

## HAWAI'I STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

State of Hawai'i · Bishop Square, 1001 Bishop Street, ASB Tower 970 · Honolulu, Hawai'i

Committee: Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Bill Number: SB 181, S.D.1  
Hearing Date/Time: February 15, 2023, 10:30 a.m.  
Re: Testimony of the Hawai'i State Ethics Commission in **SUPPORT** of SB 181, SD 1 -- Making an Appropriation for County Ethics

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and Committee Members:

The Hawai'i State Ethics Commission ("Commission") **supports** SB 181, SD 1, which provides a one-time grant in aid to the respective ethics boards of the counties of Kauai, Maui, Hawaii, and the Ethics Commission of the City and County of Honolulu.

The Hawai'i State Constitution mandates that all public officers and employees must "exhibit the highest standards of ethical conduct. . . ."<sup>1</sup> To this end, state and county ethic commissions are required to administer a code of ethics that expressly must include "provisions on gifts, confidential information, use of position, contracts with government agencies, post-employment, financial disclosure, and lobbyist registration and restriction."

Despite the strong mandate in the Hawai'i State Constitution, the ethics boards on Kauai, Maui, and Hawai'i island operate with little or no funding. Staff support is limited to a secretary and an attorney from the county corporation counsel office, both of whom have responsibilities outside of helping the all-volunteer ethics commission.<sup>2</sup> Additional staff capacity could significantly increase public confidence in government by ensuring the county ethic commissions could actively provide advice and training to county employees as well as increase enforcement efforts.

Considering the numerous public corruption cases at both the state and county-level, there is an evident need for systemic change. The purpose of this measure is intended to create a one-time spark or incentive to ramp up their efforts rapidly. Once additional capacity is added, the burden will be on the counties to continue to support those efforts over time.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 181, SD 1.

Very truly yours,

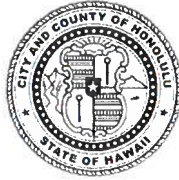
/S/ Robert D. Harris  
Robert D. Harris  
Executive Director and General Counsel

<sup>1</sup> Article XIV, Constitution of the State of Hawai'i.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., <https://www.civilbeat.org/2022/11/county-ethics-watchdogs-need-more-money-to-do-the-job-right-state-panel-says/> (last reviewed on January 27, 2023).

**ETHICS COMMISSION  
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

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February 13, 2023

The Honorable Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
and Members  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Hawaii State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Committee Members,

SUBJECT: Senate Bill 181, SD1

My name is Jan Yamane, Executive Director and Legal Counsel for the Honolulu Ethics Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to offer written comments on Senate Bill 181, SD1.

The Honolulu Ethics Commission has not yet had a chance to review and discuss this bill and, thus, has no position on this measure at this time. This bill will be on the agenda for discussion at the next Commission meeting, which is scheduled for February 15, 2023 at 11:30 a.m.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer written comments on Senate Bill 181, SD1.

Sincerely,

Wong-  
Nowinski,  
Laurie A  
for

Jan K. Yamane  
Executive Director and Legal Counsel

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Committee on Ways and Means  
Chair Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran

Wednesday, February 15, 2023 10:00 a.m., Conference Room 211  
SB181

TESTIMONY

Judith Wong, Legislative Committee, League of Women Voters of Hawaii

Chair Name, Vice Chair Name, and Committee Members:

**The League of Women Voters of Hawaii supports SB181**

This proposal recognizes that many of the county ethics boards or commissions lack the necessary resources to adequately meet their mandated obligations to investigate complaints, provide advice and offer training. Providing a one-time grant would allow the county ethics boards the capacity to hold public officers and employees to the highest standards of ethical conduct and thereby increase public confidence in government. We support an adequate appropriation for this bill and defer to the Ethics Commission on an appropriate amount for each county.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.