

# Health 'ombudsman' helps make rules work

When people complain about Hawaii's "difficult" business climate, they are often talking not so much about taxes or employment rules as they are about the so-called "red tape" involved in getting business going here.

Much of this red tape centers on Hawaii's well-entrenched system of environmental, land-use and health laws. As onerous as those rules may seem, they have a purpose: They are designed to ensure the survival of those natural and physical attributes that make Hawaii special.

Our environmental record is far from perfect, obviously. But the very reason Hawaii is treasured by so much of the world is that we have generally refused to allow our environment to become irreversibly polluted, our lands arbitrarily developed and our scenic vistas irretrievably lost. The public has repeatedly said that it wants strong

environmental controls to continue. That doesn't mean, however, that the state cannot be more sensitive to the burden such rules impose.

In that regard, the state has taken a major step forward with the creation of a Compliance Assistance Office within the Health Department. The purpose of the office is to help businesses cope with a blizzard of environmental and health rules in one convenient place.

But simply collecting the various regulations in one spot is not enough. The key to the success of this office is the word "assistance." The way to make Hawaii more business-friendly is not to eliminate the rules but to make compliance less of a headache.

If the office takes that mission seriously, perceptions of Hawaii as a tough place to do business will begin to fade. But perceptions of Hawaii as an environmentally sane, carefully nurtured place to live and work will continue.