

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
P. O. Box 3378  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB1921 HD2  
RELATING TO CESSPOOLS.**

SENATOR MIKE GABBARD, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

SENATOR JOY A. SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date, Time and Room Number: 03/23/2026, 1:30 pm, 225

1 **Fiscal Implications:** None.

2 **Department Position:** The Department of Health (“Department”) supports the intent of this  
3 measure.

4 **Department Testimony:** The Environmental Management Division, Wastewater Branch (EMD-  
5 WWB) provides the following testimony on behalf of the Department.

6 The Department supports the intent of this measure to align affordable housing and  
7 wastewater policy by allowing reasonable bedroom additions in priority level 3 areas without  
8 compromising human safety, health, and water quality.

9 **Offered Amendments:** None.

10 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

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

Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment  
and  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
March 23 2026 at 1:30 p.m.

By

Darren T. Lerner, PhD  
Director, Sea Grant College Program,  
School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology  
and

Tao Yan

Director, Water Resources Research Center,  
Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering  
and

Vassilis Syrmos, PhD

Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

#### HB 1921 HD2 – RELATING TO CESSPOOLS

Chairs Gabbard and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Richards and McKelvey, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (Hawai'i Sea Grant) and Water Resources Research Center (WRRRC) support HB 1921 HD2 relating to cesspools and provide comments.

The conversion of cesspools in Hawai'i is a pivotal component of the state's broader strategy to address water quality issues, promoting a cleaner and healthier environment for current and future generations to enjoy and avoiding the compounding impacts that climate change will have on our already stressed resources. However, the Cesspool Conversion Working Group reported that the vast majority of cesspool owners cannot afford the upgrade of their cesspool to an advanced form of wastewater treatment. And, not all cesspools may be provided the same level of governmental support in converting their cesspools, providing an unequal financial burden to homeowners. HB1921 HD2, which allows for the construction of additional bedrooms on existing homes in priority level 3 areas, may allow for homeowners that are unlikely to receive significant government assistance to be adaptable to the needs of Hawaiian families.


The Hawai'i Cesspool Prioritization Tool provides priority data at three spatial resolutions (census tracts, block groups, and blocks), but HB 1921 HD2 does not explicitly specify which resolution should be used to assign cesspool priority levels. Without this clarification, the bill could lead to confusion, inconsistent interpretation, and potential legal ambiguity. WRRRC strongly recommends that amended bill language clearly specify the intended spatial resolution for determining priority levels. Specifically, we recommend the use of block resolution to define Priority 3, rather than the default tracts resolution to provide the most accurate and refined prioritization for conversion.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



 808-733-7060

 808-737-4977

 1259 A'ala Street, Suite 300  
Honolulu, HI 96817

March 23, 2026

**The Honorable Mike Gabbard, Chair**

Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment

**The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair**

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
State Capitol, Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

**RE: House Bill 1921, HD2, Relating to Cesspools**

**HEARING: Monday, March 23, 2026, at 1:30 p.m.**

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Chair San Buenaventura, and Members of the Joint Committees:

My name is Lyndsey Garcia, Director of Advocacy, testifying on behalf of the Hawai'i Association of REALTORS® ("HAR"), the voice of real estate in Hawaii and its over 10,000 members. HAR **supports** House Bill 1921, HD2, which allows an existing cesspool that lawfully serves a single dwelling or dwelling unit in a priority level 3 area to continue serving that dwelling or dwelling unit and additional bedrooms constructed on the same parcel and within the existing dwelling or dwelling unit, subject to certain conditions. Authorizes the Department of Health to adopt rules and restrict additional bedrooms where evidence demonstrates that continued cesspool use impacts water quality or human health. Effective 7/1/3000.

Hawaii continues to face a housing shortage and multigenerational living has become more common as families seek to stay together, reduce housing costs, and remain in Hawaii and their communities. As such, this measure can help with our housing challenges for bedroom additions for existing homes in priority level 3 areas, where the risk to water resources is lower than in higher-priority zones. Additionally, this measure provides added safeguards to ensure that any additional bedrooms would not have an impact on health or water quality.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



Statement of  
Gregory Wong  
Co-Founder and Engineer at WaiHome LLC  
before the  
**Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment  
& Senate Committee on Health and Human Services**

Monday, March 23rd, 2026 | 1:30 PM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

In consideration of  
**HB1921 HD2**  
**RELATING TO CESSPOOLS**

To: Chair Gabbard, Chair San Buenaventura, and Members of the Committees

WaiHome LLC supports the intent of HB1921 HD2 to provide housing relief for families in Priority 3 areas. However, to ensure this growth does not come at the expense of our groundwater and public health, **we urge the committees to adopt a responsible expansion amendment in SECTION 2 subsection (a)(5) that read as followed:**

*SECTION 2 subsection (a)(5): For any construction that increases the total bedroom count of the dwelling or dwelling unit, the owner shall install a director-approved wastewater technology that utilizes solid waste separation, including but not limited to diversion systems, incinerating units, solid waste interceptors, or composting systems.*

These types of technologies are a fraction of the price of a standard septic system while still minimizing the environmental impact of downstream environments. **WaiHome is a Hawaii-based company supported by the NSF and NOAA to build exactly these types of island-specific solutions.** This amendment transforms HB1921 from a simple waiver into a proactive tool for environmental protection and sustainable housing growth.

I urge the committees to adopt this amendment and pass HB1921, HD2. Thank you for the opportunity to offer these comments,



Gregory Wong  
Co-founder and Engineer  
WaiHome LLC

March 23, 2026, 1:30 p.m.  
Hawaii State Capitol  
Conference Room 225 and Videoconference

**To: Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment**

**Sen. Mike Gabbard, Chair**

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

**Senate Committee on Health and Human Services**

**Sen. Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair**

**Sen. Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair**

**From: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii**

**Ted Kefalas, Director of Strategic Campaigns**

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1921 HD2 — RELATING TO CESSPOOLS

Aloha Chairs, Vice Chairs and other Committee Members,

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii **supports** [HB1921 HD2](#), which would allow homes connected to a cesspool deemed priority level three by the state Department of Health to build additional bedrooms, so long as the total number of bedrooms connected to the cesspool does not exceed five.

This legislation would not change the mandate that all cesspools in the state be converted to septic, sewer or another wastewater treatment method by 2050. But it would give some homeowners reprieve from having to convert their cesspools early just to expand their homes.

Hawaii has a pressing need for new housing, and every extra room could help shelter someone. But not every homeowner can afford to upgrade their cesspool now, so this is a commonsense bill that should be approved.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ted Kefalas  
Director of Strategic Campaigns  
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii