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LAND
STATE PARKS

Testimony of
RYAN K.P. KANAKA'OLE
Acting Chairperson

Before the Senate Committee on
WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Monday, March 16, 2026
1:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

In consideration of
HOUSE BILL 2426, HOUSE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO STATE PARKS

House Bill 2426, House Draft 1 authorizes and appropriates funds for the expansion of Wailuku River State Park and authorizes the Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) to exercise the power of eminent domain for the expansion of Wailuku River State Park. **The Department supports this measure provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the Executive Supplemental Budget request.**

The Department agrees that promotion of mental and physical well-being and community connection is important. The Department appreciates the intent to expand Wailuku River State Park and preserve more open space in perpetuity. Staff from the Department have conducted a cursory site visit, and the parcels appear to possess public park values.

The Department offers the following considerations: (a) the Department cannot purchase lands at higher than appraised value; (b) due diligence will be time consuming and require significant funding; (c) upon acquisition, the Department would request CIP funds for planning, design and construction of park facilities; and (d) the Division of State Parks cannot take on additional lands and responsibilities without adequate resources so therefore would request that the Legislature establish new staff positions to maintain and manage the new acquisition.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

HB 2426

From Aaron Lee <aaron_lee@live.com>
Date Mon 3/16/2026 12:00 PM
To Sen. Chris Lee <senlee@capitol.hawaii.gov>

 1 attachment (1 MB)
HB 2426 State Senate.pdf;



You don't often get email from aaron_lee@live.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Dear Senator Lee,

My name is Aaron Lee and I sent you an e-mail last week about HB 2426, which is scheduled to be heard by the Water, Land, Culture and the Arts Committee today. I am trying to get on the Zoom video of the meeting but I may not be able to. If I am unable, I'd like you to have a copy of my comments on HB 2426. I sent the following e-mail and attached pdf to the other members of the Committee, I am sorry I didn't get this to you sooner:

"I am asking that you vote to reject or defer HB 2426, which proposes the State buy 283 acres of land in Hilo to create a State Park. If this bill becomes law, it will be to remove 283 acres from the future supply of housing in Hilo, which will be very detrimental to the long-term growth of our town. I understand the legislature is considering modifying the tax cuts, federal funding may be reduced and the Hawaii Council on Revenues has projected a decline for this fiscal year. With this in mind, I think it is a bad time to make an open-ended financial commitment to building a park in Hilo. The proposed park will likely become a luxury for the few people who live in the area, at a permanent expense to the taxpayers of Hawaii. This will be detrimental to future generations of taxpayers by limiting housing options, while burdening us with the cost to maintain a very large park.

I sent some written testimony on HB 2426 to the House Finance Committee and I've attached some of my thoughts on the bill, along with some maps of other State land that could be used to expand the Wailuku River Recreational Area. The main points of my letter are:

- this is a bad time to spend a lot of money to buy land for a very large and expensive park
- Hilo does not need a 283-acre park; this is almost as big as Kapiolani Park on Oahu, which has a zoo, amphitheater and multi-sport complex; Oahu has a population density of about 1,600 people-per-square-mile, the big Island has a population density of about 50 people-per-square-mile
- HB 2426 was written for the benefit of a couple hundred neighbors, who don't want more homes built in the area; 200 neighbors is about %0.014 of the population of the Hawaii or %0.1 of the population of the Big Island
- the State owns land around Wailuku River that could be developed into more park space; maps are in the attached pdf

- the 283-acre site is well-located and could be a critically important site for housing in the future; the eventual development of the site will add to the limited supply of homes in Hilo and likely provide affordable housing, park space and road connectivity as part of a public benefits package
- the eventual creation of housing on the site will provide jobs for residents and tax revenue of the State and County
- the money that would be spent on HB 2426 could be used to maintain and upgrade existing State park facilities
- HB 2426 will serve as a taxpayer-funded "bailout" to the Owners, who made a bad speculative investment in real estate and ran out of money: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/05/bikini-atoll-nuclear-fund-interior-department>

Thank you for taking the time to consider this and please call or e-mail me whenever is convenient for you, if you'd like to talk about HB 2426 or anything else. My phone number is (808) 960-3138 and my e-mail address is aaron_lee@live.com.

Have a good week."

Sincerely,

Aaron Lee

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