



# A Community Dedicated to Saving Puakō Reef

Return the reef to its historic 70% coral coverage from its existing 7%.

[www.Puako4reefs.org](http://www.Puako4reefs.org) \* [Puako for Reefs Facebook](#)

Story map of Puakō: [Wahi Pana -A Sacred Place](#)

## HEARING FOR STATE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

**Wednesday, April 8, 2026 9:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 423, State Capitol**

- TO:** House Committee on Economic Development and Technology Chair, Greggor Ilagan, and Vice-Chair Ikaika Hussey, and all members
- RE:** House Concurrent Resolution 33. Encouraging Hawai'i County, in collaboration with the Puakō community, Department of Health, and other stakeholders, to complete the Puakō Sewage Project.

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Puakō For Reefs, we respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of HR 33. The resolution advances effective, timely, and innovative wastewater solutions to protect and restore nearshore waters and reefs.

Puakō represents a unique and powerful model for addressing one of Hawai'i's most urgent environmental challenges. Our approach—built on partnerships between the public sector, private citizens, and philanthropic support—demonstrates a path forward that is faster, more adaptive, and more cost-effective than traditional government-led infrastructure models. This collaborative framework may be the only viable way to successfully rescue and restore the reef systems along our coastline.

While the State's mandate to eliminate all cesspools by 2050 is an important step, it is not enough to save our waters. In coastal environments like Puakō, simply transitioning from cesspools to septic systems, including advanced treatment units (ATUs), does not eliminate the problem. These systems still rely on leach fields, and given our highly porous soils and low elevations, contaminants inevitably migrate into nearshore waters. To truly protect our reefs, wastewater must be removed entirely from the groundwater system.

Additionally, the current cesspool conversion timeline is unlikely to be met without more innovative and scalable solutions. In communities such as Puakō, conventional upgrades are not only inadequate—they risk prolonging environmental harm rather than resolving it.

The Puakō community has demonstrated an extraordinary level of engagement and commitment. For over a decade, residents have worked diligently to develop a practical, community-driven solution to this statewide issue. No other community has progressed as far in proactively addressing wastewater impacts, not only for our near shore waters but as a model for others.



**PUAKŌ FOR  
REEFS**

# A Community Dedicated to Saving Puakō Reef

**Return the reef to its historic 70% coral coverage from its existing 7%.**

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Story map of Puakō: [Wahi Pana -A Sacred Place](#)

Puakō is also a unique and inclusive coastal community. As the only non-gated ocean access community north of Kailua-Kona village, residents and visitors alike are welcomed to share in the natural resources we are all striving to protect. This responsibility further underscores the urgency of implementing a lasting solution.

Importantly, Puakō has been designated as a Priority 1 area—the State’s highest ranking—for cesspool elimination under the State’s 2022 prioritization framework. This designation reflects both the severity of the threat and the opportunity for meaningful impact.

Puakō For Reefs is committed to creating a replicable model that can serve other coastal communities facing similar challenges. With your support, Puakō can help lead the way in demonstrating how collaborative, forward-thinking solutions can protect Hawai’i’s reefs for future generations.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify and for your continued leadership on this issue.

For Puakō for Reefs Board members and its many volunteers,

**Karen Anderson**, Board Chair,  
**Stephanie Erickson**, Board Treasurer,  
**Barbara Bell**, Board Secretary, and  
**George Fry**, Board member.



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

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

Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Economic Development & Technology  
April 8, 2026 at 9:30 a.m.

By  
Bonnie Irwin  
Chancellor  
University of Hawai'i at Hilo

HCR 33/HR 33 – ENCOURAGING HAWAII COUNTY, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PUAKŌ COMMUNITY, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS, TO COMPLETE THE PUAKŌ SEWAGE PROJECT.

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

The University of Hawai'i at Hilo (UH Hilo) submits testimony in support of HCR 33/HR 33, which encourages Hawai'i County, in collaboration with the Puakō Community, Department of Health, and other Stakeholders, to complete the Puakō Sewage Project.

UH Hilo is planning the development of the Puakō Marine Center at Puakō, South Kohala, Hawai'i Island for teaching and research. The impressive coral reefs at Puakō are among the best developed and most diverse in Hawai'i. Coral reefs are in peril around the world, and Puakō has the potential of becoming the best hands-on living laboratory to promote understanding and conservation of one of Earth's most precious resources. Numerous scientific studies have been conducted at Puakō by UH faculty because of the unique characteristics, clear waters, and easy access. However, this research work has been difficult to carry out because field bases have to be established far away from the area, either in Kailua-Kona or Hilo.

The Puakō Marine Center would provide essential infrastructure to train students of all ages from across the state in science, Hawaiian culture, and conservation mauka to makai in Kohala and North Kona. UH Hilo will be the stewards of the Puakō Marine Center, which will serve as a collaborative gateway, integrating the expertise of University of Hawai'i researchers with state and federal agencies and external partners at US and international universities to address critical Pacific marine conservation and climate resilience goals. By offering specialized shore-based access to diverse reef ecosystems, the center acts as a premier international hub for visiting scientists and students to conduct high-impact research and hands-on environmental education. In addition, the Center would also serve as a resource for the community that currently has limited meeting and gathering spaces.

