



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

#### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Higher Education  
Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Charles "Chip" Fletcher, PhD

Dean

School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology

and

Vassilis Syrmos, PhD

Interim Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

#### HB 1989 – RELATING TO WATER RETENTION

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology (SOEST) offer comments on House Bill 1989, which provides resources to SOEST to conduct a study that identifies, analyzes, and evaluates possible methods to capture, retain, and store rainwater and storm water runoff. House Hill 1989 currently calls for an annual report to the Legislature and SOEST respectfully suggests extending the timeline to two years for a comprehensive report to the Legislature to ensure the highest quality while accounting for potential delays in securing funding through necessary administrative processes. SOEST also respectfully suggests that this be conducted as a one-time effort rather than recurring annual research.

While the bill currently calls for an annual study, SOEST respectfully suggests extending the timeline to two years for a comprehensive report to the Legislature, conducted as a one-time effort rather than recurring annual research, to ensure the highest quality while accounting for potential delays in securing funding through necessary administrative processes. This report may determine whether additional research is needed or identify when in the future further studies might be warranted.

HB 1989 recognizes that slowing, retaining, and infiltrating stormwater is one of the most cost-effective and climate-resilient ways to safeguard O'ahu's limited freshwater supplies, improve water quality, and reduce flood risk to our communities.

To fulfill the goals of HB 1989, SOEST could conduct a landscape analysis consisting of major aquifer locations, recharge areas, land use in recharge areas, rainfall analysis, surface runoff analysis, land ownership analysis, and analysis of opportunities to slow and retain runoff using nature-based solutions grounded in historical cultural practices. To ensure the best possible outcome, SOEST would review the best practices around the world and review all relevant studies and research for O'ahu.

HB 1989 is a timely and necessary response to the combined pressures of declining rainfall, more intense storm events, and growing demand on our aquifers. HB 1989 is also consistent with a landscape-scale, integrated approach that brings together hydrologic science, land-use

planning, and nature-based, culturally-grounded solutions. A coordinated focus on O'ahu's recharge areas will enable agencies to map aquifers and recharge zones, analyze runoff pathways, and identify priority locations where flows can be slowed, spread, and infiltrated without increasing flood risk.

The appropriations provided in HB 1989 will support efforts to conserve and protect O'ahu's limited freshwater supplies, improve water quality, and reduce flood risk to our communities.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

**HB-1989**

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 2:33:35 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/4/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Khristin Lovato	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and specifically a student with SOEST. I support HB1989 because it takes an important step toward improving water security in Hawai‘i by studying methods to capture, retain, and store rainwater and stormwater runoff. As climate change increases both drought risk and heavy rainfall, using UH’s scientific expertise to help evaluate sustainable water retention strategies will help counties make informed, data-driven decisions. Requiring an annual report to the Legislature ensures transparency and accountability. I respectfully urge you to pass HB1989.

**HB-1989**

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 5:43:52 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/4/2026 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Individual Citizen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB1989. Water security is a growing concern in Hawai'i as climate change increases droughts, flooding, and unpredictable rainfall. This bill takes an important step towards addressing these challenges by conducting a study to capture, retain, and store rainwater and stormwater runoff, instead of allowing it to be lost. By directing the University of Hawai'i School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology to conduct this research, HB1989 ensures solutions are science-based and tailored to Hawai'i's unique environment.