



SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

The Honorable Mike Gabbard, Chair
The Honorable Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair

S.C.R. NO. 192, REQUESTING THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR TO CONDUCT A PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S PLANT INDUSTRY DIVISION.

S.R. NO. 164, REQUESTING THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR TO CONDUCT A PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE'S PLANT INDUSTRY DIVISION.

Hearing: Wednesday, March 27, 2024, 1:00 p.m.

The Office of the Auditor offers comments on S.C.R. No. 192 and S.R. No. 164, which request the Auditor to conduct a performance audit of the Department of Agriculture's Plant Industry Division. The resolutions also request the performance audit to include:

- (1) Follow-up to
 - (A) Report No. 17-05, entitled "Audit of Hawai'i Department of Agriculture's Plant Quarantine Branch;" and
 - (B) Report No. 20-[12], entitled "Follow Up on Recommendations from Report No. 17-05, *Audit of Hawai'i Department of Agriculture's Plant Quarantine Branch;*"
- (2) Reports on the implementation status of the action items of the Hawai'i Interagency Biosecurity Plan; and
- (3) An evaluation of the true operational capacity of the Department of Agriculture to achieve its assigned action items established in the Hawai'i Interagency Biosecurity Plan.

The Office of the Auditor conducts performance audits that examine the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs, specifically, the activities that are key to achieving the purposes for which the Legislature created the programs. Often, the audit assesses the processes and procedures that the programs have developed to perform those key activities and whether the programs are performing the activities consistent with their respective processes and procedures. To report about things that the Legislature is interested in understanding, it is important for the Legislature to identify, specifically, the program or activity.

We note neither S.C.R. No. 192 nor S.R. No. 164 identify a specific program or activity for us to audit. The requested audit identifies the Department of Agriculture's Plant Industry Division, which includes the Plant Quarantine Branch, the Pesticides Branch, and the Plant Pest Control Branch; it is very broad and undefined. We recommend the Committee amend the resolutions to identify, specifically, the program or the activities within the Plant Industry Division that the

Legislature is interested in having us audit. That will help to ensure that the audit addresses the concerns of the Legislature.

In addition to an audit of the Plant Industry Division, the resolutions ask us to follow-up on an audit of the Plant Quarantine Branch issued in 2017, about 7 years ago. We do not believe that there is much value in assessing the branch's implementation of the recommendations from that audit. In the past 7 years, we assume that the branch has revised its procedures because of advances in technology as well as best practices. If the Committee is interested in understanding those procedures, we would suggest the Committee request a new audit of the Plant Quarantine Branch instead of asking us to update the status of the branch's implementation of the recommendations contained in our 2017 report.

The resolutions also ask for us to report on the implementation status of the Hawai'i Interagency Biosecurity Plan as well as to evaluate the Department of Agriculture's "true operational capacity" to achieve the assigned action items in the plan. Those are not audits. The Auditor's duties, as set forth in Section 23-4, Hawai'i Revised Statutes, is to conduct "postaudits" of agency transactions, accounts, programs, and performance.¹ Postaudits examine actions that have already been taken. We suggest that another agency – such as the Department of Agriculture or the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development – would be better able to report on the implementation status of the Hawai'i Interagency Biosecurity Plan and evaluate the Department of Agriculture's ability to achieve the action items in the plan.

We request that the Committee amend the resolutions to identify, specifically, the program or activities that the Legislature is interested in having us audit. We are available to discuss more appropriate language upon request.

¹ See also Article VII, Section 10 of the Hawai'i Constitution.