

## Written Testimony on Agenda Item V.3

*The Commission will discuss advice it could provide DEM related to the redesign of programs to reduce the need for additional County employees, such as automation, appropriate scaling of equipment, applying logistical optimization tools, outsourcing, resource sharing with other islands, revised prioritization, renegotiation with agencies and contractors, and other tactics to ensure DEM carries out its duties **in the face of chronic staffing shortfalls**. This agenda item does not include advice on DEM's management of its human resources.*

Dear Chairwoman Adams and Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. While this agenda aims to seek advice on proposed recommendations for DEM, we need to first address the ongoing challenges of **coping with reduced staffing levels** within the Department of Environmental Management (DEM).

Firstly, I appreciate the intent behind these recommendations. However, I believe it is crucial to emphasize that any redesign or optimization of programs must be rooted in the realities of our current staffing and operational challenges. While these ideas have merit, the following concerns and considerations must be acknowledged.

### 1. Redesign of Programs to **Reduce the Need for Additional County Employees**

With 87 vacancies (last report) **already in critical operational roles**, reducing the need for additional employees is not viable for many programs without risking service disruptions. Solid Waste management, Wastewater operations, Recycling, Derelict and Abandoned Vehicles, and Green Waste have experienced staffing issues. Transfer stations are already struggling to meet public needs.

\*I urge the Commission to ensure that any redesign initiatives prioritize maintaining existing services while addressing the root causes of staffing shortages.

### 2. Automation

Automation offers potential efficiencies but requires upfront investment, skilled operators, and maintenance staff. It is not a standalone solution but one that complements—not replaces—adequate staffing. Furthermore, any automation plans must account for Hawaii's unique environmental and logistical challenges.

### 3. Outsourcing

Outsourcing may appear as a short-term solution, but it does not eliminate the need for skilled workers to oversee and execute operations, whether by County employees or contractors. Additionally, the Hawai'i Supreme Court's Konno decision imposes legal constraints on privatization that must be carefully considered.

#### 4. Resource Sharing and Equipment Scaling

Resource sharing with neighboring counties or agencies could be beneficial but would require agreements that respect operational autonomy. Scaling equipment to align with current staffing levels risks overburdening our workforce, which could exacerbate existing challenges.

#### 5. Exclusion of Human Resources from Agenda Discussions

Finally, I find it contradictory that human resources issues are excluded from these discussions. Chronic staffing shortages directly impact all aspects of DEM's operations, and meaningful solutions cannot be developed without addressing this. Staffing is integral to the delivery of all County services and must be a central focus of any recommendations.

It is worth noting that the County's HR department itself is currently understaffed, making it even more critical for recruitment and retention efforts for an already strained department. This further underscores the urgency of addressing staffing challenges as a root issue that impacts every program and service DEM provides.

Without adequate staffing, no amount of redesign, automation, or outsourcing can ensure the sustainability of DEM's services.

In conclusion, I respectfully recommend that the Commission's policy recommendations for 2025 prioritize actionable solutions tied to realistic operational capacities. I also urge the inclusion of human resources discussions in our monthly agenda to comprehensively address the DEM's staffing challenges and to give support to their efforts.

I am hopeful and optimistic as I look forward to working with this new administration.

Thank you for considering my testimony, and for continued collaboration on this critical issue.

Respectfully submitted,

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