A sewage system at Puakō would save millions of dollars for the construction of the Puakō Marine Center. UH's 6 year CIP plan identifies the Puakō Marine Center as a priority capital project. Presently, awarding any substantial construction permits at the

site, which sits in the Coastal Zone Management Area, requires the initial construction of a small wastewater treatment plant. However, if there was a sewage system at Puakō that the Puakō Marine Center could connect into, no on-site wastewater treatment plant would need to be built and the associated costs would be saved.

UH Hilo's Marine Science department is uniquely positioned to provide research, data and environmental monitoring essential for the success of the Puakō Sewage Project. Given the area's complex hydrology, UH Hilo researchers can utilize stable isotope analysis and dye-tracing studies to map precisely how land-based contaminants travel through the porous volcanic rock into the nearshore reef system. The project's engineering solutions translate into measurable ecological recovery. Numerous studies, including collaboration with UH Hilo faculty, have been done to document that sewage from Puakō is impacting water quality at the shoreline and having a negative impact on the coral reef. Dr. Wiegner and colleagues (2021) document how with the treatment of sewage at a wastewater treatment plant was the only way "sewage from Puakō would be completely removed from Puakō's groundwater as it will enter into a sewer system." To enhance coral resiliency to disease, including coral bleaching, removing land-based sources of pollution, including excess nutrients from sewage, from coral reefs is one of the top management actions (UH Social Science Research Institute, 2017).

We request that UH Hilo be included as a stakeholder and research resource in future discussions regarding completion of the Puakō Sewage Project. Strong consideration should also be given to inclusion of the Puakō Marine Center be included in design considerations, including location of a sewer and volume considerations for wastewater treatment.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on this resolution.

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/3/2026 4:53:19 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ted Bohlen	Hawaii Reef and Ocean Coalition	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**STRONG SUPPORT!**

Coral reef cover in Puako is reported to be down from 70% to 7%, dangerously close to the point of no return. Wastewater, especially nutrients from cesspools and other individual wastewater systems, is a major reason for coral decline there and elsewhere.

The County needs to step up and do its part to save the reefs! Please pass this resolution!

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/3/2026 5:37:49 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Marie Addario	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Puako Reef is a misnomer because it serves much more of Kohala than our small community along Puako Road. The Mauna Kea and Hapuna Resorts are reef protected by the same eco system lying just across Puako Bay. So is the state beach, Panniou and the visitors and residents all along the northern and southern part of the reef. Local fishermen throw their nets and poles or spear fish along the backbone of this extensive reef. Hawaiian families still teach their children to swim in these protected warm waters. I live on Puako Point and have watch the enjoyment of neighbors, locals, and visitors either alone or with local businesses like dive shops and kayak teams enjoy the reef. Once a year. The humpbacks see it as their nesting grounds. As the reef dies so does the entire coast's spirit.

I support HCR33

Marie Addario

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and the members of the House Committee on Economic Development & Technology,

I am U'ilani Naipo, a marine advocate and environmental protector of our nearshore and marine ecosystems. I submit this testimony in strong support of HCR 33.

Hawai'i Island faces significant challenges with outdated wastewater infrastructure, particularly widespread use of cesspools. In West Hawai'i, the coastal community of Puakō has been designated a Priority 1 area—the State's highest ranking—for cesspool elimination due to its high risk to coastal water quality and nearby reef ecosystems. In addressing wastewater challenges of Puakō, Puakō for Reefs aims to establish a replicable framework that can be implemented by other coastal communities facing similar environmental and infrastructure issues.

Please support Puakō for Reefs and support this resolution.

Mahalo,  
U'ilani Naipo

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/3/2026 8:13:15 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Sara Fuller	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HCR33 to protect the Puako reef for the people of Hawaii to enjoy for generations to come.

I also support that it be an important model for other communities in Hawaii.

Mahalo, Sara Fuller

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/4/2026 7:24:21 AM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Georjean Adams	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Puako community is showing the way for collaborative, innovative approaches to solving our cesspool crisis. The State Legislature should remove barriers and contribute to such efforts that are selflessly working to malama ka aina.

I support this resolution.

Georjean

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/4/2026 2:32:46 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Stephanie Erickson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this resolution to protect Puakō Reef and to create a model for other communities in the state

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/5/2026 4:10:26 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Kaimi N Kaupiko	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Ilagan, Vice Chair Hussey, and the members of the House Committee on Economic Development & Technology

I am Kaimi Kaupiko, and I am writing in strong support of HCR 33.

Hawai‘i Island faces significant challenges with outdated wastewater infrastructure, particularly widespread use of cesspools. In West Hawai‘i, the coastal community of Puakō has been designated a Priority 1 area—the State’s highest ranking—for cesspool elimination due to its high risk to coastal water quality and nearby reef ecosystems. In addressing wastewater challenges of Puakō, Puakō for Reefs aims to establish a replicable framework that can be implemented by other coastal communities facing similar environmental and infrastructure issues.

Please support Puakō for Reefs and support this resolution.

