

For those who are pessimistic about local politics, it is important to highlight what can happen when everyone works together. Last Thursday, Governor Lingle signed House Bill 1308, also known as the “Legacy Lands Act,” in a ceremony attended by representatives from both parties in the State Legislature, affordable housing advocates, homeless service providers, conservation groups, Native Hawaiian representatives, farmers, and landowners. Governor Lingle correctly noted that the name “Legacy Lands Act” represents only a fraction of the benefits this bill will provide.

While the bill could help protect such beloved community lands as Pūpūkea-Paumalū, Honu‘apo Bay, and Moanalua Valley—its effects will also be felt in watersheds and Natural Area Reserves around the State where efforts to protect our forests and pure sources of drinking water will be given a huge boost. Perhaps most importantly, the approved Act will dedicate millions to increase affordable rental housing in Hawai‘i at a time when many local families are struggling to find living space in the face of a booming real estate market.

Our broad coalition would like to acknowledge the initiative of the Hawai‘i State Legislature and bill introducers House Speaker Calvin Say and Senator Russell Kokubun. These legislators and many others helped make the dream of new funding for affordable housing and conservation a reality. We would also like to acknowledge Governor Lingle for recognizing the value of the Legacy Lands Act, and understanding the enormous and immediate contribution it will make to increasing our quality of life in Hawai‘i. The Legacy Lands Act is truly a visionary bill that will benefit future generations.

The Legacy Lands Act garnered almost unanimous support from hundreds of individual citizens, non-profit organizations, businesses, and others. With the Governor’s signing, the bill officially becomes Act 156 and takes effect on Friday, July 1. The vision and leadership of both the State Legislature and the Governor will give Hawai‘i a fair mechanism to generate revenue from high-end property sales and then devote these badly-needed funds to proven programs that enhance our environment and help build strong families and communities.

We believe that the greater ‘ohana in Hawai‘i will directly benefit from the hundreds of units of affordable rental housing and open space protection that will result from this Act. We thank the Legislature and the Governor for demonstrating to the people of Hawai‘i that good ideas have a good chance of becoming law in a state where leadership truly does listen to the people.

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