

BILL006(23)
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 72

COUNCIL

COUNCIL Meeting

Meeting Date: Feb 22, 2023 @ 10:00 AM

Support: 0

Oppose: 0

I wish to comment: 1

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Representing: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii	Position: I wish to comment	Submitted: Feb 20, 2023 @ 02:08 PM



February 22, 2023

10 a.m.

Honolulu City Council Chambers

To: Honolulu City and County Council

Councilmember Tommy Waters, Chair

Councilmember Esther Kiaʻāina, Vice Chair

From: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

Ted Kefalas, Director of Strategic Campaigns

RE: Bill 6 (2023) — RELATING TO PROFESSIONAL SELF-CERTIFICATION

Comments Only

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii would like to offer its comments on [Bill 6 \(2023\)](#), which would allow building applications to be reviewed by qualified third-party reviewers or professionals qualified to self-certify that the plans and other data are in compliance with all applicable laws.

Expanding the use of third- party reviewers and self-certification could meaningfully slash Honolulu’s permitting backlog, which in December totaled more than 200 days for residential permits.¹

Third-party review, which the county has already utilized to some extent in the past, allows property owners and builders to contract with private vendors to review their building permits. Because the Honolulu Department of Planning and Permitting continues to face a staffing shortage and a permit backlog, third-party reviewers could prove to be an effective safety valve.

Self-certification could also streamline the permitting process. Under a self-certification regime, professionals — such as architects, engineers and other experts designated by the DPP — could

¹ [“Update from the Department of Planning and Permitting on Building Permit Process Backlog,”](#) Honolulu City and County Council hearing, Feb. 9, 2022. See the 1:48:00 timestamp.

attest that their building plans complied with all applicable building codes and regulations and automatically receive a permit without going through a DPP or third-party review.

Other municipalities across the country use both of these mechanisms to minimize permitting delays. For example, Johns Creek, Georgia, a town of 80,000, contracts with a private entity to review its most complicated permits, such as for hospitals, while allowing its civil servants to review standard permits, such as for homes. This ensures the city does not have a permitting backlog. In fact, permits in Johns Creek are often issued within five to 10 days of when they are applied for.²

Self-certification has also worked in other cities. For example, New York City has employed a self-certification process for decades. This has helped speed up the building process, while the city has implemented several safeguards to ensure all buildings meet code. Its Department of Buildings randomly audits 20% of self-certified plans, and architects can lose their professional certification privileges or endure harsher penalties for failure to comply with code.³

Chicago has also used a self-certification program with success. Many architects can self-certify building plans and receive a permit within 10 days.⁴

Lest anyone fear that self-certification could lead to unsafe buildings, many architects and engineers would likely ask third-party reviewers to double-check their findings for more complicated projects. Building code inspectors would also still perform routine inspections on the building during its construction and again upon its completion.

Current permitting delays cause headaches and higher costs for homeowners trying to renovate their kitchens, businesses trying to take out a wall and homebuilders trying to construct new housing.

We applaud the Council for considering measures such as this that could streamline the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

² Joe Kent, "[Testimony: Hawaii County could use 'Konno' exceptions to address permit backlog](#)," Grassroot Institute of Hawaii, Nov. 3, 2022.

³ "[Back to Basics: Professional Certification — Pros and Cons](#)," Milrose Consultants, July 1, 2015.

⁴ "[Self-Certification Permit Program](#)," City of Chicago, Feb. 25, 2022.

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