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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Tuesday, April 2, 2024 — 4:00 p.m.

Ulupono Initiative supports SB 2518 SD2 HD1, Relating to Geothermal Energy Exploration.

Dear Chair Yamashita and Members of the Committee:

My name is Micah Munekata, and I am the Director of Government Affairs at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy and clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

Ulupono supports SB 2518 SD2 HD1, which requires and appropriates funds for the Hawai'i State Energy Office to conduct a statewide environmental assessment for, and subsequently administer, a geothermal resources characterization program under the direction of the Hawai'i Groundwater and Geothermal Resources Center at the University of Hawai'i.

Hawai'i needs all viable forms of renewable energy to meet the 100% renewable portfolio standard by 2045. New data underscores the widespread support among residents for this transition. Between October 2023 and January 2024, Ulupono Initiative partnered with Anthology Research to conduct a statewide public opinion survey on energy in Hawai'i involving 1,985 surveys across all four counties. With a margin of error +/- 2.21%, this is arguably the most extensive and comprehensive study on the topic to date. The findings are compelling.

A staggering 91% of respondents expressed their support for the expansion of renewable energy resources throughout the islands. Moreover, the importance of developing Hawai'i's own energy resources was emphasized across all counties by the residents. This resounding endorsement from the community underscores support is strong for continued investment and advancement in renewable energy solutions to meet our collective energy goals.

Furthermore, the Hawai'i State Energy Office in its recently published Hawai'i Pathways to Decarbonization Report identifies, among other things, the significant need for additional

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renewable energy generation to meet broader economy-wide decarbonization goals.¹ Wind and solar alone are not enough. Firm sources, such as geothermal, will also be necessary. Hawai'i also faces many competing demands for available land, and geothermal projects use the least amount of land per megawatt of renewable power produced. As reported by Hawai'i Public Radio in 2019, "[\[r\]esearch recently presented](#) by graduate student Ted Brennis with the [Hawai'i Groundwater and Geothermal Resources Center](#) indicates that where resources are available, geothermal is competitive with wind and solar on both cost and land use."² In the case of land use, this is actually an understatement, as geothermal is not merely competitive but in fact uses much less land per megawatt.

Most residents seem to believe the Big Island is the only place in which geothermal energy can be commercially produced, and yet that assumption has never been thoroughly researched and confirmed. It's worth noting that Ulupono's 2024 survey showed that there is broad support for geothermal energy statewide, and more importantly more than 60% of respondents stated they would support the construction of a utility-scale geothermal power plant in their community if it meant a \$30 per month savings per household.

Ulupono supports the work of the Hawai'i Groundwater and Geothermal Resources Center, to further the discovery and development of geothermal resources. This bill will dedicate resources to the staffing and field work necessary for geothermal research into its potential.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Micah Munekata
Director of Government Affairs

¹ Hawai'i Pathways to Decarbonization Act 238, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2022, Report to the 2024 Hawai'i State Legislature December 2023. https://energy.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Act-238_HSEO_Decarbonization_Report.pdf

² <https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/local-news/2019-07-25/unexplored-geothermal-potential-may-offer-solution-to-renewables-reliability-problem>. Report cited can be found at <https://www.higp.hawaii.edu/hggrc/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Brennis-Ted-2019.07.23-Thesis-Presentation.pdf>