



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS
 City Council Testimony
Bill 17 RELATING TO BUSES USED FOR THE HOMELESS
 Public Hearing
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 Chamber

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The Office of Hawaiian Affairs supports the purposes and intent of Bill 17. Our interest in this legislation is primarily based on our concern that 40% of the overall population of individuals who experience homelessness in Hawaii are Native Hawaiian. The 2003 homeless census revealed that there were 6,029 homeless individuals at any point-in-time in Hawaii and approximately 14,500 in a given year.

OHA supports immediate shelter solutions to Hawaii's affordable housing and homeless problem, which will only escalate beyond reasonable management without immediate intervention and funding by both the State and County. We applaud creative efforts such as the use of buses for the homeless. The approval of this bill is one way the County can demonstrate its endorsement of creative approaches and "outside of the box" thinking initiated through community partnerships. The exemption of the motor vehicle tax being recommended will aid to offset the conversion costs involved and is a movement in a proactive direction toward resolving these critical issues.

Through direct contact with our beneficiaries, homeless service providers, and coalitions like Partners In Care, Solidarity with the Homeless, and Housing Hawaii Coalition, a new entity that grew out of the Rural Community Assistance Corporation's housing conference in Honolulu last November called, "Affordable Housing in High-Cost Areas," we are aware and concerned that the "hidden homeless" population is growing rapidly. Therefore, the provision of available, safe shelters to citizens is essential and an intervention to this trend.

OHA recognizes that shelters are not the permanent solution to the homelessness problem

within the community. We still contend that the underlying need is to increase the inventory of affordable rental housing for the neediest of families in Hawaii and create homeownership opportunities for low-income families through the self-help housing program. However, in the interim, reducing homelessness on the streets by way of mobile homeless shelters is an option worth supporting.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to present testimony.