

Statement Before The
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LABOR & PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT
Thursday, February 6, 2020
9:20 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 309

in consideration of
HB 1998
RELATING TO THE EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM.

Chair JOHANSON, Vice Chair ELI, and Members of the House Labor & Public Employment Committee

Common Cause Hawaii supports HB 1998, which authorizes forfeiture of certain ERS benefits, pursuant to court order, for state or county employees and designated beneficiaries who are convicted of an employment-related felony.

Common Cause Hawaii is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to reforming government and strengthening democracy. Common Cause Hawaii works to restore faith in our government and our democracy that has been shattered in the last few years through ethics, accountability, and transparency reforms. These reforms are probably the most important tools to restoring the people's trust in their elected leaders and government – to show people that their government is acting for the people's interest versus serving their own interests.

In a recent [Honolulu Star-Advertiser poll](#) published on Sept. 22, 2019, a majority of local residents feel that Hawaii's elected officials do not care what they think and generally do not have high ethical standards. This must change for people to have confidence in our government.

HB 1998 will show that government takes ethics seriously. Public employees are also public servants. They cannot defraud the public and destroy our confidence in government and still reap the benefits of their criminal misconduct. If this were to occur, then the only losers are the people and democracy.

HB 1998 is **not** about punishment or retribution. It is about ethics and restoring the public's trust in government. HB 1998 is not about revenge, because families of the convicted governmental employees who rely on the pensions are protected under the bill. HB 1998 provides that, upon the convicted governmental employees' passing, their pensions may be awarded to the designated beneficiaries. Due process is afforded, and pension is only forfeited pursuant to court order, under HB 1998.

Much concern is given to what may be lost by a convicted government employee. We also need to consider that much is lost by the public - the people - when a government employee abuses his/her

position of power, trust, and authority. As we have seen, democracy is fragile; people need to have confidence in our government. Please act to restore that trust through ethics reform.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1998, and Common Cause Hawaii respectfully urges the Committee members to pass HB 1998 out of your Committee. If you have further questions of me, please contact me at sma@commoncause.org.

Very respectfully yours,

Sandy Ma
Executive Director, Common Cause Hawaii



HB-1998

Submitted on: 2/3/2020 9:18:47 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/6/2020 9:20:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Caroline Kunitake	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Dear Chair Johanson and Members of the House Committee on Labor and Public Employment,

I am writing in support of HB1998. HB 1998 authorizes forfeiture of certain ERS benefits, pursuant to court order, for state or county employees and designated beneficiaries who are convicted of an employment-related felony.

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I'm sorry to say that the Kealoha case has brought so much negative press and distrust of our local officials who are now being investigated. It is an embarrassment and disappointment for our entire state. Therefore we need strong and clear legislation that will deter behaviors which may lead to employment related felonies. The voters and tax payers deserve good government.

Mahalo,

Caroline Kunitake

HB-1998

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Mahalo,

Caroline Kunitake

Late Testimonies

LATE

HB-1998

Submitted on: 2/5/2020 8:06:02 PM

Testimony for LAB on 2/6/2020 9:20:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Donna Ambrose	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Hawai'i residents have lost faith in our public officials. Events of the past few years have brought to light the unethical behavior of some of them. Perhaps the potential loss of valuable pension benefits will cause appointed and elected public servants to think twice before committing serious crimes. Twenty five states already have similar legislation on the books. We need pension forfeiture rules to restore faith in government.