BILL018(26)
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 278

COUNCIL

COUNCIL Meeting

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

Support: 4

Oppose: 0

I wish to comment: 0

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Roxanne Bolden	systemsadvocacy@alohailhawaii.org	96782
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Aloha Independent Living Hawaii	Support	Jul 2, 2026 @ 01:34 PM
Name:	Email:	Zip:
Damien Waikoloa	damien.waikoloa@gmail.com	96822
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Hawai'i YIMBY	Support	Jul 6, 2026 @ 04:26 PM
Name:	Email:	Zip:
Ted Kefalas	tkefalas@grassrootinstitute.org	96813
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii	Support	Jul 7, 2026 @ 11:54 AM
Name:	Email:	Zip:
Martin Nguyen	martin@centre-urban.com	96815
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Centre Urban Real Estate	Support	Jul 7, 2026 @ 11:14 PM

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Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) dedicated to providing independent living programs and services for persons with disabilities in Hawaii.

We work together with the community and consumers to improve the quality of life through individual choices and access to services.

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Testimony of Aloha Independent Living Hawaiʻi

Bill 18 (2026), CD1 — Relating to Affordable Housing
Re: Committee Report CR-167(26); Bill 18 (2026), CD1 (OCS2026-0383, dated June 15, 2026)
Honolulu City Council — Public Hearing and Second Reading
Hearing: Wednesday, July 8, 2026
Position: Support the intent, with requested amendments

Chair Waters and Members of the Council:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Aloha Independent Living Hawaiʻi is the federally designated statewide Center for Independent Living. We serve rural Oʻahu — which lies within the City and County of Honolulu — and the neighbor islands. We work from the Independent Living philosophy: people with disabilities have the right to live in integrated, ordinary housing in their own communities. We testified before the Committee on Housing, Homelessness & Parks on June 23 on the proposed CD1, and we renew and update those comments now that the CD1 is before the full Council for public hearing and second reading.

We support the goal of Bill 18. Oʻahu needs far more affordable rental housing, and people with disabilities are among those who need it most. We ask only that the housing this program produces be housing our community can actually enter and live in.

The CD1 makes the program bigger while removing its accessibility protections. The CD1 doubles the maximum lot area to 40,000 square feet and allows buildings to rise to 60 feet or the maximum height of the underlying zoning district, whichever is greater. At the same time, it deletes every elevator requirement: the bill as introduced required elevators in buildings over 60 feet, and the amendments the Committee on Housing, Homelessness & Parks approved on March 3 would have required an

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elevator in any building 30 feet and above, closely tracking the recommendation of the State Disability and Communication Access Board. The CD1 now provides that elevators "are not required unless mandated by Section 1007.2.1 of the building code, or required by applicable federal accessibility laws," and it retains "None" for off-street parking with no accessible parking or passenger-loading provision. The result is a program that invites larger and taller walk-ups in which most units are closed to wheelchair users, to many people with mobility and chronic-health conditions, and to kupuna.

The legal fallbacks the CD1 cites will almost never apply. Section 1007.2.1 of the building code requires an elevator as an accessible means of egress only where a floor that is required to be accessible sits four or more stories above the level of exit discharge. In a walk-up with no elevator, the upper floors are not required to be accessible in the first place, so the provision does not reach them. The federal Fair Housing Act is no broader: in a building with no elevator, its design standards cover only the ground-floor units, and only in buildings first occupied after March 1991. A tenant may pay for reasonable modifications, but no modification can add an elevator to a building that never had one. "Unless required by federal law" is, in practice, an exemption for nearly every unit above the ground floor.

The stakes are integration itself. The Technical Assistance Collaborative finds there is no housing market in the United States where a person living solely on Supplemental Security Income can afford a modest apartment without rental assistance. When accessible, affordable housing does not exist, people with disabilities are pushed into segregated institutions that cost an average of $759 a day. That is the outcome the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision directs public systems to prevent. A City housing incentive should move people toward community living, not away from it.

Accessibility is not what is holding this program back. The University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization's May 2026 review of the Bill 7

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program found that it has produced 189 units against a goal of 500 per year, and that the average time from application to permit issuance is 661 days — against a promised 90. The barrier is the permitting process, not elevators or an accessible parking stall. Deleting accessibility requirements will not shorten a permitting queue; it will only guarantee that the units that do get built are closed to disabled renters. We also note that the administration told the Committee on June 23 that it is awaiting UHERO's review before commenting further. The Council should not lock in the removal of accessibility protections before the study it commissioned has been heard.

