HB2925
RELATING TO ESTABLISHING A HOTLINE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

House Committees on
Energy and Environmental Protection
Judiciary
Intergovernmental Relations and International Affairs
Housing

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HB 2925 would establish an environmental protection hotline and appropriate funding for its implementation.

Our statement on this bill does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

Public participation is desirable in all aspects of government, but nowhere is it more crucial than in environmental management. The need to improve public access to environmental information and to provide opportunities for public input to environmental decisionmaking is evident. Thus, we strongly concur with the intent of this legislation.

However, we have concerns that the proposed "hotline" may not be the best way to proceed in this area. Some of our concern emerges from our experience in fielding the breadth of public queries on environmental issues which naturally are directed to our office. No one individual can be expected to be knowledgeable on all the areas of environmental concern which are likely to be touched on by the public. At the Center, we have the diverse resources of the University community at our disposal, and even with that breadth of knowledge, we occasionally find ourselves stumped. Of course, we welcome such occasions, because they usually lead us to articulating new and challenging research projects.

We envision that the majority of inquiries would involve issues of environmental regulation and protection; thus, we suggest that it would be more appropriate for establishment of an informational referral service,
perhaps within the OEQC or the new DEP, to direct callers to the responsible departments or divisions within government.

Our greater concern addresses the issues of accountability and follow-up to insure timely and appropriate response to public inquiries. A mechanism is needed to assure the public that their concerns are taken seriously and dealt with sincerely. From our own experience, we appreciate the difficulty of dropping everything to respond to a request from a concerned citizen. Perhaps, through consolidation of existing "hotlines" (e.g., the litter hotline, energy hotline, education hotline, recycling hotline, etc.) a core organization for public information could be created and provided with the staff necessary to perform the required follow-up. An ancillary advantage of this consolidation effort would be to eliminate unnecessary duplication of services.

This is an excellent area for further legislative effort. We would be pleased to offer what assistance we may in bringing this idea to fruition.