HB 1365 proposes an amendment to the State Constitution to allow the legislature to delegate to the counties or to the people of the counties the power to create other political subdivisions below the county level and authorize other state agencies to assist the counties or the people of the counties in the creation of political subdivisions below the county level.

Our statement on this measure is compiled from voluntarily submitted opinions of the listed academic resources, and, as such, does not constitute an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

Others have addressed the political theory aspects of the proposed Constitutional amendment. It seems appropriate to consider environmental management implications of town or regional governments. From an environmental perspective, it is apparent that local control is desirable, in that residents of a given community will have a direct stake in the quality of their immediate surroundings. This principle was ably demonstrated by the successful community-based watershed management strategy developed and implemented in Waimanalo, where, with help from the Environmental Center, the Neighborhood Board undertook a monitoring and planning process to evaluate and manage water quality problems in their streams and coastal waters. This approach has subsequently been adopted by other communities, and there is now a national initiative wherein the US Environmental Protection Agency is promoting such a community based management strategy. In practice, some minimum quality standards must prevail, and these are established at higher government levels. However, following the EPA model, local governments are free to set more stringent standards if they wish, and they are given the authority to implement and enforce their own management programs.

While it is evident that effective local government may enhance environmental quality at the local level, people seem to be seeking less government now, not more. It would be likely that any growth in regional governance would have to be matched by a diminution of centralized government authority. For the present, the logistics of such a reallocation of power are daunting, and environmental services such as water supply, waste management, and pollution control, already costly to provide, would not likely diminish in expense. We would not object to the authorization of political subdivisions below the county level, but we suggest that prior to implementation of the idea, the Legislative Reference Bureau should be requested to study the issue and comparatively analyze Hawaii in the light of experiences in other jurisdictions.