

LATE

Testimony of:

**Blair Wulfert
Deputy Sheriff
Department of Public Safety**

COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

DATE: Tuesday, February 17, 2009

TIME: 8:30 A.M.

**PLACE: Conference Room 309
State Capitol
419 South Beretania St.**

HB1723

HB 1715

HB 1726

HB1727

Good morning Chairman Rhoads, Vice Chair Yamashita and members of the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony on the bills in front of you. My name is Blair Wulfert and I have worked for the state of Hawai'i for 14 years. I am a sworn Deputy Sheriff for the State of Hawaii. A Deputy Sheriff is a State Police Officer who put himself/herself in harms way to arrest felons, enforce criminal statutes and protect the public. I **strongly oppose** HB 1723, 1715, 1726 and 1727. All of these bills make it seem as though the Hawaii State Legislature is willing to undercut the hardworking public employees and future employees of Hawai'i. It is unacceptable and I hope that this committee understands just how unjust these bills truly are.

The Hawaii State Legislature is attempting to balance the State budget on the backs of the State employees by reducing the health benefits and passing on the cost to the employees. This equates to "pay cut," for States Employees and this does not even include the possible take-a way's that is expected from the Executive Branch, through collective bargaining, and the probable rate increase proposed by HMSA. This is not sharing the pain, this is suffering the serious wounds that will be imposed on not just state employees, but our families who depend on us.

Today I would like to specifically comment on HB 1715. This bill increases the minimum age and length of service for an unreduced service retirement allowance for new employees. As civil servants, we do not do this job because of the pay. We do this job because we care about our community. We care enough to even care about the next generation of public workers. It is hard enough to find good qualified people to work for the state. If we make it so that we offer less than industry standard pay as well a weak package of benefits and retirement plan, we will be scraping the bottom of the barrel of applicants. We cannot make it so that state work is the last choice for incoming recruits. We have also seen in the past that the same employees, in the same bargaining unit, doing the same job that has two different sets benefits is in violation of labor standards. These benefits were later re-instated.

There are several alternatives to reducing the cost of government, balancing the budget, and being fiscally responsible, without reducing services and the responsibility of the State Government. I implore the legislative branch to further explore, educate, and ponder to make government more efficient and reduce needless waste.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



HAWAII FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS LOCAL 1463, AFL-CIO
2305 S. BERETANIA ST., RM. 202, HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826-1493
TELEPHONE (808) 949-1566 FAX: (808) 952-6003
WEBSITE: www.hawaii firefighters.org

LATE

The Twenty-Fifth Legislature
House of Representatives
Committees on Labor and Public Employment
February 17, 2009

Testimony by
Hawaii Fire Fighters Association

H.B. No. 1715 Relating to Retirement

My name is Robert H. Lee and I am the President of the Hawaii Fire Fighters Association, Local 1463, IAFF, AFL-CIO and also an active-duty fire captain with the Honolulu Fire Department. On behalf of the 1,800 active and 1,000 retired professional fire fighters throughout the State, the Hawaii Fire Fighters Association strongly opposes H.B. No. 1715.

H.B. No. 1715 increases the years of service required to be eligible for unreduced service retirement allowance for fire fighters and all public employees. The 25-year service requirement for unreduced benefits for fire fighters was established decades ago, recognizing the dangers of the profession. Today's fire fighters are exposed to more hazards such as blood and air borne pathogens, chemical and biological hazards and occupational risks that make the profession more dangerous than ever. In a recent Harvard study, the increase risk of heart attacks that fire fighters experience has been directly associated with the job due to the requirements of fire fighting and the stresses of being on the frontline. The physical nature of job takes an enormous toll on fire fighters.

Rather than increasing the years of service required for unreduced service retirement allowance for fire fighters, the legislature may want to consider enacting laws that protect fire fighters. Legislation such as addressing presumption for illnesses associated with the job such as cancers and other infectious diseases are important to fire fighters who are exposed to a plethora of hazard as first responder.

HFFA strongly opposes H.B. No. 1715 and ask the Committee to acknowledge the sacrifices Hawaii's fire fighters make every day for all of us and retain the current retirement requirements for fire fighters.

