

Leasehold land bill draws native Hawaiian protest

Protesters compare the Council measure to "land grabbing"

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Evern Williams fears that if a bill by the City Council is passed, funds for programs that benefit destitute native Hawaiian children could dry up.

About 20 native Hawaiians marched along Kalakaua Avenue yesterday to protest a City Council Bill 53 that would make it easier to force landowners to sell land to leaseholders. Williams is part of the group, Kupaa Mahope O Liliuokalani, which supports the Queen Liliuokalani Trust, intended by the Queen to provide for orphaned and destitute Hawaiian children.

Kanaloa Koko, who said he was a descendant of the queen, wore a black cape and held the Kamehameha flag on Kalakaua Avenue in front of Foster Tower, one of four leasehold properties owned by Queen Liliuokalani Trust.

"It's land grabbing by the state," Koko said.

The group contends that if the bill passes, the trust's income from leasehold properties would be affected.

The bill would allow half of the owner-occupants in a leasehold building to force the sale of the land under their units.

The measure addresses a state Supreme Court ruling that set a higher standard that a minimum of 25 owner-occupants or half of all owners of the units in a leasehold building must agree to mandatory conversion.

The group says that with 8 of the 14 owner-occupants of the 142-unit building filing for conversion, the 50 percent requirement would be fulfilled, and the trust would be forced to sell their land.

But supporters of the bill say the trust would get a fair price for the land.

"If Liliuokalani sold the fee and got fair market value for it they could reinvest the money and earn more income than all the lease rent they collect under the leases plus the redevelopment value of the land at the end of the lease," said Michael Pang, a principal broker of Monarch Properties.

"It counters a lot of the emotional rhetoric that says you're taking the moneys away from the widows and orphans," he said. "They could help more widows and orphans by selling, and that's economic fact."

Lono Correa, media coordinator for the group said the leasehold rents provide a portion of the \$14 million income of the trust, estimated to be worth \$300 million.

The group had held a rally Monday on Liliuokalani's birthday in front of Iolani Palace with 500 attendees.