
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO WASTEWATER SYSTEMS.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that additional resources
2 are needed to help governments and homeowners address Hawaii's
3 cesspool pollution problem. Existing law requires that all
4 cesspools be converted by 2050. However, these much needed
5 conversions must be affordable for homeowners and government
6 entities.

7 The legislature further finds that the health of Hawaii's
8 people and the quality of Hawaii's waters are being harmed by
9 pollution from individual wastewater systems, especially
10 cesspools. Cesspools are antiquated, substandard systems that
11 damage public health, pollute drinking water, and lower water
12 quality in streams, groundwater, nearshore marine areas, and the
13 ocean. Hawaii has more than eighty thousand cesspools that
14 discharge about fifty million gallons of wastewater into the
15 State's groundwater every day. Cesspool pollution also harms
16 public recreation and the precious coral reefs on which the
17 State's economy, shoreline, fisheries, and native species



1 depend. Wastewater systems release over three thousand tons of
2 nutrients per year, which fertilize algae that can smother coral
3 reefs. Maintaining the cleanliness of the State's waters falls
4 under the State's obligation to protect, control, and regulate
5 the use of Hawaii's water resources for the benefit of its
6 people and the legislature's obligation to provide for a water
7 resources agency that shall, among other things, set overall
8 water quality and use policies and protect ground and surface
9 water resources and watersheds, pursuant to article XI,
10 section 7, of the Hawaii State Constitution.

11 The legislature also finds that to protect the public
12 health and environment, including coral reefs, cesspools should
13 be replaced by connections to sewerage systems or, in areas that
14 are too remote to be feasibly connected, upgraded either with
15 individual on-site wastewater disposal systems or cluster
16 wastewater treatment systems. Upgrading cesspools will benefit
17 public health, water quality, and coral reefs and enhance the
18 State's economy by providing better visitor experience and
19 stimulating new green jobs related to the installation of
20 wastewater systems. Protecting the State's coral reefs also
21 will benefit fisheries and protect shoreline properties from



1 erosion. The United States Geological Survey estimates that
2 coral reefs in Hawaii provide flood protection benefits to
3 Hawaii residents and \$836,000,000 annually in averted damages to
4 property and economic activity.

5 To address the State's cesspool pollution, Act 125, Session
6 Laws of Hawaii 2017, and Act 87, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022,
7 require all cesspools to be upgraded or converted to a director-
8 approved wastewater system or connected to a sewerage system
9 before January 1, 2050, with certain exemptions. Although more
10 than three thousand three hundred cesspools need to be upgraded
11 per year on average to meet the 2050 mandate, currently less
12 than four hundred cesspools per year are being upgraded.

13 In Act 217, Session Laws of Hawaii 2024, the legislature
14 appropriated funds for the university of Hawaii water resource
15 research center to prepare an overlay of sewers and cesspools
16 and in Act 198, Session Laws of Hawaii 2025, the legislature
17 established a three-year new wastewater system and individual
18 wastewater system technology testing pilot program. These Acts
19 are intended to help the counties plan for sewer expansion and
20 cesspool upgrades and help the director of health expedite
21 approval of new wastewater technologies in the near term.



1 However, the cesspool upgrade effort will also need additional
2 strategic planning and resources for the long term.

3 The legislature additionally finds that, given the scope of
4 Hawaii's cesspool pollution problem, the department of health
5 needs additional support and resources to help implement the
6 program of cesspool upgrades, including:

- 7 (1) Advice from a committee of technical advisors to help
8 determine the best, most affordable solutions;
- 9 (2) Advice in revising existing administrative rules,
10 which were adopted a decade ago and may exclude some
11 feasible, affordable solutions; and
- 12 (3) Additional department personnel to focus solely on
13 cesspool upgrades.

14 Additionally, the legislature finds that the department of
15 health should examine rules and policies adopted in other states
16 as models to find more affordable means of improving public
17 health and the environment without compromising water quality.
18 For example, the department of health's current administrative
19 rules require an individual wastewater system to be designed
20 assuming a home produces two hundred gallons of wastewater per
21 day per bedroom, whereas many other states use a lower number.



1 This requirement tends to result in larger, more expensive
2 individual wastewater systems in Hawaii. Identifying ways to
3 reduce excavation, which is a major cost of installing an
4 individual waste system given the State's geology, could reduce
5 costs. Additionally, treating wastewater adequately before
6 disposing of it through an existing cesspool could improve water
7 quality while reducing costs.

8 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to:

- 9 (1) Establish a cesspool conversion implementation working
10 group to assist the department of health in its review
11 of rules and practices for cesspools and wastewater
12 systems;
- 13 (2) Require the department of health, in consultation with
14 the cesspool conversion implementation working group,
15 to propose changes for administrative rules and
16 practices to make wastewater systems and cesspool
17 upgrades and conversions more affordable without
18 compromising water quality;
- 19 (3) Establish positions within the department of health
20 focused on implementing the cesspool compliance
21 program and related activities; and



1 (4) Appropriate funds.

2 SECTION 2. (a) There is established a cesspool conversion
3 implementation working group to assist the department of health
4 in reviewing administrative rules and practices for cesspools
5 and wastewater systems. The cesspool conversion implementation
6 working group shall consist of members selected by the director
7 of health, unless otherwise specified, from various backgrounds
8 with knowledge of wastewater technologies and systems and shall
9 include but not be limited to:

10 (1) The director of health or the director's designee;

11 (2) Members of the house of representatives or the
12 members' designees, to be selected by the speaker of
13 the house of representatives;

14 (3) Members of the senate or the members' designees, to be
15 selected by the president of the senate;

16 (4) The administrator of the state historic preservation
17 division of the department of land and natural
18 resources or the administrator's designee;

19 (5) The chairperson of the Hawaiian homes commission or
20 the chairperson's designee:







1 (d) The department of health shall submit a report of its
2 findings and recommendations, including any proposed
3 legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior
4 to the convening of the regular session of 2028.

5 (e) The cesspool conversion implementation working group
6 shall dissolve on June 30, 2028.

7 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
8 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
9 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for
10 the establishment of the following positions focused on
11 achieving cesspool upgrades within a branch of the department of
12 health:

13 (1) One full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) permanent program
14 specialist V position; and
15 (2) One full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) permanent engineer
16 V position.

17 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
18 health for the purposes of this Act.

19 SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general
20 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
21 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to



1 hire a consultant to assist the cesspool conversion
2 implementation working group in advising the department of
3 health on changes to the department's administrative rules and
4 policies that have the potential to make wastewater systems and
5 cesspool upgrades more affordable without compromising water
6 quality.

7 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
8 health for the purposes of this Act.

9 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000.



Report Title:

DOH; Cesspool Conversion Implementation Working Group;
Cesspools; Administrative Rules; Appropriation

Description:

Establishes a Cesspool Conversion Implementation Working Group to assist the Department of Health in a review of the Department's administrative rules and practices regarding wastewater systems and cesspools and in the development of proposed changes to make cesspool conversions more affordable. Requires a report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds for positions and hiring of a consultant to assist the Cesspool Conversion Implementation Working Group. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

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