Mahalo,

Kaimi Kaupiko

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/5/2026 8:08:03 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ute Bouchez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I urge to move forward with HCR 33.

There are many places where we can not make a positive impact on our environment and avoid potential environmental damage. Here is one where we can have this impact and at the same time help preserve one of our own natural habitat and wonders.

It is money well invested, not just in the now, also for the future.

It's time to get going. It's time to protect and preserve what we have while ensuring a safe living environment for everyone. It's time to move forward.

Mahalo

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 5:50:41 AM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jon E Hall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this resolution to protect Puakō Reef and to create a model for other communities in the state.

The Puako Reef is spectacular and extends/augments the wonderful waters all along the Kohala Coast. Sewage is out of control, destroying the reefs. Please help!

Jon Hall and Edward Grant

Puako 33

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 7:15:07 AM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Jovan Hall	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this resolution to protect Puakō Reef and to create a model for other communities in the state.

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 8:14:42 AM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Greg Gilliom	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this resolution to protect Puakō Reef and to create a model for other communities in the state. The reef off Puako is a state treasure, and needs to be protected. I own a home at 69-1928 Puako Beach Drive, and will be happy to pay my fair share to help create a sewer system and then connect our home to that system.

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 8:19:46 AM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Marcia Watt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this resolution to protect Puakō Reef and to create a model for other communities in the state. The first time I was in Puako was January 1977. It was stunningly beautiful. The sealife was amazing and so varied. There were many fish of varying sizes, shapes, and colors. There were numerous sea cucumbers, too many to count. There were little octopi, sea urchins, eels, corals, etc., etc. In 2007 I would still see an occasional Tang, but the corals didn't look healthy, and there were far fewer sea cucumbers and octopi. Now, in 2026, it's rare to find a sea cucumber. There are still a few urchins. Even tiny fish are few and far between. For the last few years I've attended the annuals talks presented by the researchers of the Seattle Aquarium. They have scientifically documented the decline in the Puako ecosystem, but still harbor hope for the reef's revival if the sewage problems are properly and swiftly resolved. Please help us in our longstanding goal of returning the Puako Reef to its full natural beauty and bountiful life.

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 2:09:23 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dan Surdam	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs and Members of the Committees,

My name is Dan Surdam and I am writing in **strong support of HCR 33**.

The Puakō Reef is one of Hawaii’s most vital marine ecosystems, yet it faces significant threats from land-based pollution and climate change. I support this resolution because it fosters a necessary partnership between the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) and the local community.

By passing HCR 33, the legislature can help ensure that Puakō serves as a "community-led model" for reef conservation. Protecting this reef is not just about preserving biodiversity; it is about protecting our coastline, our culture, and our future.

I urge the committees to pass HCR 33 to provide the Puakō community and the state with the framework needed to safeguard this natural treasure.

Mahalo for your time and for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Dan Surdam

Kamuela, HI

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 4:31:40 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Christian Enns	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this resolution to protect Puakō Reef and to create a model for other communities in the state

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 4:33:02 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Nicole Nores	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this resolution to protect Puakō Reef and to create a model for other communities in the state

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 4:43:42 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Sonja Rudie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this resolution to protect Puakō Reef and to create a model for other communities in the state.

Please help us get the sewage out of our ocean.

Thank you!

Sonja Rudie

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 7:03:59 PM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Adams	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Michael Adams**

69-1688 Puako Beach Drive Lot #30

Kamuela HI 96743

United States

Puako.Hawaii@gmail.com

+1 (530) 312-0491

**Date:** April 6, 2026

**To:**

Chair and Members

House Committee on Economic Development

Hawai'i House of Representatives

State Capitol

Honolulu, Hawai'i

**Re: Support for HCR 33 – Puakō Sewage Project**

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

I strongly support **HCR 33**.

I have been an owner of a house in Puakō since 2005, and my family has had a house in Puakō since 1982. I am a certified diver and have been diving the Puakō reef every year since 1983. I also graduated from university in 1985 with a degree in civil engineering and have experience in the design and operation of a wastewater treatment plant. Because of that long personal and professional connection to Puakō, I believe I have a strong basis for supporting this resolution.

In my opinion, the best option is to connect Puakō to the Mauna Lani wastewater system. This should have been done a long time ago. A proper wastewater solution is necessary to protect the reef and the long-term health of the community.

It is proven that sewage is affecting the reef, and from my own personal experience, the reef has deteriorated over the years. I have seen these changes firsthand through decades of diving in

Puakō. For me, this is not an abstract environmental issue. It is something I have observed personally over a long period of time.

From both an engineering and environmental standpoint, improving wastewater infrastructure in Puakō is the right thing to do. Sensitive coastal areas require effective wastewater collection and treatment systems, and delay only increases the risk of further damage. Completing this project will benefit water quality, reef health, and the future of the Puakō community.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support **HCR 33** and move it forward.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

**Michael Adams**

**HCR-33**

Submitted on: 4/7/2026 4:16:27 AM

Testimony for ECD on 4/8/2026 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Richard Warner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We have a home Puako on the Bay and support this resolution. Puako MUST have this sewer system to keep the Reef alive. Please pass this, thank you, Richard and Julie Warner