



# SIERRA CLUB

## HAWAI'I ISLAND GROUP

June 25, 2025

Ms. Erica Perez, Chair  
c/o County of Hawai'i  
Environmental Management Commission  
345 Kekūanāo'a St. Suite 41  
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

Sent via email to [cohdem@hawaiiicounty.gov](mailto:cohdem@hawaiiicounty.gov)

Re: Agenda Item V.A.1., Budget Update

Aloha Chair Perez and Members of the Commission,

HIG is concerned that the Environmental Management Commission's (EMC) mission is being undermined due to a lack of prior discussion, transparency, and communication by the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) or the County of Hawai'i (County) as a whole. HIG urges the EMC to take action that will improve its processes, transparency by DEM and the County, and facilitate a more timely and inclusive forum to integrate community involvement.

The EMC's mission is "To advise the department on waste reduction strategies, recycling, litter control, community involvement, and other issues related to the functions of the department, and exercise any other powers related to the functions of the department delegated by ordinance." At last month's EMC meeting, although the budget was on the agenda, there was no information provided to allow the EMC to fulfill this advisory function on funding that is the primary driver of DEM's functions. Instead, the update was that DEM wanted to wait until the County Council approved the budget before discussing the budget further, which occurred on June 5, 2025.

As a result, there was no opportunity for the EMC or the community to provide prior input or advice, or for DEM or the administration to consider and potentially integrate such advice. This is not only a lost opportunity to leverage the expertise of the EMC, but also undermines the purpose and mission of the EMC.

The lack of transparency and communication for timely and thorough discussion prior to decision-making also undermines the public's trust in the County as a whole. The lack of information provided with the budget leaves the EMC, and the general public, left with more questions than answers – such as, but not limited to, the various funding sources considered, how priority projects were identified, or the broader funding strategy to complete pressing matters of environmental protection, public health, and environmental justice. For something as important as DEM's budget, which involves taxpayer dollars as well as potential future increased sewer fees, much greater transparency and opportunities for comment is clearly warranted.

There are various fora, including public testimony and community involvement at EMC meetings, where expert community input and advice is often provided. It is unclear as to how the input provided is integrated into the relevant project, work, or written report. It is also unclear how DEM or the County is responding to the comments, input, or feedback that it receives.

Accordingly, the following are recommended actions:

- Urge the EMC to work in collaboration with DEM to develop a process that would allow for prior discussion and input before the agenda item is approved by Council, before the due date, or otherwise considered final.
- Urge DEM to provide regular updates on its community engagement and involvement in decision-making.
- Urge the DEM and county administration to work with members of the community who have prior expertise and knowledge to assist in finding the optimal solutions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.