

**ACT 171**

S.B. NO. 808

A Bill for an Act Relating to the Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts.

*Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:*

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the Hawaii association of conservation districts, through coordination, facilitation, and partnerships, assists government agencies in identifying and implementing culturally-sensitive projects and practices to ensure the protection of Hawaii's environment. Chapter 180, Hawaii Revised Statutes, authorizes the soil and water conservation districts to operate as government subdivisions to educate the public and construct and maintain conservation projects and programs in Hawaii. The Hawaii association of conservation districts comprises sixteen districts representing every community on all major islands of Hawaii. Each of the sixteen districts is governed by five volunteer directors and is supported by staff. The department of land and natural resources provides administration and maintains oversight authority of the soil and water conservation districts.

Soil and water conservation districts have worked to improve Hawaii's environment and economy through major projects over the past sixty years; collaborative efforts with partners and government agencies have brought millions of dollars to Hawaii to improve farm practices, reduce erosion, improve ocean and

drinking water quality, fight invasive species, improve public safety, protect property, conserve water, and strengthen the economy. The soil and water conservation districts also provide educational and community support for conservation awareness. The districts participate in resource conservation and development projects and statewide high school programs. The districts also introduce conservation principles in elementary schools.

Additionally, soil and water conservation districts assist with reviewing each county's grading permits and conservation plans. County grading permit reviews and conservation plans are critical to preserve the environment, stimulate the economy, and maintain individual livelihoods. The demand and accompanying workload of the conservation districts have increased dramatically with population growth and land use changes. The districts receive hundreds of requests for conservation plans and county grading permit reviews each year. As a result, districts are currently struggling to keep pace with the demand, and adequate funding for the work of the Hawaii association of conservation districts is in serious jeopardy at a time of critical demand for its services. Soil and water conservation districts are authorized to accept contributions in money, services, materials or otherwise from any source, and use or expend them in carrying out its operation.

The legislature also finds that the lack of funding for the Hawaii association of conservation districts results in many negative impacts on agriculture, despite efforts to build the agricultural industry in Hawaii. Due to funding shortages, services provided by the Hawaii association of conservation districts are limited to entities within priority watershed areas that have approved watershed plans, although many of Hawaii's farming areas are not within priority watersheds. Additionally, many farmers in Maui county who require a grubbing and grading permit and are referred by the county to a soil and water conservation district will go unassisted due to funding shortages. The service of farm plan preparation will no longer be available to landowners who are requested by Maui county to obtain a farm plan. Furthermore, new farmers, many of whom are immigrants and often unfamiliar with United States laws, will not be educated by soil and water conservation district staff on conservation measures or advised to pursue environmental stewardship as a core value while seeking economic viability.

The purpose of this Act is to make an appropriation for the operational expenses and staffing costs of the Hawaii association of conservation districts.

**SECTION 2.** There is appropriated out of the special land and development fund the sum of \$450,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2017-2018 for the operational expenses and staffing costs of the Hawaii association of conservation districts.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of land and natural resources for the purposes of this Act.

**SECTION 3.** This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2017.

(Approved July 11, 2017.)