

Written Testimony of Congressman Ed Case (HI-01)

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment

Members' Day Hearing: Proposals for a Water Resources Development Act of 2022

Wednesday, March 16, 2022

Chair DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves and Members of the Committee:

Aloha, and mahalo for the opportunity to support this Committee's continued efforts on behalf of critical water resources activities and programs that are important to both our nation and my home state of Hawai'i.

Hawai'i of course, is an island state, with the ocean on all sides, so the impacts of our ocean on our land directly affect our everyday lives. This is especially important where we go to enjoy our oceans and marine environment, and where we host millions of visitors per year seeking the same experience, making travel and tourism by far our largest single industry. So the impacts of climate change on Coastal erosion and flooding, especially along our world-class beaches, are severe both as to our economy and our way of life.

The State of Hawai'i needs the technical assistance only the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can provide to save our precious beaches and oceans, especially iconic Waikiki Beach and the surrounding Māmala Bay. This is my top request to this Committee for assistance.

Māmala Bay and Waikīkī Beach in Honolulu have played a central role in Hawaii's recreational, cultural and economic story for centuries. Waikīkī Beach and its offshore waters form the hub of Hawaii's visitor industry, Hawaii's largest overall economic driver with direct contributions of around 25% of our total GDP. Waikīkī Beach is one of the most visited and enjoyed beaches on earth, with over 10 million visitors per year. These visitors are both local residents, for whom Waikīkī Beach is the most central ocean recreation in urban Honolulu, and tourists. The majority of tourists who visit Hawai'i stay at some point in Waikīkī hotels and resorts, right on Waikīkī Beach or right next to it so they can visit the beach. A 2016 report by the University of Hawai'i concluded that some 58% of tourists to Waikīkī would not have visited if there was no beach and easy ocean access at Waikīkī.

However, the increasing impacts of climate change and sea level rise, which is especially problematic for island states and territories such as Hawai'i, are taking an alarming toll on Waikīkī Beach. Especially over the past decade, there has been an alarming increase in shoreline erosion with associated impacts on the immediate

ocean habitat, ecosystems and recreational opportunities. These have been exacerbated by completely inadequate shoreline stabilization efforts for decades – and in some places for over a century.

The threat of further accelerating erosion up to the total loss of the beach is real. The consequences would be widespread. In the visitor industry alone, the University of Hawai'i 2016 study concluded that complete erosion of Waikīkī Beach would result in a loss of some \$2.2 billion annually in spending and revenue for Hawaii's economy.

There have been some small and discrete stabilization projects initiated and implemented along specific portions of the Waikīkī coastline, but no comprehensive, integrated project that would address the threat in its entirety. A new, comprehensive feasibility study is required to develop a project or series of projects that address the long-term sustainability and utility of Waikīkī Beach and its adjacent ocean environment and critical public infrastructure. Such a study will help ensure the associated recreational and economic benefits are preserved and enhanced.

Your Committee has within its power the ability to make a legislative correction to assure this study can move forward. Section 209 of Public Law 87-874 currently authorizes the Corps of Engineers to conduct surveys of flood and tidal events only of Hawaii's rivers and harbors, but it does not cover related shorelines or nearby buildings and infrastructure. There is no justification for this distinction, especially in the specific case of Waikīkī Beach where the basic challenge extends from the land through the beach to the marine environment. Your support is needed to make sure we take into consideration the outsized issues like this that remote and coastal locations face as our country debates how to approach impacts to infrastructure due to climate change.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Corps of Engineers for its continued commitment to improving and adjusting to these unique situations in Hawai'i and urge further consideration of these topics that are so vital to my home state.

Mahalo you for your time, and I appreciate your consideration of these concerns from Hawai'i as the Committee reauthorizes the Water Resources Development Act.