

March 2, 2021
9:30 a.m.
Conference Room 211 & Videoconference



To: Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Sen. Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Sen. Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair

From: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii
Joe Kent, Executive Vice President

RE: SB1337 — RELATING TO HOUSING DENSITY
Comments Only

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii would like to offer its comments on [SB1337](#), which would authorize counties to create an upzoning program, allowing homeowners within a block in an urban district to vote to increase housing density for that block.

We commend the Legislature for considering new ways to help address the state housing crisis. It is easy to focus solely on new building projects and overlook how much it could help to lift the zoning restrictions that hamper creative solutions to the lack of affordable housing.

Recently, the Grassroot Institute has distributed two publications to legislators on the ways zoning and other regulations throttle the growth of housing.

One was our policy report, [“Reform the Hawaii LUC to encourage more housing,”](#) which advocates giving the counties more authority to make decisions at the county level, thus reducing the amount of bureaucracy in development and preventing the LUC from becoming a kind of state zoning commission.

The other was a zoning reform toolkit, [“How to Build Affordable, Thriving Neighborhoods”](#) which explores different ways to grow housing and improve affordability by reforming state

and local zoning restrictions. We summarized proposals from the toolkit in a commentary published in The Maui News, ["50 ways — at least — to update Maui's zoning code."](#)

We're pleased to see that SB1337 embraces two principles in the zoning toolkit: It empowers homeowners to increase the density of their own city blocks if they so choose, and it reduces county and state restrictions that hamper owners from putting their property to better use.

By allowing urban neighborhoods to vote to increase housing density within their block, SB1337 would comprise a positive step toward addressing the state housing shortage.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our comments.

Sincerely,
Joe Kent
Executive Vice President, Grassroot Institute of Hawaii