"Affordable" at the top of this program's range does not reach our community. Bill 18 lets a project meet its requirement by renting to households at up to 100 percent of area median income. On the City's own schedule, 100 percent AMI for one person is an income of $106,400 a year and a one-bedroom rent of $2,850 a month. A person on Supplemental Security Income receives $994 a month in 2026; the average Social Security Disability Insurance benefit is about $1,630. Both sit below even the City's 30 percent "extremely low income" line:

Income band (1 person)	Annual income limit	City "affordable" 1-BR rent	Share of SSI ($994/mo)	Share of avg. SSDI ($1,630/mo)
30% AMI — extremely low	$31,920	$855/mo	86%	52%
50% AMI — very low	$53,200	$1,425/mo	143%	87%
80% AMI — low	$85,120	$2,280/mo	229%	140%
100% AMI — bill's ceiling	$106,400	$2,850/mo	287%	175%

Source: City & County of Honolulu / HHFDC income and rent schedule; SSA 2026 benefit rates. Rents include utilities.

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At 50 percent AMI and above, the City's own "affordable" rent already exceeds an SSI recipient's entire monthly income. Housing priced to the upper bands is affordable on paper and out of reach in fact.

Our requests are straightforward. Because CR-167(26) returns this bill to committee after second reading, the Council can advance the bill's housing goals and fix its accessibility deficit in the next draft. We ask the Council to:

1. Restore the elevator requirement for buildings 30 feet and above, as this body's own committee approved on March 3 and as the Disability and Communication Access Board has recommended;

2. Require an accessible route from the street, parking, or loading area into each building and its common spaces, and reserve at least one accessible parking or passenger-loading space per project;

3. Anchor the program's affordability to extremely low- and very low-income households, who include most disabled renters; and

4. If these amendments cannot be made at this stage, commit to incorporating them in the CD2 when the bill returns to the Committee on Housing, Homelessness & Parks.

If this program is the start of a new wave of housing on Oʻahu, accessibility should be built in from the first unit — not retrofitted, at the tenant's expense, after the fact.

Mahalo,

Roxanne U Bolden

Roxanne Bolden
Executive Director

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July 8, 2026

Honolulu City Council
530 South King St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: SUPPORT BILL 18 (26) CD1 - 06-23-26 HHP - RELATING TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Aloha Chair Waters, Vice Chair Tupola, and Council Members,

On behalf of Hawai‘i YIMBY, we are writing **in support of Bill 18 (26)** and appreciate the author’s continued efforts to improve the Chapter 32 Affordable Rental Housing Program, commonly known as the "Bill 7" program. We also thank the author for carefully evaluating prior versions of the bill and for removing provisions that raised concerns about unintended consequences or barriers to participation.

The Bill 7 program has become one of Honolulu’s most important tools for encouraging the construction of affordable rental housing. As we continue to face a severe housing shortage, it is critical that we refine and strengthen programs that have demonstrated the ability to produce homes for local residents.

We support the proposed increase in the maximum lot area from 20,000 square feet to 40,000 square feet and the removal of the maximum building area limitation. Together, these changes will provide greater flexibility for affordable housing developers and expand the number of properties that may be suitable for redevelopment into affordable homes. In many urban areas, larger assembled parcels are necessary to achieve the scale needed to make affordable housing financially feasible. Allowing larger sites to participate in the program and enabling more efficient use of available land can improve project

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feasibility and help maximize the amount of housing that can be delivered on suitable sites.

We also encourage continued consideration of an extension of the program's sunset date. The housing crisis we face today was decades in the making, and meaningful progress will require sustained commitment over many years. We often speak about housing production as though it can be solved through a short-term effort, but what began as a sprint has proven to be a marathon.

The Bill 7 development community is only now beginning to hit its stride. Affordable housing projects require years of planning, financing, design, permitting, and construction before homes are delivered. The policy certainty provided by a longer program horizon can help encourage additional participation and investment.

We continuously monitor and evaluate the progress of our affordable housing pipeline, and the data shows that progress is being made. However, building a generation's worth of housing that was never built due to short-sighted policies and NIMBY opposition will take time. **We should remain committed to improving programs that are producing results and give them the stability necessary to succeed.**

Lastly, we would like to address DPP's written testimony from the last committee hearing that concerns over lengthy permit processing oversimplifies the issue. Honolulu's housing shortage is in large part the result of decades of adding more regulations and design standards that have effectively made it financially infeasible or illegal to build the variety of homes our community needs, especially multi-family homes. Instead of looking inward at whether the permitting process has become overly complex, DPP continues to point to the time applications spend with applicants as the explanation for why permits take so long. Rather than proposing reforms that could help achieve the 90-day permitting goal envisioned by Chapter 32, DPP instead recommends adding new requirements, such as creating a separate set of development standards for buildings between 60 and 75 feet that would remove reduced development standards and add new height setback

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requirements. If the quality or completeness of applications is truly a significant source of delay, then it is equally important to consider whether the growing complexity of our development standards is contributing to those same delays.

