

**From:** [Robert Golden](#)  
**To:** [Planning LPC Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Testimony concerning Bill 147  
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## WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF ROBERT GOLDEN

Regarding Bill 147

Before the Leeward Planning Commission

County of Hawai‘i

Aloha Chair and Members of the Leeward Planning Commission,

My name is Robert Golden, and I reside in Lower Puna. I am the founder of Puna Rising ‘Ohana, a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening local connection, economic resilience, and opportunity across our district.

I appreciate the intent behind Bill 147, particularly its effort to create a more structured and enforceable framework for transient vacation rentals and its focus on accountability and responsible management.

At the same time, I respectfully ask the Commission to carefully consider the broader role that short-term vacation rentals play in the economic and social fabric of Hawai‘i Island, especially in districts like Puna.

Tourism represents approximately 20–25% of Hawai‘i’s economy and contributes more than \$17 billion annually statewide. On Hawai‘i Island, however, the distribution of those benefits is not uniform. Unlike resort areas such as Kona or Waikoloa, Lower Puna has little to no resort infrastructure. As a result, short-term vacation rentals serve as one of the primary pathways through which visitor spending reaches our communities.

Visitors who stay in vacation rentals tend to spend directly within local neighborhoods—supporting farmers markets, food vendors, small businesses, locally owned services, and community events. In Puna, these visitor dollars circulate through places such as the Maku‘u Farmers Market, roadside vendors, local restaurants, and emerging community-based enterprises. These are not peripheral benefits; they are essential to the circulation of local economic value.

I would also like to share my personal experience.

I operate an Airbnb on my property in Lower Puna. In 2025, my net rental income before expenses was approximately \$90,600, and I collected and remitted approximately \$15,400 in taxes to the County.

That income does more than support me personally—it directly enables my pro bono work as the founder of Puna Rising ‘Ohana. It allows me to dedicate substantial time and energy toward organizing community initiatives, supporting local entrepreneurs, convening

collaborative gatherings, and strengthening the social and economic fabric of Puna.

In that sense, my short-term rental is not separate from community benefit—it is one of the ways that community benefit is made possible.

I recognize and support the need for reasonable enforcement and neighborhood protections. However, I respectfully urge the Commission to avoid recommendations that may unintentionally displace responsible, small-scale local operators.

Overly aggressive enforcement may have unintended consequences, including:

- Driving out locally owned rentals
- Consolidating ownership among larger and better-capitalized operators
- Reducing the diversity and accessibility of Hawai‘i Island’s visitor experience
- Weakening important income streams that help local residents remain on their land

I respectfully encourage the Commission to support a balanced approach—one that upholds standards, protects neighborhoods, and ensures compliance, while also recognizing the important role that short-term vacation rentals play in sustaining local livelihoods and community-based economies.

In communities like Puna, this issue is not theoretical. It directly impacts whether families can remain in place, whether small businesses can thrive, and whether visitor dollars circulate locally or are extracted elsewhere.

Mahalo for your time, your service, and your thoughtful consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Robert Golden  
Lower Puna, Hawai‘i Island



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