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Mayor

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County of Hawai'i

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT COMMISSION

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 17, 2021

TO: Maile David, Council Chair
and Hawai'i County Council Members

FROM: Georjean Adams, Chair
Environmental Management Commission

RE: Bill No. 21, Draft 2: Increase the Solid Waste Fund to add funding for a
Life Cycle Assessment

Aloha Council Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Environmental Management Commission to request a new \$50,000 line item in the Solid Waste Fund's budget for Recycling Programs-County, Other Current Expenses, Miscellaneous Contract Services (085.601.5610.02.115) for "Life Cycle Assessment Study." This additional \$50,000 will be dedicated to conducting Life Cycle Assessments to evaluate our Solid Waste Division's Recycling Programs and will preserve monies allocated for general outreach and education on recycling. The Commission, via a motion adopted at its meeting on April 28, 2021, has appointed me to send this letter pursuant to its responsibility to advise the Council under Section 2-207(b) of the Hawai'i County Code.

The purpose of the Life Cycle Assessment methodology is to measure and evaluate the environmental, economic and social impacts of the Solid Waste Division's current and proposed recycling programs. Rather than continuing to assume that all landfill diversion programs reduce the County's environmental impact, we believe that by using a Life Cycle Assessment, we may find that some of our programs could, in fact, be causing more harm than good. For example, all cardboard collected by the County of Hawai'i is sorted, baled, hauled to port and then shipped to Taiwan. We have no data on the climate impact of this mode of recycling and a Life Cycle Assessment would provide the information needed to determine if this is the best use of our resources. The lessons learned from those assessments can result in savings many times greater than the initial expenditures.

On Thursday, April 29, 2021, Hawai'i became the first state to declare a climate emergency. By doing so, we are acknowledging as a state that climate change is an immediate threat. "The

resolution calls on government to make choices that will enable a more sustainable future” (Hawaii News Now). Sustainability involves considering the social, environmental and financial impacts of our practices. For example, what happens to our cardboard once it reaches the shores of Taiwan? Is it responsibly dealt with? Would that cardboard be better off used here as a valuable ingredient of compost instead of using bunker fuel to ship it thousands of miles away? In addition to providing answers to these kinds of questions about our current programs, the assessment will provide guidance on how to best manage our landfill diversion programs going into the future.

On April 21st, a week prior to the State of Hawai’i declaring a climate emergency, the Council authorized acceptance of the 2019 Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan. One of its top six recommendations is to: “establish goals that are expressed and measured in terms of environmental impacts (e.g., greenhouse gas emissions, toxicity, energy use) and consider *full life cycle impacts*, in addition to tonnage-based landfill diversion or waste recovery goals (Chapter 4 Recommendation 5).” A major advance on this goal would be to fund Life Cycle Assessments on various recyclable materials. These assessments will also serve as templates to inform evaluation of future landfill diversion options.

We understand that there are budget shortfalls due to the devastating economic impact of COVID-19; nevertheless, as the ISWMP states, “The status quo is not sustainable. Some of these programs may be challenging and perhaps even controversial because they require changes to ingrained behaviors and increased costs.” We ask for additional funds because we do not want to take away from the No. 1 priority from the ISWMP: “education, outreach and public awareness” (currently funded at \$50,000, line item 085.601.5602.115.3). We have kuleana to move in a more sustainable direction as a County and to do so we need a full spectrum of information to select the best diversion methods. Life Cycle Assessments will provide that data. The Recycling Coordinator and his office have everything in place to begin to perform Life Cycle Assessments except for the funds. We urge you to provide the necessary funds for this crucial work by adding \$50,000 to the DEM budget.

Sincerely,



Georjean L. Adams, Chair
Environmental Management Commission

C: Ramzi I. Mansour, Director, Department of Environmental Management