



**STATE OF HAWAII  
OFFICE OF PLANNING  
& SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
GOVERNOR

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
LT. GOVERNOR

**MARY ALICE EVANS**  
DIRECTOR

235 South Beretania Street, 6th Floor, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2359, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96804

Telephone: (808) 587-2846  
Fax: (808) 587-2824  
Web: <https://planning.hawaii.gov/>

Statement of  
**MARY ALICE EVANS, Director**

before the  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY**

Wednesday, February 11, 2026, 8:30 AM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 423

in consideration of  
**HB 2140**  
**RELATING TO ESSENTIAL PERMITTING POSITIONS.**

Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Members of the House Committee on Economic Development & Technology.

The Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD) **offers comments on HB 2140**, which establishes a pilot program to improve the speed, accountability, and quality of permit processing through targeted staffing, performance incentives, and interdepartmental competition within participating counties; authorizes a mayor to designate any number of positions as essential permitting positions across departments involved in permit review, permit processing, or both; authorizes the payment of a minimum differential payment to assist in employee recruitment and retention; authorizes the hiring of essential permitting positions at salaries above the minimum salary within the approved salary range; requires personnel departments to prioritize the hiring of individuals into essential permitting positions over other positions; authorizes counties to use revenues from the county surcharge on state tax pursuant to pay for pilot program expenses; and requires annual reports to the Legislature.

OPSD **supports the intent** on HB 2140, which seeks to improve the speed and quality of permit processing through a pilot program for essential permitting positions. OPSD recognizes that a major barrier to housing development in Hawai'i is the extensive time required to navigate through the permitting process. We further acknowledge that staffing shortages and a lack of experienced personnel within permitting agencies significantly slow these critical reviews, creating a bottleneck that delays the delivery of new housing units.

While OPSD supports the goal of enhancing recruitment and retention for permitting staff, we prefer a more stable and permanent increase in compensation over the temporary incentive structures proposed in this measure. To effectively address the staffing crisis, the State must provide financial certainty for both existing personnel and the next generation of professionals we hope to attract to the permitting field. Short-term incentives, while well-

intentioned, often lack the long-term reliability to influence a professional's career decisions or to compete with the stability offered by the private sector.

Establishing a permanent, competitive salary floor and range for permitting personnel would signal a long-term investment in the State's infrastructure and housing capacity. This approach not only rewards the expertise of our current staff who have carried the burden of high vacancies but also creates a predictable and attractive career ladder for new recruits. By improving fundamental pay and ensuring its permanence, we can build a resilient, professional workforce capable of sustaining the accelerated permitting timelines necessary to solve our housing crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on this measure.

**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND PERMITTING**  
**KA 'OIHANA HO'OLĀLĀ A ME NĀ PALAPALA 'AE**  
**CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

650 SOUTH KING STREET, 7TH FLOOR • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
PHONE: (808) 768-8000 • FAX: (808) 768-6041 • WEBSITE: honolulu.gov/dpp

RICK BLANGIARDI  
MAYOR  
MEIA



DAWN TAKEUCHI APUNA  
DIRECTOR  
PO'O

BRYAN GALLAGHER, P.E.  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
HOPE PO'O

REGINA MALEPEAI  
2<sup>ND</sup> DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
HOPE PO'O KUALUA

TESTIMONY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND PERMITTING

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
AND TECHNOLOGY

February 10, 2026  
Conference Room 423

TO: The Honorable Greggor Ilagan, Chair, The Honorable Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair,  
and Members of the House Committee on Economic Development and  
Technology

RE: SUPPORT THE INTENT OF HOUSE BILL NO. 2140, RELATING TO  
ESSENTIAL PERMITTING POSITIONS

The Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP) **supports the intent** of House Bill No. 2140, which establishes a pilot program to improve the speed, accountability, and quality of permit processing through targeted staffing, performance incentives, and interdepartmental competition within participating counties. The Bill also authorizes the payment of a minimum differential payment to assist in employee recruitment and retention, and authorizes the hiring of essential permitting positions at salaries above the minimum salary within the approved salary range.

