

BILL022(26)
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 270

COUNCIL

COUNCIL Meeting

Meeting Date: Jul 8, 2026 @ 10:00 AM

Support: 0

Oppose: 1

I wish to comment: 0

Name: Jonathan Huynh	Email: jhweather123@yahoo.com	Zip: 96792
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Jul 1, 2026 @ 10:29 AM

Testimony:

Aloha,

I'm an advocate for housing and livability on Oahu. I oppose the override of the Mayor's veto on OER funding.

I'm not here to defend OER as-is. The audit and the \$800K foodbank criminal case are real failures. They deserve anger and corrective action. But corrective action isn't what's on the table. Collective punishment is.

The defunding eliminates 18 positions, 18 of your constituents who had nothing to do with the foodbank theft or the audit findings. If HPD had an audit problem, nobody here would abolish the police department. If someone at ENV committed fraud, you wouldn't shut down the wastewater plants. You'd fix the problem, tighten controls, and hold the responsible parties accountable. That's not what this is. This is firing everyone because someone else broke the law.

OER's model is deliberate: general funds pay staff so program dollars come from outside. About \$150K/year in personnel supported a team managing \$300 million in rental and utility relief. One program manager at \$88K oversees \$886K in federal and private funds across three programs through FY28.

That's not waste. That's leverage. Leverage dies when you fire the people who create it. Federal grants need a local administrator. No staff = no grants = no programs.

Since July 2025: 869 businesses served through the Business Connector. Over 900 people trained through Good Jobs Hawai'i. \$1.2M in congressional earmarks for early childhood programs. \$199K federal EDA grant for disaster readiness. These are documented in the budget packet you're voting on.

Could OER track outcomes better? Absolutely. But those are real dollars and real people.

Farmers have been showing up at your hearings talking to reporters. They're scared. The office that connected them to markets, storm recovery, and federal resources might vanish, and nobody has told them what replaces it. The budget kills a \$500K farmers' market initiative. It eliminates disaster recovery positions for farms hit by the Kona Low. It severs community org relationships built over years.

Plain question: if you override the veto, which department picks up the farmers' market program? Who handles disaster recovery coordination? Which agency absorbs the grant compliance for committed funds? "We'll figure it out later" isn't a plan. It's abandonment.

Restore the funding. Attach real strings:

- Independent audit, results public and presented to Council.
- Recurring reporting with hard numbers: grants secured, businesses served, wage outcomes. Data, not testimonials.
- Fraud controls based on the federal 2 CFR Part 200: dual signatures, segregation of duties, independent reconciliation.

Had these been in place earlier, the foodbank mess might've been caught sooner.

- Whistleblower protections so staff can flag problems without retaliation.

That's not coddling OER. That's giving them a chance to fix what's broken.

Someone stole from the foodbank. An audit said OER wasn't focused enough. The easy political move is to cut and call it reform. But UHERO, your own economist, says Honolulu is falling behind. Productivity is stagnant. Cost of living keeps climbing. None of that gets better by killing the one office working on it.

Fix OER. Hold it accountable. Give it benchmarks and a deadline. But don't fire 18 people because somebody else committed a crime, and don't tell farmers they're on their own because an audit said "staffing."

I respectfully urge you to vote no on the override. I urge you to give OER a chance to fix itself.

Mahalo.