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TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILLS 2588 & 2589

**HB 2588 – PROPOSING AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION OF THE
STATE OF HAWAII TO CREATE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE**

**HB 2589 - A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO
THE GOVERNANCE OF ELECTIONS**

**Lieutenant Governor James R. Aiona, Jr.
Office of the Lieutenant Governor**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Representative Jon Riki Karamatsu, Chair
Representative Ken Ito, Vice Chair**

**Tuesday, February 9, 2010
2:30 P.M., Conference Room 325**

Good Afternoon Chair Karamatsu, Vice Chair Ito, and Members of the Committee. The Office of the Lieutenant Governor strongly supports both H.B. 2588 and H.B. 2589.

The purpose of these measures is to establish a Secretary of State as an elected, nonpartisan constitutional officer, who would be responsible for administering the election laws as well as supervising the voting system in the state.

Recent concerns surrounding the Hawaii Elections Office have been well documented. Public anxiety over the office's fiscal and legal challenges has prompted some members of the community to call for more direct accountability over the administration of elections. It is critically important for voters to have some level of control over this vital part of democracy at a

time when elections can be decided by unusually slim margins that are often bitterly contested.

Additionally, under Hawai'i law, it is the responsibility of the Chief Election Officer to maximize the electorate and voter participation. Hawai'i continues to maintain one of the lowest voter turnout rates in the nation.

In 38 other states, voters elect Secretaries of State who are put in charge of their elections. Alaska and Utah assign that task to their Lieutenant Governors. In each case, voters have a direct say in naming the administrator of their election system, and can make changes if the system fails.

Here in Hawai'i, the Chief Election Officer is appointed by a nine-member Election Commission that is largely selected by four members of the Legislature. Hawai'i voters have little say in the process.

If adopted, this measure would empower voters in Hawaii to elect a Secretary of State, who would be directly responsible for ensuring that the State's election system operates smoothly and remains compliant with all federal, state, and local requirements.

Under this proposal, the Secretary of State would assume the duties and responsibilities of the Chief Election Officer and manage the Office of Elections under its existing structure. As such, there would be no added cost or bureaucracy. Indeed, by abolishing the Elections Commission, this proposal would actually eliminate government bureaucracy.

We ask that the committee pass these measures, which is important to maintaining the integrity of our election system. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



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The Twenty-Fifth Legislature, State of Hawaii Hawaii State House of Representatives Committee on Judiciary

Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association
February 9, 2010

H.B. 2589 – RELATING TO THE GOVERNANCE OF ELECTIONS

The Hawaii Government Employees' Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO opposes H.B. 2589, which establishes a Secretary of State as an elected, nonpartisan constitutional officer, responsible for administering election laws and supervising the voting system in the State.

The Office of Elections is currently under scrutiny for a variety of reasons, including unresolved issues related to the purchase of new voting machines and crippling budget cuts. The underlying and correlating problem is not limited to accountability over the administration of elections, but rather the ability of the Office to secure financial resources. Establishing a Secretary of State position will not, in and of itself, resolve the Office's current fiscal and legal problems. Further, our state is in an economic crisis. It is ludicrous to consider the creation of a new office at a time when 650 state employees were laid off due to the state's financial problems.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in opposition of H.B. 2589.

Respectfully submitted,

Nora A. Nomura
Deputy Executive Director