

Panel approves new guidelines for OHA funding plan

By Becky Ashizawa

Star Bulletin

The House Committee on Hawaiian Affairs last night put its stamp of approval on a bill that begins to address the longstanding issue of what the state owes the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

The bill authorizes the state to begin a process of figuring out what it owes OHA in revenues from the ceded land trust since 1980, outlines the payment process and authorizes \$8.5 million as this year's payment. That figure is roughly \$7.2 million more than what OHA currently receives in a year.

Afterwards, Sen. Mike Crozier,

bill passed by the Legislature in 1988, Waihee needs to resolve Hawaiian beneficiary claims against the state for past violations on the ceded land trust and the Hawaiian Home Lands program.

Ceded lands were returned to Hawaii by the federal government at statehood. According to the Admission Act and State Constitution, part of the revenues generated from the ceded lands go toward helping native Hawaiians, now defined as those with at least 50 percent Hawaiian blood.

If the state fails to come up with a settlement, beneficiaries can sue the state from the date both land trusts came under state responsibility.

The settlement affects the state general fund, the counties, public lands and other state agencies, Milliani Trask said. She fears a negative public reaction, and "It's going to be anti-Hawaiian because OHA has grabbed this without giving anyone a fair opportunity."

But Kinau Kamalii, head of the State Health Planning and Development Agency, testifying as an individual, said she voted for the OHA trustees because she knew they would exercise judgment on her behalf.

"That is self-determination, where I'm concerned," she said.

Despite testimony questioning OHA's ability to manage its money and programs, Rep. David Ige said he is confident that the trustees will "generate an appropriate plan."

Ige, chairman of House Committee on Hawaiian Affairs, said, "It's my opinion that the bill presented does provide a just and equitable settlement in terms of definitions of revenue and definitions of land which is the primary bone of contention in OHA's suit against the state."