From:	Namele Naipo-Arsiga
To:	Planning LPC Testimony
Subject:	Testimony in Opposition to Bill 124, 125, 126
Date:	Monday, March 30, 2026 4:10:14 PM
Attachments:	Testimony Bill 124, 125, 126.pdf

Please see attached

Testimony in Strong Opposition
Bills 124, 125, and 126 – Downtown Pāhoa Commercial District
East Hawaiʻi Planning Commission Hearing – April 2, 2025

Submitted by: Namele Naipo-Arsiga

Aloha Chair and Members of the Commission,

I am a resident of Puna and I am submitting this testimony in strong opposition to Bills 124, 125, and 126.

My opposition is simple: Pāhoa and the surrounding Puna community do not have the infrastructure to support the scale of commercial development these bills would allow. Passing these bills does not create that infrastructure. It simply opens the door to businesses and developers while leaving our community to absorb the consequences.

That is not "Activate Puna". That is negligence.

These Bills Open Pāhoaʻs Door to Outside Development — Without Building Anything Our Community Needs

Who do these bills actually serve? The small local business owner in Pāhoa is already here. The artist, the farmer, the family running a plate lunch shop, the kupuna renting a small commercial space — they do not need a new zoning designation to do what they are already doing. What they need is infrastructure. They need reliable water. They need safe roads with sidewalks accessible for all ages. They need a community that is not being priced out from under them.

Large commercial districts attract developers and investors who look at a newly designated commercial corridor and see opportunity — the opportunity to build at scale, to acquire multiple parcels, to consolidate and develop in ways that local residents and small business owners cannot compete with financially.

We have watched this happen across Hawaiʻi. Kakaʻako was going to be revitalized for local communities. Kailua was going to be protected by design guidelines. In both cases, the zoning changes that were supposed to preserve character instead created the conditions for displacement. The buildings got taller. The rents went up. The local businesses that gave those places their identity could no longer afford to stay.

The development these bills attract will not build that infrastructure. It will consume what little we have — and leave our community to live with what remains.

There Is No Water
Most of lower Puna runs on rainwater catchment and private wells. There is no municipal water main serving Pāhoa Village at commercial scale. Bill 126 permits breweries, food processing facilities, car washes, laundries, and medical clinics by right — all of them heavy water users. None of these businesses can operate responsibly without a reliable, high-volume water supply that does not exist here.

Beyond supply, the geology beneath Pāhoa is young, porous lava. There is almost no natural filtration between the surface and the aquifer our community drinks from. Commercial wastewater — chemical runoff, cleaning agents, food processing discharge — moves directly into that aquifer. There is no sewer system to intercept it. The county is proposing to welcome large commercial operations into a community where the ground water is one spill away from contamination, with no infrastructure to prevent it and no plan to address it.

There Is No Road
Pāhoa has one road in and one road out. Pāhoa Village Road is a single corridor. It is already congested during peak hours. It is already difficult for kupuna, for families with young kēiki, and for community members with disabilities to navigate safely.

Bill 126 eliminates all off-street parking requirements for the entire DPC district while simultaneously permitting over fifty commercial uses by right — bars, restaurants, breweries, theaters, event facilities, wholesaling operations. The vehicles those businesses generate have nowhere to go except onto that one road and into the surrounding residential streets.

This is not a theoretical concern. It is a daily lived reality for everyone in lower Puna who drives through Pāhoa to get anywhere. Adding a large commercial traffic volume to a single-corridor road with no parking, no sidewalks, and no transit alternatives does not serve our community. It traps it.

And it does something far worse in an emergency. Pāhoa Village Road is the evacuation route for tens of thousands of lower Puna residents. We lived through 2018. We know what that road looks like when people are trying to leave and lava is moving. Increasing commercial density and eliminating parking on that corridor without a single traffic study or evacuation capacity analysis is not a planning oversight. It is a public safety failure that this community cannot afford.

There Is No Wastewater System

Lower Puna relies heavily on individual cesspools and septic systems. The State of Hawaiʻi has already mandated under Act 132 that all cesspools be eliminated by 2050 because of the threat they pose to groundwater and coastal water quality. These bills would encourage large-scale commercial development — with the wastewater demands that come with it — in an area where the primary disposal method is already under a state mandate to be phased out. There is no county wastewater infrastructure to replace it. The county would be simultaneously telling property owners to upgrade their cesspools while rezoning their land in ways that demand more from those same failing systems.

There Is No Plan

Not one of these three bills is accompanied by a fiscal impact analysis, a traffic study, a water capacity assessment, a wastewater infrastructure plan, or an environmental review. The map establishing the DPC boundary was drawn by the Planning Department in January 2026. This hearing was scheduled two months later. The testimony deadline gives working people in our community less than one week to respond to a zoning change that will affect their land, their taxes, their safety, and their daily lives for generations.

The infrastructure does not exist. The studies have not been done. The community was not meaningfully consulted. And the businesses these bills invite — breweries, wholesalers, food manufacturers, car washes — are not small local enterprises that need a new zoning designation to thrive. They are commercial operations that require the kind of roads, water, wastewater, and utilities that lower Puna simply does not have.

Approving these bills does not build that infrastructure. It just makes our community responsible for the consequences of its absence.

I am asking this Commission to reject Bills 124, 125, and 126 in their entirety and to tell the County Council that before any commercial rezoning of Pāhoa moves forward, the infrastructure must come first — the water, the roads, the wastewater systems, the safety plans. Build that foundation, do the studies, consult the community, and then talk about what kind of future Pāhoa wants.

Until then, the answer is no.