SB 944 S.D.2, H.D.2 Proposed
Relating to Health

House Committee on Finance

Public Hearing - April 3, 1997
2:00 P.M., Room 308 State Capitol

by

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The proposed H.D.2 of SB 944 would, among other things, repeal sections 341-3, 341-4, 341-5, and 341-6, HRS, effectively eliminating the Office of Environmental Quality Control, the University of Hawaii Environmental Center, and the Environmental Council.

My statement on this proposed measure does not constitute an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

Although no explanation is provided in this draft measure, the intention evidently is to reduce State expenditures by eliminating these offices. Mr. Gill has noted that the responsibilities of the Office of Environmental Quality Control and of the Environmental Council would remain, even if these offices were abolished, and the reallocation of these responsibilities would cost the State more than would be saved by eliminating the offices. Similarly, abolishing the UH Environmental Center, which I head, will prove more costly than frugal.

The Environmental Center has an annual G-funded budget of $150,059, provided entirely by the University. For this sum, the State receives the full time services of two professional environmental scientists with a combined Hawaii environmental management experience of over 55 years. Our budget also includes the salaries of a full time office manager, and from 5 to 10 student employees, as well as the normal operating expenses of an academic unit. I suggest that the competence, experience, and sheer number of person-hours of expert service to the State provided by our $150,000 of State funding cannot be matched elsewhere.
Like most academic research organizations, the Environmental Center generates substantial funding from both government and private sources. Last year, the Center received $209,578 in external funding for research, of which all but $6,000 was from the federal government. Clearly, the Center brings more money into the State than it derives indirectly from the State coffers. With the elimination of the Center, these funds would be lost.

But the Center is not solely a research organization. We also offer the University's Environmental Studies Degree program, graduates of which have found responsible positions in State government and throughout the private sector at a variety of levels. By abolishing the Center, the availability of locally trained environmental management professionals, the very future of our environmental stewardship capability, will be drastically curtailed.

And, in addition to research and education, the Center provides direct service to the State government and to the private sector, through formal academic review of planning and permitting documents, and by prepared testimony such as this before legislative bodies. Our mandate is to make most effective the contribution of the University to the problems of determining and maintaining optimum environmental quality. Our reviews are compiled from the expert opinions of university faculty and researchers working on the frontiers of new knowledge. Their contributions are strictly voluntary; we pay nothing for their expertise, which they provide as a community service. The scope of available and frequently utilized expertise is unmatched anywhere in the state. And our focus is not limited to Oahu; because our purview includes the entire state, we maintain liaison with designated Environmental Center representatives on UH campuses in each county.

Along with the corporate memory and records of the 27 years of the Center's work, these are the resources for which the University annually provides slightly more than $150,000. Does the State need these resources? The implied message of this proposed measure is that it does not. In response to that implication, I offer the following questions for you to consider:

1. What is the value of a clean, healthful environment to the State's annual revenues, and;

2. What would it cost the state to duplicate both the services and the net revenues provided by contributions of the UH Environmental Center?

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.