns related to the placement of utility infrastructure and potential impacts on communities and the environment. The Department offers that the Commission is already looking at a variety of issues affecting, and affected by, high-voltage transmission lines, including those on the island

of Maui, in its ongoing Integrated Grid Planning (IGP) proceedings (Docket No. 2018-0165). The Department respectfully suggests that the separate proceedings described in this resolution may not be necessary and requests that the Commission be granted some flexibility in how to most efficiently address underlying issues related to transmission and distribution infrastructure on Maui island. A study of all high-risk areas could require a reallocation of resources from other ongoing proceedings. In addition, to address possible sea level rise concerns, the analysis would most likely require a much broader analysis since placing overhead infrastructure in underground conduits anticipated to be under water may not be the most cost-effective nor reliable plan. Thus, If undergrounding or relocating any high-voltage transmission lines on the island of Maui – because of the factors mentioned in the resolution, but also in light of other factors already being considered in the IGP proceedings – is optimal, then the Department believes that the current planning processes should bear that out.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this resolution.

TESTIMONY OF
JAMES P. GRIFFIN, Ph.D.
CHAIR, PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
STATE OF HAWAII

TO THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

March 24, 2022
10:00 a.m.

Chair Lowen and Members of the Committee:

MEASURE: H.C.R. No. 177 / H.R. 177

TITLE: REQUESTING THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION TO EXPLORE, THROUGH ITS DOCKET PROCESS, THE FEASIBILITY OF RELOCATING ABOVE-GROUND ELECTRIC TRANSMISSION LINES AND DISTRIBUTION LINES UNDERGROUND IN HIGH-RISK AREAS ON THE ISLAND OF MAUI.

POSITION:

The Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”) offers the following comments for consideration.

COMMENTS:

The Commission supports the intent of these resolutions to explore the feasibility of relocating above-ground electric transmission lines and distribution lines underground in high-risk areas on the island of Maui.

The Commission notes that issues such as those discussed in this measure are considered in ongoing Commission proceedings, such as the Integrated Grid Planning docket (Docket No. 2018-0165). Should these resolutions be adopted, the Commission requests that the deadline for the report be amended to twenty days prior to the Regular Session of 2024. This will ensure that sufficient time is provided to complete a study of the items listed in these resolutions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.