LATE

February 17, 2009

HOUSE LABOR & PUBLIC EMPLOYEE COMMITTEE

Karl Rhoads, Chair

Kyle Yamashita, Vice Chair

My name is Shirlene Miyashiro. I work for the Dept. of Land and Natural Resources, Bureau of Conveyances and am a member of HGEA.

I am a dedicated, faithful and hard working public servant since April 1, 1969 to the present. Come this April 1st, I will have 40 years of service with 2,138 hours Sick Leave and 585 hours of Vacation Leave.

It has been 18 years since I became a widower. I have 2 grown adult children and 1 grandson. Like everyone, I too have some financial and health issues. I have not collected Widow's Benefit from Social Security. I have been working very hard to make ends meet on my own.

In 1994, I had open heart surgery to repair my metal valve.

In 1998, I had bunion and dislocated 2nd toe surgery on my right foot. Practically every toe was worked on except one.

In 2008, I had breast cancer surgery, 4 treatments of Chemo Therapy and 33 treatment of Radiation. Currently, I am experiencing pain in my right shoulder and upper arm.

Last January 31st I celebrated my 61st Birthday. I as planning on retiring at age 62 but with a number of bills introduced this Legislative session against public employees benefits to balance the budget which I strongly feel is very wrong which is causing me to panic and to initiate retirement procedures.

I am here to voice my opposition and I am asking you for your support in opposing the following House Bills: HB 1106, 1108, 1715, 1718, 1719, 1720, 1721, 1722 1723, 1725, 1726 and 1727.

Please look for other ways to balance the budget. Raising the excise tax would be a fairer way to address the state's revenue problem. Everyone paying a little more will mean sharing the burden during these tough times.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Shirlene Miyashiro
SHIRLENE MIYASHIRO
91-1015 Kumulipo Street
Kapolei, HI 97807

cc: Senator Mike Gabbard, Room 201
Representative Sharon Har, Room 438

yamashita3-Chelsea

From: Joanne_Amaki/WAIKIKIE/HIDOE@notes.k12.hi.us
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2009 7:59 AM
To: LABtestimony
Subject: HB 1725, 1723, 1715, 1726, 1727

I am opposed to the passage of HB 1725, 1723, 1715, 1726 and 1727. Please do not pass these bills. We need the benefits these bills provide. There are a number of workers who are close to retirement and will be negatively impacted if these bills pass. In addition, it will make workers rethink working for the state government in the future. Our pensions do not include enough money to pay for these take aways. I fear that we will have to apply for government assistance or welfare when we retire. I will not be able to attend today's hearings regarding these bills but I hope that you will consider other options to balance our state budget. Thank you for your assistance.

yamashita3-Chelsea

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2009 10:01 AM
To: LABtestimony
Cc: 4kisha@hawaiiantel.net
Subject: Testimony for HB1715 on 2/17/2009 8:30:00 AM

Testimony for LAB 2/17/2009 8:30:00 AM HB1715

Conference room: 309
Testifier position: oppose
Testifier will be present: No
Submitted by: Susan S Yamashita
Organization: Individual
Address:
Phone:
E-mail: 4kisha@hawaiiantel.net
Submitted on: 2/17/2009

Comments:

LATE

February 17, 2009

The Honorable Karl Rhoads, Chair
And members
Committee on Labor & Public Employment
House of Representatives
State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Rhoads and Members:

SUBJECT: House Bill 1725 Halt prescription drug coverage under EUTF
House Bill 1723 Limit employer contribution to 55% and make it non-negotiable
House Bill 1715 Increase, for new employees, the age and service time requirement to retire
House Bill 1726 Curtail EUTF payment for life insurance benefits
House Bill 1727 Prohibits provision of dental and vision coverage

The purpose of these bills appears to be an attempt to solve the economic downturn and financial crises the State of Hawaii and respective Counties are facing. These bills will do nothing but counter their intent as they will undoubtedly hurt the very people who are instrumental in turning our financial situation around.

