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LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU
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Written Comments

HB875 **RELATING TO TOURISM**

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Presented to the House Committee on Legislative Management

Wednesday, February 5, 2025, 2:00 p.m.
Room 430 & Via Videoconference

Chair Holt and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon, Chair Holt and members of the Committee, my name is Charlotte Carter-Yamauchi, and I am the Director of the Legislative Reference Bureau (Bureau). Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit written **comments** on H.B. No. 875, Relating to Tourism.

The purpose of this measure is to appropriate funds in an unspecified amount for the establishment of one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) state capitol tour guide position within the Legislative Reference Bureau's Public Access Room (PAR).

The Bureau takes no position on this measure but has very serious concerns and submits the following comments for your consideration.

PAR was established in 1994 with the core mission of enhancing the public's ability to participate in the legislative process; it became part of the Bureau in 1996. PAR's office and services are utilized year-round, offering equipment, services, and facilities to members of the public who seek to participate in the legislative process. PAR has only two permanent full-time staff members and adds up to two additional temporary staff during legislative sessions. At this staffing level, PAR is already severely challenged to maintain the demanding level of services it currently provides to the general public. While the demand lets up slightly during the interim, the challenge for the two permanent staff members is exacerbated, given this is

the limited time period in which they can take vacation leave or if one or both needs to be out due to illness or personal reasons.

As some examples of the demanding PAR workload:

- During January 1 – June 30, 2024, the two permanent full-time PAR staff and two session staff handled over 3,700 requests for service and training, via email, phone calls, and in-person, for an average of 616 requests per month;
- During July 1 – December 31, 2024, the two full-time PAR staff handled over 1,600 requests for service and training, via email, phone calls and walk-ins, for an average of 266 requests per month. These statistics do not include a mid-November visit of 200 students to the Capitol, which was coordinated by a Legislator and involved PAR staff conducting four 30 minutes sessions each on the legislative process;
- These foregoing statistics also do not include the numerous scheduled workshops offered by PAR staff year-round; however, to provide a snapshot of the substantial impact these workshops have on the PAR workload, during January 2025 alone, PAR staff provided workshops to 28 different groups via zoom or in-person, reaching a total of 778 attendees; and
- Frequently, large groups show up unplanned or unannounced at PAR seeking training and assistance. Only a few recent examples include when, on January 17, 2025, eight groups of high schoolers (for a total of 120 students) visited PAR throughout the day related to a Chamber of Commerce Hawaii initiative; or on January 15, 2025, when more than a dozen students from the Climate Futures Forum high school group descended upon PAR and spread out at over PAR workspaces, spilling over to the floor. It appears they intend similar monthly visits to PAR throughout the 2025 Regular Session.

This measure provides funds for only one permanent full-time equivalent position to be placed within PAR to conduct and host capitol tours but does not seem to consider the extremely detrimental impact this additional burden will have on PAR's already strained ability to meet its core statutory mission, especially given the current staffing levels. Nor does it appear to contemplate the nature and scope of the capitol tours program that is intended. Moreover, this measure fails to recognize other serious challenges that PAR will incur if required to establish, maintain, and operate a capitol tours program. It simply is not sustainable to accommodate walk-in patrons looking for a workspace, provide a brief introduction to PAR services or longer training, answer patrons' questions in person or by phone, and provide tour visits in the limited space PAR currently occupies. Accordingly, if the intended scope of the tour program is to include large groups, such as providing tours for classes of school children, PAR would need substantial additional space within the Capitol building to limit disruption to PAR's existing core services, especially during the legislative session when the PAR room is

often filled to capacity. Further, we note that neither PAR nor the Bureau has any expertise or experience with respect to creating, managing, or conducting a tour program or with creating, maintaining, and updating a State Capitol Tours webpage.

The majority of states have well-established and staffed state capitol tour programs. Of note, 19 states have established separate state capitol tour offices (Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin), and in 14 states, museum or historical groups provide these services (Alabama, Arizona, California, Delaware, Georgia, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas). While two states (Wyoming and Kentucky) do not appear to have addressed the issue, nearly all other states have assigned responsibility for capitol tours to various state executives or entities. Moreover, the Bureau notes that legislative agencies charged with the responsibility of operating capitol tour programs are in the minority. Below is a breakdown of how these other 15 states delegate the capitol tour functions:

- 4 Lieutenant Governor/Secretary of State (Arkansas, Illinois, Massachusetts, Rhode Island)
- 3 Various State Department Offices (Louisiana – Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism; North Dakota – Office of Management and Budget; South Dakota – South Dakota Bureau of Administration)
- 1 State Parks (South Carolina)
- 1 State Florida Welcome Center (under Department of Commerce)
- 1 Third party (League of Women Voters - Connecticut)
- 1 Governor's Office (Hawaii)
- 4 Legislative Services Agency (Alaska, Iowa, Maryland, Montana)

Historically, the Hawaii State Capitol Tours program has been housed in the Office of the Governor, most recently in its Community Relations area. To this point, the Office of the Governor already has a "Hawai'i State Capitol Tours" page on its website that includes a virtual tour and a self-guided tour brochure. **Given its historical expertise in running a tour program and having a pre-existing State Capitol Tours webpage, substantially more existing space within the Capitol building than PAR, and considerably more resources than the Bureau or PAR, the Office of the Governor seems to be the appropriate entity in which to formalize a Hawaii State Capitol Tours program. We note that this is especially so given that jurisdiction over the Capitol building resides with the executive branch (Department of Accounting and General Services), rather than the legislative branch.**

The Bureau also notes that during the 2023 Regular Session, a similar measure, S.B. No. 699, was considered by the Legislature, which sought to transfer the Capitol tours function to the Lieutenant Governor's office. The Lieutenant Governor's testimony before the Senate Committee on Government Operations on this measure indicated that this function was currently and appropriately housed within the Office of the Governor. Further, the Lieutenant Governor noted that if her office was tasked with this responsibility, they would need the following resources just to successfully fulfill programmatic needs at the level currently offered:

- Two (2) additional FTEs to coordinate and provide tours, of which one (1) FTE is fluent in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i to ensure both official languages of the State of Hawaii are spoken;
- Funding to procure, clean, operate, and maintain individual audio systems for self-guided tours; and
- Funding and support to produce tour materials and signage in foreign languages.

Should the Committee decide that it still would like the Bureau, through PAR, to establish a State Capitol Tours program, even though it would be somewhat redundant to the one already operated by the Governor, we respectfully request that the Committee:

- (1) Clarify the nature of the Capitol tours program envisioned and the scope of work involved;
- (2) Very seriously consider the spatial, technological, and experiential challenges that creation, maintenance, and operation of such a program would create within PAR, and the extreme disruption this would present to PAR's existing core mission; and
- (3) Provide sufficient staffing, space, and resources, at the least similar to those requested in 2023 by the Lieutenant Governor in her testimony on similar legislation, to truly enable PAR to successfully carry out this responsibility.

Thank you again for your consideration.