SUPPORTING A FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT FOR REEF INSURANCE AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS TO PROTECT
HAWAII’S COASTLINES AND COASTAL INFRASTRUCTURE FROM NATURAL
DISASTERS.

WHEREAS, the islands of the State include environmental
resources such as coral reefs, wetlands, forests, and other
natural infrastructure that, if healthy, effectively managed,
and functioning, can help mitigate the risks and related loss
and damage from the effects of climate change and natural
disasters; and

WHEREAS, the State's coastal areas and infrastructure face
climate change-related risks and disaster events including
exposure to storms, high wave events, sea level rise, and
flooding; and

WHEREAS, climate scientists and other local and global
experts predict an increase in severity and frequency of these
events; and

WHEREAS, a study by a team from the United States
Geological Survey, The Nature Conservancy, and University of
California at Santa Cruz has developed models showing that
healthy coral reefs can absorb up to ninety-seven percent of
wave energy, protecting coastal properties from the power of the
sea; and

WHEREAS, that study estimated that Hawaii's coral reefs
protect $836,000,000 worth of coastal infrastructure from
flooding annually; and

WHEREAS, in addition to coastal protection, Hawaii's coral
reefs provide residents with income from fishing and tourism,
food security, recreational opportunities, and a cultural
connection to our island home; and
WHEREAS, the health and function of Hawaii's coral reefs are threatened by global stressors related to climate change, including sea level rise, coral bleaching, and acidification; and by local stressors from land-based sources of pollution, unsustainable fishing practices, and invasive species; and

WHEREAS, live coral cover has declined by as much as forty percent and reef fish abundance has declined by up to ninety percent in some areas; and

WHEREAS, Hawaii has experienced three coral bleaching events in the past five years, including the first statewide mass bleaching event in 2015; and

WHEREAS, coastal risks are expected to increase in the future from the effects of climate change, including an increase in the number and severity of hurricanes, higher levels of rainfall in fewer storm events, increasing sea surface temperatures, and increased ocean acidification, which will negatively impact coral reefs, lobsters, oysters, and other calcifying organisms; and

WHEREAS, global losses due to natural catastrophes and tropical hurricanes have increased in recent decades; and

WHEREAS, these storms impact national and local economic productivity, threaten water and food security, increase diseases, damage critical public infrastructure, and impede basic services; and

WHEREAS, the exposure of communities and coastal assets to flooding and erosion is also increasing because coastal ecosystems that serve as a first line of defense, such as wetlands and coral reefs, are being lost at alarming rates; and

WHEREAS, these coastal ecosystems protect people and assets on the coast by reducing wave energy, trapping sediments, and attenuating storm surge; and

WHEREAS, ten million visitors travel to the State annually to experience the beauty of its beaches, reefs, oceans, and
other natural resources, and in doing so contribute nearly $17,000,000,000 to our state economy annually; and

WHEREAS, the health and sustainability of our communities and economy are closely intertwined with the health of our coral reefs and coastal ecosystems; and

WHEREAS, in 2018, the Mexican state government of Quintana Roo partnered with the local hotel owners' association, The Nature Conservancy, and a local marine park to establish a Coastal Zone Management Trust Fund to manage and restore beaches and coral reefs, funded in part through local tourism taxes; and

WHEREAS, in mid-2019, the Trust purchased the world's first Reef Insurance policy that will provide funds to quickly restore the coral reef if damaged in a hurricane; and

WHEREAS, the reef insurance policy covers damage to the reef rather than damage to the private property on the coastline, thus insuring nature itself; and

WHEREAS, The Nature Conservancy is conducting a feasibility assessment to determine whether reef insurance may help protect and restore Hawaii's reefs after a natural disaster; and

WHEREAS, this feasibility assessment is scheduled to be completed by October 2020, and will assess the biological, political, economic, cultural, and social feasibility of reef insurance in the islands; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives of the Thirtieth Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2020, that the Legislature encourages the completion of The Nature Conservancy's feasibility assessment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of Land and Natural Resources, Department of Transportation, appropriate state and county agencies, The Nature Conservancy, and other experts and partners are urged to cooperate to develop an implementation plan identifying and proposing to the 2021 Legislature specific, nature-based projects that can help protect the State's coastal infrastructure from inundation,
including the use of insurance and other market mechanisms that incentivize public and private investment to protect the health and function of reefs and other coastal systems and restore these reefs and other coastal systems after a natural disaster; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that The Nature Conservancy is requested to share the results of its feasibility assessment with the 2021 Legislature along with any recommendations for nature-based solutions to help protect Hawaii's coasts from flooding and inundation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the Governor, Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources, Director of Transportation, Co-Chairpersons of the Hawaii Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission, each member of the Hawaii Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission, and Executive Director of The Nature Conservancy of Hawaii.

OFFERED BY: [Signatures]

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