Public employees are truly dedicated and many have foregone higher salaries because they believe in civil service and trusted the "promise" that they would eventually benefit from a well managed and attractive retirement system. To now propose making them the scapegoat of our financial and economic woes and stripping them of their health benefits and their retirement benefits is simply unconscionable. You will certainly lose the trust of the people you employ and who serve your communities.

To turn around now and renege on promises made at hire is simply not how it's done in Hawai'i. I, therefore, do not support the bills listed above.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Cindy Kagoshima
County of Maui

yamashita3-Chelsea

From: Kerry Holokai [kholokai@hawaii.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2009 9:02 AM
To: LABtestimony
Subject: Testimony 02-17-2009

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Kerry Holokai and a member of HGEA, Bargaining Unit 03. I live in Ha'iku, Maui.

As a public employee for 16 years, I am truly disturbed by the bills introduced by Speaker Calvin Say. Specifically:

HB1725 – Halt prescription drug coverage under EUTF;
HB1723 – Limit employer contribution to 55% and make it non-negotiable;
HB1715 – Increase, for new employees, the age and service time requirement to retire;
HB1726 – Curtail EUTF payment for life insurance benefits;
HB1727 – Prohibits provision of dental and vision coverage.

Many government employees make the decision to work at lower pay in order to obtain medical, dental, and vision benefits. This is the only way so many of us are able to afford the outrageous medical costs. By choosing to accept lower wages, we then struggle to live paycheck to paycheck.

In all fairness, if you decrease benefits, you should then rightfully increase the salaries of all public employees accordingly. With the current cost of living, ever-rising health costs, inflation, insurance, taxes, etc., we will most likely still struggle, but that's the way life is in Hawai'i for many of us.

It seems that public employees are usually the target and often the ones to blame for our State's problems. Public employees are not the problem.

Please vote "no" on all of these bills that take away benefits from public employees.

Mahalo

yamashita3-Chelsea

From: J R [jrgons@hotmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2009 8:09 AM
To: LABtestimony
Subject: Strong Opposition to HB 1715, 1723, 1725, 1726, 1727

I'm very disappointed to see that these bills have been introduced and are currently being considered. I, as well as many others in the Honolulu Police Department, have dedicated my life to serve the community. Aside from wanting to serve the communities that we grew up in, I joined the department because of the security of the benefits offered. Benefits both while working as well as benefits when retired. Through out my 12 years of service, 13 in June, I had been come at with a knife, spit on numerous times, assaulted, harassed, had my family threatened, and suffered serious bodily injury. These are just a few incidents that are just off of the top of my head. There are many other officers out there that have experienced this and more. I had co-workers that have been shot, been run over by a car (intentionally), and die. All as a result of their dedication to the job. It is disheartening to hear that with all of the sacrifices that we do for our community, that we love dearly, we may be left to fend for ourselves in the time of our lives when we need our benefits the most. Our benefits should be like a sign of gratitude for our years of dedicated service and sacrifice. We and our spouses will be dramatically affected from this. This was part of the deal that we entered into when applying for this job. Everything that we stand to lose has been earned, by every officer, through their blood, sweat, and tears.

I ask that you take into consideration the things that I have said. Please don't take away benefits from police officers. Keeping our benefits in tact would be the best way to say thank you, and to show them gratitude, for their years of dedicated service. Our society depends on us for help and security, please don't turn your back on us when we need it.

Thank you for the oportunity to voice my opinion.

Joel Gonsalves
(Registered Voter)

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Windows Live™: Keep your life in sync. [Check it out.](#)

yamashita3-Chelsea

From: Karen Kagawa [kagawak@yahoo.com]
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2009 7:57 AM
To: LABtestimony
Subject: HB 1723, HB 1715, HB 1726, and HB 1727 / Hearing Date: February 17, 2009, 8:30 a.m.

Re: HB 1723, HB 1715, HB 1726, and HB 1727
Hearing Date: February 17, 2009, 8:30 a.m.

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Yamashita, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony this morning. My name is Karen Kagawa, and I have been a State employee since 1985. I currently work for the Department of Defense, Hawaii Army National Guard.

