



March 29, 2023

1 p.m.

Conference Room 224 and Via Videoconference

To: Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment

Sen. Mike Gabbard, Chair

Sen. Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs

Sen. Glenn Wakai, Chair

Sen. Brandon J.C. Elefante, Vice Chair

From: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

Ted Kefalas, Director of Strategic Campaigns

RE: SCR141/SR216 — REQUESTING EACH COUNTY TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE INTEGRATED WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT PLAN AND FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO UPGRADE OR CONVERT CESSPOOLS LOCATED WITHIN ITS RESPECTIVE JURISDICTION BY 2050

Comments Only

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii would like to offer its comments on [SCR141/SR216](#), which would require each of Hawaii's counties to develop an integrated wastewater management plan and financial strategy to upgrade or convert cesspools in their jurisdictions by 2050.

This resolution is in response to the final report presented to the 2023 Legislature by the Cesspool Conversion Working Group. This report analyzed strategies to implement a 2017 law that called for all of Hawaii's 83,000 cesspools be upgraded or converted to a director-approved wastewater system or connected to a sewerage system by Jan. 1, 2050, excluding cesspools granted exemptions by the state director of health.

The Working Group noted that many properties in rural areas, especially on the neighbor islands, may not be in areas where existing county infrastructure allows for easy conversion and connection to sewer systems.

It also estimated that 97% of Hawaii homeowners with cesspools face a significant financial burden from the conversion costs, with the total costs to replace all cesspools ranging from \$880 million to \$5.3 billion. Even with a \$10,000 tax rebate from the state, 85% would still face a financial burden.¹

Considering these difficulties and costs, this resolution aims to establish a framework for meeting the 2050 conversion deadline by asking the counties to identify their respective infrastructure requirements, including where connections to centralized public and private treatment systems might be planned, locations where individual treatment systems would be needed and where smaller-scale cluster treatment systems could be utilized.

In other words, this resolution will provide a guide for county lawmakers, the Legislature and other interested stakeholders about the financial feasibility of wastewater plans and possible cesspool conversion strategies.

It is highly likely that the strategies of the counties would differ from each other, but this would give them the opportunity to learn from each other and adopt more innovative, cost-effective approaches.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments.

Sincerely,

Ted Kefalas
Director of Strategic Campaigns
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

¹ [“Cesspool Conversion Working Group Final Report to the Regular Session Legislature pursuant to Act 170 Session Laws Hawaii of 2019,”](#) Dec. 15, 2022, p. 43.