

BILL056(25)
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 453

COUNCIL

COUNCIL Meeting

Meeting Date: Sep 3, 2025 @ 10:00 AM

Support: 2

Oppose: 2

I wish to comment: 1

Name: Jacob Wiencek	Email: jacob.m.wiencek@pm.me	Zip: 96815
Representing: Self	Position: I wish to comment	Submitted: Aug 29, 2025 @ 07:20 PM
Testimony: Aloha Councilmembers, I appreciate the intent of Bill 56 to ensure greater community engagement and input regarding various development projects. However, I am concerned that this proposal is too heavy and will impose additional, unnecessary uncertainty on our already byzantine and burdensome permitting system. These critical bottlenecks and delays only increase costs and worsen affordability. Additionally, I am worried about the role of so-called "other" community associations having official input outside a city defined system (i.e., Neighborhood Boards). I appreciate the intent, but more work is needed to ensure the intent does not worsen our convoluted permitting/regulatory processes, increase costs and allow unofficial actors an effective veto over proposed projects.		
Name: Ted Kefalas	Email: tkefalas@grassrootinstitute.org	Zip: 96813
Representing: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Sep 2, 2025 @ 09:25 AM
Name: Kathleen Pahinui	Email: pahinuik001@hawaii.rr.com	Zip: 96791
Representing: Self	Position: Support	Submitted: Sep 2, 2025 @ 02:40 PM
Testimony: Aloha Council Chair Waters and Council Members - I respectfully request that this pass first reading and on to the Zoning Committee for discussion. I strongly support this bill as too often SMA minors come through with no community awareness and they actually have a big impact on the surrounding area - especially if related to shoreline development. This issue needs a thorough vetting and some guardrails so communities can be aware and have a say. Mahalo for your time and consideration. Mālama 'āina,		

Kathleen M. Pahinui

Waiialua Resident

Name:

Julia Fink

Email:

julia@aiahonolulu.org

Zip:

96813

Representing:

The American Institute of Architects (AIA), Honolulu Chapter

Position:

Oppose

Submitted:

Sep 2, 2025 @ 05:09 PM

Name:

Racquel Achiu

Email:

rhachiu@gmsil.com

Zip:

96791

Representing:

Self

Position:

Support

Submitted:

Sep 3, 2025 @ 08:15 AM

Testimony:

Aloha my name is Racquel Achiu of the Waiialua Moku in support of Bill 56. Mahalo Council Member Weyer for hearing our concerns and introducing this Bill. THERE IS A VERY SERIOUS AND SIGNIFICANT CONCERN for the rapidly growing trend of cutting corners in the SMA process. As I'm sure you're aware the north shore has a significant amount of space that sits in the SMA, especially our shorelines. Currently property owners, real estate agents/investors have avoided the critical steps that an SMA has in place such as under valuing their permit to avoid #1 public hearing process #2 environmental, coastal and cultural protocols AND portion their applications to remain under the criteria of an SMA MAJOR . Entire rebuilds are happening in place of repairs. I look forward to continuing this process and conversations to enhance & preserve the integrity in which our spaces & processes are utilized. MAHALO

Sept. 3, 2025, 10 a.m.
Honolulu Hale

To: Honolulu City Council
Tommy Waters, Chair
Andria Tupola, Vice Chair

From: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii
Ted Kefalas, Director of Strategic Campaigns

RE: Bill 56 (2025) — RELATING TO SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREAS

Aloha Chair Waters, Vice Chair Tupola and other members of the Council,

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii **opposes** [Bill 56 \(2025\)](#), which would require permit applicants to present project proposals to their area neighborhood boards or community associations as a condition of receiving minor special management area permits.

This bill would add unnecessary delays to simple projects and would increase the Department of Planning and Permitting's workload at a time when it is already struggling to complete existing jobs.

Right now, Honolulu requires a special management area minor permit for any project within a designated coastal zone that is valued under \$500,000 and that would not have a "significant adverse environment or ecological effect," with limited exceptions for certain single-family homes and work such as home repairs, infrastructure maintenance and farming.¹

Applicants must pay an application fee and provide drawings of the property along with a written description of the project.²

Meanwhile, projects valued above \$500,000 or that are likely to have an effect on the environment must apply for an SMA major permit. The process for obtaining an SMA major permit includes going through a public

¹ [§ 25-2.3 Permits required for development](#), Revised Ordinances of Honolulu, accessed Sept. 2, 2025. Note that [Act 125 \(2025\)](#) increased this threshold to \$750,000 but the City Council has not yet incorporated this change into the ROH.

² [§ 25-5.2 Special management area minor permit](#), Revised Ordinances of Honolulu, accessed Sept. 2, 2025.

hearing from the area neighborhood board or community association and getting approval from the City Council.

In other words, there's already a distinction made between SMA major and SMA minor permits, with more intensive projects requiring greater oversight. Adding a layer of review for SMA minor permits would do little to protect public health or safety, but it would slow down the approval process for those projects.

Even though Bill 56 (2025) does not require the neighborhood board or community association's approval for a project to proceed, vocal critics of the project could use the hearing as an opportunity to pressure the applicant or DPP into making modifications to the project that could slow it down or increase costs.

Furthermore, this bill would increase DPP's workload by requiring staff to attend meetings and answer questions from board members, taking time away from actually processing permits.

It is already difficult enough to obtain building permits in Honolulu. Grassroot urges the Council to avoid making it any harder.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ted Kefalas
Director of Strategic Campaigns
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

Tommy Waters, Chair
Andria Tupola, Vice Chair
Honorable Council Members
Honolulu City Council

Subject: Bill 56 2025
Relating to Special Management Area

Dear Chair Waters and Honorable Members of the Council,

AIA Honolulu respectfully **OPPOSES** Bill 56 (2025), which would require SMA *minor permit* applicants to present to a Neighborhood Board or community association before DPP review.

Neighborhood Boards play an important civic role, but they are not technical review bodies and lack the expertise to evaluate environmental or ecological impacts. The SMA minor permit already exists to confirm that a project will have no substantial adverse environmental effect. DPP staff are best equipped to make this determination under established standards.

Recent updates to shoreline setback regulations and zoning ordinances already provide strong protections against large-scale shoreline development. Adding a Neighborhood Board step duplicates existing review, extends permitting timelines, and increases costs for property owners. The \$500,000 cap for SMA minors is already very restrictive given today's construction costs, meaning even modest projects fall outside the "minor" threshold. Larger projects are already subject to major permit review.

The SMA system was intended to balance environmental protection with the reasonable use of property. Requiring Neighborhood Board review for all minor permits risks overburdening long-time homeowners who seek to maintain or modestly improve their properties. Families may find themselves subject to the same additional processes as large-scale developers.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Council to reject this measure.
Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Phil Camp, AIA
2025 President, American Institute of Architects, Honolulu