I am asking you to please vote "no" on the following bills: HB 1723, HB 1715, HB 1726, and HB 1727. I've been with the State through the years with no raises and payroll lags, in hopes of one day receiving decent retirement and health benefits. I am devastated and frightened by the thought that these benefits I have been working for all these years could be taken away. Please don't diminish my entire career with the State. I do not want to become a burden to the State in my later years if I cannot rely on retirement and health benefits to live an independent life.

As a taxpayer, and someone who is already struggling to make ends meet, I ask you to vote "no" on HB 1723, HB 1715, HB 1726, and HB 1727. There are fairer ways to share the burden of addressing this revenue problem we are facing.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Karen Kagawa

February 17, 2009

LATE

The Honorable Karl Rhoads, Chair
And members
Committee on Labor & Public Employment
House of Representatives
State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Rhoads and Members:

I'm writing to you to voice my opposition of the following bills:

House Bill No. 1723- Related to Public Employees
House Bill No. 1715- Related to Retirement
House Bill No. 1726- Related to the Health Fund
House Bill No. 1727- Related to the Hawaii Employer-Union Health Benefits
Trust Fund

By eliminating benefits from public employees, it will create a mass retirement of employees wishing to maintain retirement health benefits. I worked in the retail industry for over twenty years and in the 1980's-90's the retail industry took a hit from competition which caused the local businesses to cut back on benefits and salaries. For those reasons, I chose to change my career to work for the county since they had the best retirement and benefits. With the introduction of these bills, there is no incentive for employees to remain with the State or County governments with the elimination of these benefits.

By creating such a situation, public safety would be a major concern due to the anticipation of a mass exodus of public employees seeking to retire early in order to retain all of the benefits that were promised when they were hired. As jobs would not be immediately filled or certain jobs would have to be eliminated, there will be an urgent need for remaining employees to fill these vacancies through overtime work or emergency callback of experienced employees to maintain public service.

This would be a lose-lose situation with all the monies being paid out.

For this reason, I am voicing my opposition to the proposed house bills. The overall effect would create problems larger than can be fathomed as it would cause a major disruption to State and County service on all islands.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Dennis G. LEE
Maui Police Department

From: Lynne H Ogata [logata@hawaii.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2009 2:54 PM
To: LABtestimony
Subject: unfair, outrageous, mean

I totally oppose to HB1725, HB1723, HB1715, HB1726, HB1727! I have worked for ridiculously low pay for several years just because I felt that the retirement benefits was worth the sacrifice. And now at age 57 you are taking this away?? What about you legislators? Didn't you just give yourselves a pay increase last year? Where is that money coming from?? If you vote for these bills, I can guarantee that this will be your last term. There are many civil servants who have long memories, if you want to remain in office listen to your constituents.

From: Peter Vanderpoel [Peter.Vanderpoel@co.mauhi.us]
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2009 1:36 PM
To: LABtestimony; Rep. Henry J.C. Aquino; Rep. Karen Awana; Rep. Faye Hanohano; Rep. Gilbert Keith-Agaran; Rep. Marilyn Lee; Rep. Mark Nakashima; Rep. Kymberly Pine; Rep. Karl Rhoads; Rep. Scott Saiki; Rep. Joseph Souki; Rep. Roy Takumi; Rep. Kyle Yamashita
Subject: House Bill 1725 Halt prescription drug coverage under EUTF; House Bill 1723 Limit employer contribution to 55% and make it non- negotiable; House Bill 1715 Increase, for new employees, the age and service time requirement to retire; House Bill 1726 Cu...
Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

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And members
Committee on Labor & Public Employment
House of Representatives
State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

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Public employees are truly dedicated and many have foregone higher salaries because they believe in civil service and trusted the promise that they would eventually benefit from a well managed and attractive retirement system. To now propose making them the scapegoat of our financial and economic woes and stripping them of their health benefits and their retirement benefits is simply unconscionable. You will certainly lose the trust of the people you employ and who serve your communities.

To turn around now and renege on promises made at hire is simply not how it s done in Hawai i I, therefore, do not support the bills listed above.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Peter K. Vanderpoel

Peter K. Vanderpoel
Fire Fighter II
Rescue 10/ B watch

(808)270-7911 (wk)
(808)870-4938 (cell)

County of Maui.

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