THE SENATE
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026
STATE OF HAWAII

S.B. NO. 2144

JAN 21 2026

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO WATER RETENTION.

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

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the State has experienced a significant decline in rainfall over recent decades. A 2016 study from the university of Hawai'i concluded that over ninety per cent of the State suffered a decline in annual and seasonal rainfall since 1920. Simultaneously, the State is also seeing more frequent rainfall extremes per year according to a 2015 study led by researchers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Drier ground conditions decrease the ability of soil to absorb water, leading to increased runoff and erosion when intense rainfall quickly saturates the soil.

The legislature further finds that studying possible solutions for capturing, retaining, and storing excess rainwater, including in the form of a recharge area, will prove beneficial in preserving a sufficient capacity of freshwater, reducing the risk of catastrophic flooding, and providing

additional resources for agriculture, commercial or domestic use.

Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to:

(1) Direct the university of Hawai‘i school of ocean and earth science and technology to conduct an annual study that identifies, analyzes, and evaluates possible methods to capture, retain, and store rainwater and storm water runoff for counties with a population of more than five hundred thousand; and

(2) Appropriate funds to conduct the study.

SECTION 2. For any county with a population greater than five hundred thousand, the university of Hawai‘i school of ocean and earth science and technology shall conduct a study that:

(1) Identifies recharge areas on a map;

(2) Analyzes the flows and runoff of both rainwater and storm water;

(3) Identifies and evaluates possible methods to capture, retain, and store rainwater and storm water runoff for future use.

SECTION 3. The university of Hawai‘i school of ocean and earth science and technology shall submit a report of its

findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of each regular session.

SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of $750,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the purposes of this Act.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the university of Hawai‘i for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

INTRODUCED BY: Karl Rhoads

S.B. NO. 2144

Report Title:
SOEST; Water Retention; Study; Report; Appropriation

Description:
Directs the University of Hawai'i School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology to conduct a study that identifies, analyzes, and evaluates possible methods to capture, retain, and store rainwater and storm water runoff for counties with a population of more than five hundred thousand. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.