Hawai‘i YIMBY *(Yes In My Backyard)* is a volunteer-led grassroots advocacy organization dedicated to supporting bold and effective solutions for Hawai‘i’s devastating housing crisis. Our members are deeply concerned about Hawai‘i’s chronic and worsening housing shortage, which has caused home prices to rise much faster than incomes and pushes thousands of kama‘āina out to the mainland or into homelessness every single year.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

Mahalo,

Damien Waikoloa & Huey Kwik

Chapter Leads, Hawai‘i YIMBY

GRASSROOT INSTITUTE OF HAWAII

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Removing barriers to Hawaii's prosperity

July 8, 2026, 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 18 (2026), CD1 — RELATING TO AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING

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

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii **supports** — and **offers three amendments** to — Bill 18 (2026), CD1, which would make changes to the Bill 7 affordable housing program.

Specifically, the current draft of the bill would allow Bill 7 projects to be built in business zoning districts; increase the 20,000-square-foot maximum lot area to 40,000 square feet; clarify that Bill 7 projects can be built to the height allowed by the underlying zoning district or 60 feet, whichever is taller; and repeal maximum square footage rules for different unit configurations.

Currently, Honolulu's Bill 7 program offers homebuilders relaxed zoning rules, property tax breaks, fee waivers and other financial incentives in exchange for building multiple housing units, at least 80% of which are required to be rented for at least 15 years at rents that would be affordable to residents making 100% or less of the area median income.[1]

The Bill 7 program has been an important tool for city homebuilders interested in producing affordable housing, and the expansions proposed in Bill 18 (2026) would add much-needed flexibility for homebuilders interested in using the program to reduce Honolulu's housing shortage.

[1] § 32-1.1 Definitions., Revised Ordinances of Honolulu, accessed Oct. 31, 2025.

After all, a 2024 update to the Hawaii housing planning study estimated that Honolulu needs 27,710 new units built between 2023 and 2027 to keep up with demand.[2]

Bill 18 (2026) also aligns with the city's 2025-2028 Strategic Housing Plan, which sets a goal to "Identify opportunities for maximizing urban land use through adjustments to density standards in the Land Use Ordinance," and states that "Enhancing predictability for developers is also critical, with a focus on methods to streamline and standardize processes."[3]

Likewise, this bill supports the housing goals laid out in the city's Primary Urban Center Development Plan.

Policy H-1.3 in that plan aims to "Encourage a greater variety of housing types, including low or middle-density multifamily housing, ADUs and ohana units, mid-rise apartment buildings and shared housing models," and policy H-2.1 aims to "Expand the supply of income-restricted affordable housing through requirements, incentives and public-private partnerships."[4]

However, the bill would benefit from being amended in three ways.

First, Grassroot recommends restoring language from a previous draft of the bill relating to the maximum number of units and a transit-oriented development bonus, as follows:

> The maximum number of affordable rental housing units for each zoning lot is determined by dividing the square footage [equivalent of the maximum allowable FAR for that zoning lot, excluding any public open space bonus FAR, by a factor of 800, and rounding down to the nearest whole number.] of the lot by a factor of 130 and rounding down to the nearest whole number; provided that for each zoning lot located within 2,000 feet of an urban high service bus stop at the time of application for a building permit to construct an affordable rental housing project, the maximum number of affordable rental housing units is determined by dividing the square footage of the lot by a factor of 120 and rounding down to the nearest whole number. For purposes of this section, "urban high service bus stop" means any bus stop that is located within the primary urban center development plan area and is served by at least one bus route with a frequency of service interval of 16 minutes or less at any point during the week.