DPP appreciates the intent, which is to allow the counties to pay designated plan reviewers a higher salary in order to recruit, hire and retain these critical employees. We have long argued that we cannot compete with the federal government or private sector when it comes to salaries. DPP consistently loses employees because they receive excellent training within the City and then move out of municipal government for higher-paying jobs in the private sector.

DPP has vacancies that we have been unable to fill due to salary limitations. This Bill would afford the counties an option to offer a pay differential as a means to recruit, hire and retain plans examiners, and others, which will result in speedier plans reviews and building permit approvals.

Given the preceding, DPP must defer to the Departments of Budget and Fiscal Services and Human Resources as to the appropriate funding mechanism for such a

The Honorable Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
The Honorable Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair  
and Members of the House Committee on Economic Development  
and Technology  
Hawai'i House of Representatives  
House Bill No. 2140  
February 5, 2026  
Page 2

pilot program and compatibility with principles of collective bargaining and the civil service merit system.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify and we are prepared to meet and work with the Legislature on changes that will benefit the State, Counties, our employees and the community.

Very truly yours



Dawn Takeuchi Apuna  
Director

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES  
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA LIMAHANA  
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

650 SOUTH KING STREET, 10TH FLOOR • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
PHONE: (808) 768-8500 • FAX: (808) 768-5563 • WEBSITE: honolulu.gov/dhr

RICK BLANGIARDI  
MAYOR  
MEIA



NOLA N. MIYASAKI  
DIRECTOR  
PO'O

KAREN MILLER  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
KOKUA PO'O

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
The Honorable Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair  
and Members of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology  
The House of Representatives  
State Capitol, Room 423  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and Members of the Committee:

SUBJECT: House Bill No. 2140  
Relating to Essential Permitting Positions

The City and County of Honolulu, Department of Human Resources (DHR) respectfully offers the following **comments** on HB 2140, which proposes the establishment of a pilot program to encourage a county's permitting department to "streamline permitting operations through targeted staffing, performance incentives, and interdepartmental coordination."

DHR supports efforts to streamline the hiring of positions in the Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP). However, DHR believes there are several options already available to DPP that are consistent with the ideas proposed by HB 2140, options that maintain civil service merit principles encapsulated within HRS §76-1 and the DHR's Civil Service Rules. Should this measure pass, DHR is concerned that this law would be interpreted to mean that current Civil Service Rules, such as those governing impartial selection, merit principles, and equal pay for equal work, could be suspended with respect to positions designated by the pilot program.

Furthermore, DHR notes the following areas within the proposal would need to be clarified prior to actual implementation of any pilot program at the City and County of Honolulu:

- Eligibility requirements to participate in the program
- Cost impacts related to the incentive payments
- Issues related to pay inversion, hiring priority and pay equity

The Honorable Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
The Honorable Ikaikai Hussey, Vice Chair  
and Members of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology  
February 10, 2026  
Page 2

Finally, as currently drafted, the majority of the positions that may be affected by this bill in the City and County of Honolulu are likely included in bargaining units, and nothing in this bill excludes them from collective bargaining or HRS Chapter 89. Therefore, some of the proposed provisions would be subject to negotiation and/or consultation with the unions before they could be implemented. Provisions that would be subject to negotiation include, for example, performance incentives and the proposed minimum differential payment of 15% of a position's salary. While the bill states that the program may or may not apply to existing, filled positions, there could be collective bargaining issues with applying the program only to vacant positions and not to currently filled positions. Therefore, we respectfully suggest that the Legislature consider the impact of the proposed language on collective bargaining while it deliberates on this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide **comments** on this measure.

