

February 17, 2026

The Honorable Lisa Marten, Chair

House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness
State Capitol, Conference Room 329 & Videoconference

RE: House Bill 2197, Relating to Property

HEARING: Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at 9:30 a.m.

Aloha Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and Members of the Committee:

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 2197, which establishes a procedure for immediately removing an unlawful occupant of a dwelling or premises with assistance from law enforcement. Provides that an unlawful occupant of a dwelling or premises is civilly liable for unpaid utility bills. Provides that a person who trespasses in or upon a dwelling or premises and intentionally or knowingly damages property in an amount exceeding \$999 commits a felony of criminal property damage in the second degree. Requires the Department of the Attorney General to develop, publish, and make available a complaint form to remove unlawful occupants of residential dwellings.

Squatting occurs when an unlawful occupant resides in an abandoned, vacant, or unoccupied property. During this time, squatters can cause significant property damage or engage in activities that pose safety risks to property owners, real estate professionals, and the surrounding community.¹ In some cases, squatters have even presented fraudulent rental agreements or other fraudulent documents, leaving homeowners and housing providers with limited options and forcing them into lengthy, costly legal proceedings despite the absence of any legitimate tenancy.

This measure provides a much-needed solution by creating a clear and balanced process for property owners to remove unlawful occupants. HAR believes this measure will help enhance community safety and assist homeowners who are victims of squatting in regaining their property.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

¹ Miller, Ashley. (August 23, 2024). Civil Beat. Honolulu Struggles to Find a Remedy for Abandoned Homes Taken by Squatters. <https://www.civilbeat.org/2024/08/honolulu-struggles-to-find-a-remedy-for-abandoned-homes-taken-over-by-squatters/>



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February 15, 2026

Re: H.B. 2197 (Relating To Property)
Hearing: February 17, 2025 9:30 a.m.
Testimony in Support

Dear Chair Lisa Marten, Vice Chair Ikaika Olds, and Committee Members:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Collection Law Section ("CLS") of the Hawaii State Bar Association.*

The CLS supports H.B. 2197. Problems with squatters and title theft have increased. This bill provides a way for property owners to quickly address those problems and at the same time, does away with the one of the main problems property owners encounter when an owner attempts to have the unlawful occupant removed for trespassing by the police or Sheriff's Department, namely, liability concerns by the police or Sheriff's Department.

Thank you.

/S/ William J. Plum

WILLIAM J. PLUM
Vice Chair
The Collection Law Section

** The comments and recommendations submitted reflect the viewpoint of the Collection Law Section of the Hawaii State Bar Association only. This viewpoint has not been reviewed or approved by the HSBA Board of Directors.*

Feb. 17, 2026, 9:30 a.m.
Hawaii State Capitol
Conference Room 329 and Videoconference

LATE

To: House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness
Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair
Rep. Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair

From: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii
Ted Kefalas, Director of Strategic Campaigns

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB2197 — RELATING TO PROPERTY

Aloha chair, vice chair and other committee members,

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii **supports** [HB2197](#), which would specify a process for removing unlawful occupants, otherwise known as squatters, from dwellings or premises with the assistance of law enforcement.

Squatting is more than just trespassing. It occurs when a person — or persons — occupy someone else's property without any legal claim and without the consent or permission from the owner.

This bill is needed because trespassing is a criminal offense, but removing squatters is treated as a landlord-tenant dispute. However, squatters are not actually tenants and have no incentive to cooperate, making landlord-tenant laws an ineffective way to approach the problem.

In addition, the civil process of eviction can be expensive and time-consuming, so property owners can be locked out of their own homes for months or years while trying to remove unlawful occupants.

In the meantime, unlawful tenants can cause property damage or accumulate utility bills and other costs that property owners are responsible for paying.

In Hawaii, squatters can cause problems for the community by [trashing](#) the property or using it as a base for criminality, making this an issue of public safety in addition to one of property rights. For example,

neighborhood watch groups on Hawaii Island [appealed](#) a few years ago to local lawmakers for help in reducing squatting after seeing an increase in criminal behavior from squatters — including assault and drug trafficking.

Other states facing similar problems have turned to legislation similar to HB2197 in order to streamline the eviction process for unlawful occupants.

According to a recent [report](#) from the Pacific Legal Foundation, the time required to remove unlawful tenants in Georgia, which adopted such a law in April 2024, has dropped from an average of eight months to less than two weeks

The PLF report noted that as of May 2024, Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, Tennessee, Washington and West Virginia had passed laws that criminalize squatting, while 11 other states have introduced bills to do so.

Grassroot recommends that Hawaii pass such a law as well. HB2197 would not only reaffirm property rights, but also enable the counties to more quickly deal with the health and safety concerns posed by criminal trespassing and squatting.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ted Kefalas
Director of Strategic Campaigns
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

HB-2197

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 3:38:57 PM

Testimony for HSH on 2/17/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kayla Marie	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly oppose this measure. Landlords already have existing legal means to remove unwanted dwellers. This bill if enacted will only worsen the homelessness crisis Hawaii is experiencing. A 24 hour notice to vacate is absolutely ridiculous and extremely cruel. So cruel I don't know how the author of this text is able to sleep at night. People who are being displaced often lose important documents, medications, and valuables. Loss of anything listed above just make already economically vulnerable people more vulnerable. The language of this bill also further dehumanizes people living in poverty by assuming they are damaging places they live. Landlords often disregard basic upkeep on their units and blame the tenants. The situation currently happening at union plaza is a perfect illustration of the type of inhumane treatment this bill will only embolden where tenants are left without water and electricity. I urge all of you to oppose this cruelty and vote against such harmful legislation.

LATE

HB-2197

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 4:10:35 PM
Testimony for HSH on 2/17/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jillian Anderson	Waikiki Neighborhood Board	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Waikiki Neighborhood Board SUPPORTS HB2197, and on behalf of our community, urges its passage by the House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness.

Vacant properties in urban neighborhoods such as Waikiki have become prime suspects for squatting. Squatters not only pose a risk to the property which they inhabit, but as Waikiki has unfortunately seen, a greater risk to public safety. Just a few weeks ago a fire broke out in an abandoned, boarded-up two-story building in the heart of Waikiki. In February 2021, another fire blazed through the site of the former Moose McGillicuddy’s, which had known squatters and illegal activity.

Abandoned and derelict buildings have long been targets for squatters, so much so that the City and County of Honolulu has recently acquired a condemned building in Waikiki partly due to squatter activity.

The passage of HB2197 would serve to provide stronger recourse for property owners to reclaim their properties, increase the deterrent for squatting in the first place, and have added benefits of reducing crime and fire risk.

Mahalo for your consideration of this measure and the opportunity to support its many merits.