That language would advance policy H-1.1 of the Primary Urban Center Development Plan, which is to "Enable and incentivize residential infill development in transit-accessible planned growth areas."[5] It would also address a weakness — lack of TOD or rail-corridor-specific development standards — identified in a recent University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization report on the Bill 7 program. [6]

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[2] "Hawaii Housing Planning Study 2024," prepared by SMS Research and Marketing Services, Inc., FSR Consulting LLC and Ward Research, Inc. for the Hawai'i Housing Finance and Development Corporation, Table 39A, p. 124.
[3] "Strategic Housing Plan 2025-2028," Prepared by the Mayor's Office of Housing with CommunityScale, January 2025, p. 70.
[4] "Primary Urban Development Center Development Plan," Honolulu Department of Planning and Permitting, April 2025, p. 158.
[5] Ibid, p. 158.
[6] Trey Gordner, Edith Prager and Rafael Ceilio Munoz, "Draft report: Assessing Honolulu's 'Bill 7' Infill/Workforce Housing Program," University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization, p. 16.

As an alternative, the Council could look to the TOD language proposed by Martin Nguyen in his June 22, 2026, testimony,[7] which is copied below:

> § 32-2.__ Transit density bonus.
> Zoning lots located within 2,000 feet of an urban high service transit stop at the time of application for a building permit to construct an affordable rental housing project, or within the Waikiki Special District, a TOD Special Direct, or adopted Neighborhood TOD Plan, are eligible to receive the following transit density bonus incentives:
> (1) Maximum number of units. The maximum number of affordable rental housing units for each zoning lot is determined by dividing the square footage of the lot by a factor of 120 and rounding up to the nearest whole number;
> (2) Maximum building height. Three additional stories and up to 30 additional feet;
> (3) Maximum floor area ratio. Percentage increase of up to 25%;
> (4) Minimum yards and setbacks. 5 feet, or the minimum side, rear, and front yards required by the underlying zoning, whichever is less; and,
> (5) Maximum lot area. No maximum lot area.
> For purposes of this section, "urban high service transit stop" means any current or planned fixed guideway rail station or bus stop that is located within the primary urban center development plan area and is served by at least one bus route with a frequency of service interval of 16 minutes or less at any point during the week.

Second, the city Department of Planning and permitting suggested in its June 23, 2026, testimony that the height limit in the bill be set at "75 feet or the underlying zoning height, whichever is greater," with an exception for special districts, in which the height limit would be "75 feet or the underlying district height, whichever is lower." Grassroot recommends adopting DPP's suggestion but amending it as follows:

> Maximum building height is 75 feet or the underlying zoning district, whichever is greater; except that within special districts, the maximum height shall be the same as that of the underlying district.

This change is needed because some special districts — such as various TOD districts and parts of the Chinatown and Waikiki special districts — specify a height limit greater than 75 feet, and it does not make sense to require Bill 7 projects to comply with a more stringent height limit in those areas.

Third, Grassroot recommends extending the sunset date of the Bill 7 program beyond 2030. Because of delays in obtaining financing and permits, a four year window could doom many beneficial projects. Making this program permanent would be best, but extending the sunset date to 2050 would at least give homebuilders more certainty to plan for future projects.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ted Kefalas
Director of Strategic Campaigns
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

[7] Martin Nguyen, "Providing Comments Regarding Bill 18 (2026) – Relating To Affordable Rental Housing," Centre Urban Real Estate, June 22, 2026.

CENTRE URBAN
REAL ESTATE

Martin M. Q. Nguyen, MRED
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July 7, 2026

The Honorable Tommy Waters
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RE: IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS TO BILL 18 (2026) CD1 – RELATING TO AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING

Aloha Chair Waters, Vice Chair Tupola, and Members of the City Council,

I am submitting this testimony **IN SUPPORT** of Bill 18 (2026) CD1, with requested amendments, relating to Affordable Housing under ROH Chapter 32 – commonly known as "Bill 7". Our firm is currently working on two kamaʻāina workforce housing projects being developed under ROH Chapter 32 that would result in the creation of 72 workforce housing units. We are currently pursuing additional project sites, focused on areas with a high concentration of jobs and access to public transit – places where we believe workforce housing is much needed.

Bill 18 is a major and necessary step toward improving Chapter 32. The current CD1 is also a significant improvement over prior versions. Increasing the prior 20,000 square foot lot limitation, allowing Chapter 32 projects in additional business and mixed-use districts, and creating more flexibility around building area and height can help unlock more meaningful workforce housing opportunities in the places where Oʻahu already expects and needs more urban housing. However, as the Council continues to refine Bill 18, we respectfully request that the development standards be better aligned so that the bill's housing-production goals are not unintentionally limited by internal inconsistencies.

ALIGN DENSITY DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

Bill 18 allows additional height where the underlying zoning allows it. That is a meaningful improvement. However, increasing allowable height without also adjusting the maximum unit calculation will have limited practical impact because the maximum unit ratio may still cap the number of units that can be built.