Sincerely,



Nola N. Miyasaki  
Director

**DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FISCAL SERVICES**  
**KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA MO'OHELU A KĀLĀ**  
**CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

530 SOUTH KING STREET, ROOM 208 • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
PHONE: (808) 768-3900 • FAX: (808) 768-3179 • WEBSITE: [honolulu.gov/budget](http://honolulu.gov/budget)

RICK BLANGIARDI  
MAYOR  
MEIA



ANDREW T. KAWANO  
DIRECTOR  
PO'O

CARRIE CASTLE  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
HOPE PO'O

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
The Honorable Ikaika Hussey, Vice-Chair  
and Members of the House Committee on Economic Development and Technology  
State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Ilagan, Vice-Chair Hussey and Committee Members:

**SUBJECT:** Testimony on House Bill 2140, Relating to Essential Permitting Positions  
Hearing: February 11, 2026, 8:30 a.m., Conference Room 423 and via Videoconference

The Department of Budget and Fiscal Services, City and County of Honolulu ("City"), expresses **serious concerns** with House Bill ("HB") 2140, Relating to Essential Permitting Positions. Our primary concern is that Section 2(c) proposes the following:

Notwithstanding any provision of section 46-16.8, Hawaii Revised Statutes, or any charter provision, ordinance, or other law to the contrary, moneys collected from the county surcharge on state tax and distributed to each county pursuant to sections 46-16.8 and 237-8.6, Hawaii Revised Statutes, may be appropriated and allocated by a respective participating county to fulfill the requirements of this subsection and fund the positions subject to the pilot project.

Pursuant to the cited sections of Hawaii Revised Statutes, the City receives a 0.5% county surcharge on the state General Excise Tax to fund the rail transit project. This surcharge is included in Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation's ("HART") Full Funding Grant Agreement with the Federal Transit Administration ("FTA") and HART's approved Recovery Plan with approved financial plan. Diverting funds away from HART's financial plan would be detrimental to the approved project agreements.

The Honorable Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
The Honorable Ikaika Hussey, Vice-Chair  
and Members of the House Committee on Economic Development and Technology  
February 10, 2026  
Page 2

We also anticipate that securing funding at the federal level will become increasingly challenging in the coming years. Any reduction in state tax funding for rail would limit the City's ability to meet its current obligations to the FTA. If there are alternative sources of funds which could be used for the stated intent of HB 2140, we would be gladly participate in discussions.

For the reasons stated above, the City expresses **serious concerns** with HB 2140 as drafted.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this bill. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the Department of Budget and Fiscal Services at (808) 768-3900 or [bfsmail@honolulu.gov](mailto:bfsmail@honolulu.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew T. Kawano". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Andrew T. Kawano  
Director



# MAUI

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

VOICE OF BUSINESS

**HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TECHNOLOGY  
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM 423  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026 AT 8:30 A.M.**

To The Honorable Representative Greggor Ilagan, Chair  
The Honorable Representative Ikaika Hussey, Vice Chair  
Members of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology

**SUPPORT HB2140 RELATING TO ESSENTIAL PERMITTING POSITIONS**

As an organization committed to fostering economic growth, diversification, and long-term prosperity for Hawai'i's communities, we view HB2140 as an important step toward addressing a persistent barrier to business and investment: inefficient permit processing. Timely and predictable permitting is critical for businesses seeking to expand, innovate, or recover from recent economic setbacks.

By establishing a pilot program that focuses on targeted staffing, performance incentives, and interdepartmental collaboration, this bill directly addresses bottlenecks that have historically delayed construction, renovation, and business development projects. The authorization for mayors to designate essential permitting positions and offer differential payments can help counties recruit and retain skilled personnel, which is vital for improving processing times and accountability. These measures align with our priorities of supporting productivity, predictability, and outcomes that benefit the broader economy.

The bill's approach of allowing counties to use existing county surcharge revenues for pilot program expenses is prudent, as it avoids imposing new taxes or fees on businesses—an outcome we strongly support. Prioritizing hiring for essential permitting positions also signals a commitment to responsive government and efficient service delivery, both of which are necessary for attracting investment and supporting economic diversification across sectors such as construction, technology, and manufacturing.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB2140 and ask that you move this bill forward.

Sincerely,

Pamela Tumpap  
President

To advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business, advocating for a responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics.

February 5, 2026

TO: Chair Ilagan and Members of the Committee on Economic Development & Technology

RE: HB 2140, Relating to Essential Permitting Positions

Dear Chair Ilagan and Committee Members,

**We strongly support House Bill 2140.**

Permitting delays hinder the timely development of affordable and workforce housing. This measure proposes a pilot program designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of permit processing in participating counties.

The current permitting process is widely recognized as a significant barrier to housing development in Hawai'i, often resulting in costly delays and uncertainty for both non-profit and private-sector developers. The Wharton Residential Land Use Regulatory Index (WRLURI) determines that Hawai'i enjoys the most adverse restrictions and regulations relating to land use in the entire United States.<sup>1</sup>

The State of Hawai'i is presently working to address the root causes of our high regulatory barriers, as most notably demonstrated by the Simplifying Permitting for Enhanced Economic Development (SPEED) Task Force.<sup>2</sup> By authorizing targeted staffing, performance incentives, and interdepartmental competition, this measure takes a pragmatic approach to addressing longstanding permitting bottlenecks.

**Let's advance HB2140.**

Thank you,



Lee Wang  
Executive Director  
Housing Hawai'i's Future  
[lee@hawaiiisfuture.org](mailto:lee@hawaiiisfuture.org)



Perry Arrasmith  
Director of Policy  
Housing Hawai'i's Future  
[perry@hawaiiisfuture.org](mailto:perry@hawaiiisfuture.org)

<sup>1</sup> Inafuku, K., J. Tyndall, and C. Bonham. *Measuring the Burden of Housing Regulation in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization, April 2022.

[uhero.hawaii.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/MeasuringTheBurdenOfHousingRegulationInHawaii.pdf](https://uhero.hawaii.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/MeasuringTheBurdenOfHousingRegulationInHawaii.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> The SPEED Task Force is authorized by Act 133, SLH 2025.



**HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION**  
AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

**RANDY PERREIRA**, Executive Director • Tel: 808.543.0011 • Fax: 808.528.0922

The Thirty-Third Legislature, State of Hawaii  
House of Representatives  
Committee on Economic Development & Technology

Testimony by  
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 11, 2026

H.B. 2140 – RELATING TO ESSENTIAL PERMITTING  
POSITIONS

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO supports the intent of H.B. 2140, which establishes a pilot program to improve the speed, accountability, and quality of the permit processing through targeted staffing, and performance incentives.

Our organization represents hundreds of employees, across all counties, that are involved in the permitting process. For years we have been advocating that the counties put more focus and investment on the recruitment and retention of employees involved in the permitting process – such as increasing the pay, reducing hiring times, and providing financial awards for meeting milestones that encourage career growth and promote employment longevity. We would like to note that the counties already possess the authority as proposed in section 2, subsection (b)(2), that allows for differentials for recruitment and retention. However, we appreciate the intent of this measure as it continues the conversation about ways our counties can look to develop modern and attractive benefits of this century, to recruit and retain a qualified permitting workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 2140.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira  
Executive Director

**HB-2140**

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 5:16:53 PM

Testimony for ECD on 2/11/2026 8:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brett Kulbis	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Ilagan and Committee Members,

My name is Brett Kulbis, I'm a 26yr retired Navy Veteran, who took a solemn oath to defend the Constitution from all enemies foreign and domestic, and that oath didn't expire when I retired. I live in Ewa Beach.

I OPPOSE BILL HB-2140 in its current iteration.

I support the intent of HB-2140 to speed up permitting and get homes and infrastructure built faster, but I believe a few common-sense amendments are needed to protect taxpayers, keep the pilot truly temporary, and ensure we get real results for the added spending.

HB-2140 recognizes that Hawaii's slow, fragmented permitting system is a major barrier to housing and economic growth, and it wisely focuses on staffing, performance incentives, and interdepartmental coordination to address these problems. I support improving permitting as a key pro-growth, pro-housing reform, provided the new spending is tightly managed and tied to measurable outcomes. Recommended amendments:

1. Clear limits on "essential permitting positions"

The bill currently allows mayors to designate "any number of positions" as essential permitting positions, including existing positions, across departments involved in permit review and processing. To prevent overexpansion and protect taxpayers, please consider:

- Requiring council approval for any designation that exceeds a set percentage of an agency's total positions (for example, no more than 20–25% of positions may be designated "essential" without explicit council approval).
- Clarifying that designations must be directly tied to permit review and processing functions, not simply related administrative or support roles.