Max Units - Lot Size / Ratio				
	5,000	10,000	20,000	40,000
200	25	50	100	200
150	33	67	133	267
120	42	83	167	333
100	50	100	200	400

Max Height (assuming ~10' per floor, 600 sf/unit, 80% efficiency)					
		5,000	10,000	20,000	40,000
50	**5 Stories**	23	51	108	221
60	**6 Stories**	28	62	130	266
70	**7 Stories**	32	72	151	310
80	**8 Stories**	37	82	173	354
90	**9 Stories**	41	92	194	398
100	**10 Stories**	46	102	216	442

As shown above, if a project is allowed to exceed the current 60-foot height limit because the underlying zoning already allows greater height, the maximum unit ratio should also be adjusted. Otherwise, the project may have a taller permitted building envelope but no corresponding ability to create additional affordable rental units.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that Bill 18 allow the maximum unit standard to be adjusted from the current 1 unit per 200 square feet of lot area to at least **1 unit per 150 square feet of lot area** for projects that are allowed to exceed 60 feet under the underlying zoning or applicable district standards. This would not create unlimited density everywhere. Rather, it would allow higher-yield Chapter 32 projects in the very locations where the City has already determined that greater height and density are appropriate.

TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT BONUS

In addition to the density refinement above, Bill 18 has the potential to become an important catalyst for workforce kamaʻāina housing near public transit and employment centers. We respectfully request that the Council consider creating a separate, clear, and administrable transit-oriented housing bonus for Chapter 32 projects. That bonus should expressly include areas near current and future Skyline rail stations, major bus corridors, adopted Neighborhood TOD Plans, TOD Special Districts, and appropriate areas of the Waikīkī Special District. The definition of an "urban high-service transit stop" should not be limited only to bus service if the City's most significant public transit investment is the Skyline rail system. Where the City has invested in transit infrastructure, Chapter 32 should help convert that investment into housing opportunities for local residents.

REAL PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION CLEAN-UP

We should also take the opportunity to clean up the definition of "Exemption Period" for the real property tax exemption under Section 8-10.33, such that the RPT exemption is equal to the affordability period of the project, in the case the affordability period exceeds the currently fixed 15 years. As currently written, the RPT exemption period appears fixed at 15 years, even if the project is subject to a longer affordability period. A prudent revision would provide that the RPT exemption runs for the same period that the property remains subject to its affordability restrictions, but in no event less than 15 years. This is the case for all other affordable housing projects, except under ROH Chapter 32. This update would create consistency with the broader policy goal of encouraging long-term affordability. If a project remains affordable for longer, the RPT exemption should align with that longer affordability commitment.

CONCLUSION

For these and various other possible updates to ROH Chapter 32, we look forward to reviewing the recommendations of the Department of Housing and Land Management should Bill 18 return to Committee for further discussion.

We also appreciate the Department of Planning and Permitting's recent testimony and its continued work to improve Chapter 32. DPP raised a number of important technical issues, and we agree that the ordinance should be clear, internally consistent, and safe to administer. In particular, as Bill 18 considers larger lots and potentially taller buildings, there may be an opportunity to create a more refined framework that preserves the existing Chapter 32 development standards for projects within the current scope of the program, while coordinating appropriate Building Code, Fire Code, loading, and operational standards for larger or taller projects. Coordination between DHLM and DPP during the next round of Committee discussions will be critical to ensuring that Bill 18 becomes the impactful piece of legislation that it can be.

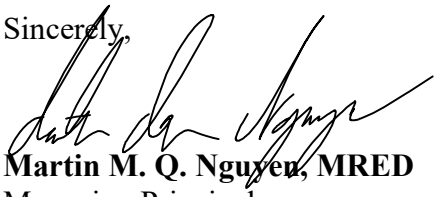
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The City Council should take this important opportunity to refine ROH Chapter 32 such that it allows more housing to be created in areas where we want more density, such as near public transit and job centers, as well as a tapering of density in areas where we want to retain the existing sense of place. Bill 18 is the City Council's opportunity to make the commitment to the targeted creation of affordable housing, preventing another day where more and more kamaʻāina – our family, friends, and neighbors - are moving away, some whom will never return to Hawaiʻi.

We respectfully urge the Council to pass Bill 18 on second reading and return it to Committee for further discussion and targeted amendments.

Mahalo for the opportunity to comment and provide recommendations. If there are any questions or concerns, please reach me at martin@centre-urban.com to discuss.

Sincerely,



Martin M. Q. Nguyen, MRED
Managing Principal
Centre Urban Real Estate Hawaii, LLC