This keeps the program focused on the people who actually move permits, rather than turning it into a broad pay-boost mechanism.

2. Guardrails on pay differentials and bonuses

HB-2140 mandates at least a 15% differential for essential permitting positions and at least a 3% financial award upon achieving each milestone goal, with authority to go higher. These incentives may be justified, but they should be clearly bounded:

- Set a maximum differential (for example, “not to exceed 20%”) unless expressly authorized by the county council in a public vote.
- Cap total performance awards per employee per year (for example, no more than 10% of annual salary across all milestones) to prevent runaway bonus costs.
- Require that any decision to increase differentials above the minimum be supported by written findings that recruitment/retention problems exist and that other non-pay fixes (process changes, training, technology) are insufficient.

These changes maintain the performance incentive structure while protecting county budgets.

### 3. Stronger fiscal discipline on use of tax surcharge funds

The bill allows counties to use the county surcharge on state tax revenues to pay for differential payments, new hires, and performance awards. To avoid permanently growing government payroll using what was meant to be a limited revenue source, please consider:

- Requiring that counties first exhaust internal reallocations within existing permitting and planning budgets before tapping surcharge funds.
- Clarifying that surcharge funds used for this pilot are non-recurring and do not create an entitlement to ongoing funding beyond the pilot end date.
- Requiring an annual public disclosure of total surcharge dollars used for the pilot, by category (differentials, bonuses, new positions).

This keeps the focus on efficiency and prioritization, not just new money.

### 4. Concrete performance benchmarks and “go/no-go” test

HB-2140 requires countywide goals and four milestone goals per agency, but leaves all metrics entirely to the counties. To ensure the pilot is judged on clear results, consider:

- Requiring that at least some metrics be standardized statewide, such as:
  - A targeted percentage reduction in average permit processing time for major permit types.
  - A targeted increase in the number of permits processed per FTE per year.
- Requiring that any extension or expansion of the program beyond June 30, 2031 be contingent on meeting or exceeding these statewide benchmarks, documented in the coordinator’s annual reports.

This turns the pilot into a real test: if it works, expand it; if not, end it.

### 5. Emphasize process and technology reform along with pay

The findings section highlights vacancies, outdated systems, and fragmented workflows as drivers of delay, not just pay levels. To align the bill with that diagnosis, you could:

- Add language requiring participating counties to adopt or expand modern tools such as electronic plan review, online application portals, standardized checklists, and interdepartmental tracking dashboards as part of their pilot plans.
- Require that each agency's milestone goals include at least one process/technology improvement metric (for example, percentage of permits processed electronically, reduction in the number of review cycles).

This ensures that taxpayers are funding lasting improvements to how government works, not just higher pay.

#### 6. Make the “pilot” truly temporary

HB-2140 includes a sunset date of June 30, 2031, but it also requires annual reports with recommendations for “pilot program expansion,” which could create momentum to make new pay structures permanent regardless of outcomes. To keep the pilot honest:

- Add language that all differential and performance pay under this section automatically terminates with the pilot, unless reauthorized by the legislature after reviewing final results.
- Require the final report before sunset to include a cost-benefit analysis: total program costs, changes in processing time and throughput, and the value of economic activity (housing units, construction value) enabled by faster permitting.

This gives policymakers a clear basis to decide whether the pilot is worth continuing.

With these common sense amendments, HB-2140 can better balance the legitimate goal of speeding up permitting with the equally important goals of fiscal responsibility, accountability, and targeted, results-driven government. I respectfully urge the Committee to move this bill forward only with strong guardrails on spending, clear performance benchmarks, and a true “sunset means sunset” framework that protects taxpayers while improving service to the public.

Respectfully,  
Brett Kulbis