

STAND. COM. REP. NO. **2890**

Honolulu, Hawaii

MAR 01 2024

RE: GOV. MSG. NO. 596

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
Thirty-Second State Legislature
Regular Session of 2024
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Higher Education, to which was referred Governor's Message No. 596, submitting for study and consideration the nomination of:

BOARD OF REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I

G.M. No. 596 NEIL ABERCROMBIE,
for a term to expire 06-30-2028,

begs leave to report as follows:

Your Committee reviewed the personal history, resume, and statement submitted by Neil Abercrombie for service on the Board of Regents of the University of Hawaii.

Your Committee received testimony in support of the nomination for the appointment of Neil Abercrombie from eight individuals.

Your Committee received testimony in opposition to the nomination for the appointment of Neil Abercrombie from Academic Labor United and twenty-three individuals.

Upon review of the testimony, your Committee finds that Dr. Abercrombie's experience, knowledge, and desire to serve as a regent qualify him for appointment to the Board of Regents of the University of Hawaii as a regent representing Honolulu County pursuant to section 26-11, Hawaii Revised Statutes. Your Committee finds that Dr. Abercrombie is the owner-operator of Pacific Strategies, LLC, where he provides counseling and advice services for business development. Dr. Abercrombie served as the



seventh Governor of the State from 2010-2014. As Governor of Hawaii, Dr. Abercrombie facilitated the establishment of major projects for the University of Hawaii System to expand access to education, including the opening of the University of Hawaii - West Oahu campus; began construction of the Palamanui Campus in Kona, Hawaii County; and incorporated the University of Hawaii President and Superintendent of Education into cabinet-level meetings for cross-department coordination. Dr. Abercrombie has dedicated nearly forty years of service to the State in a variety of public service roles, including as Representative for the First District to the United States House of Representatives, member of the Honolulu City Council, Representative of District 13 in the Hawaii State House of Representatives, and Senator of District 6 in the Hawaii State Senate. Before his career in public service, Dr. Abercrombie earned a Doctor of Philosophy in American Studies from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Your Committee further finds that Dr. Abercrombie's extensive experience in public service and prior experience in academia will be assets to the Board of Regents of the University of Hawaii.

Your Committee further finds that Dr. Abercrombie has served as an interim regent since July 2023. According to Dr. Abercrombie's statements at the public hearing on his nomination, his long relationship with the University of Hawaii began as a graduate student in the Sociology Department at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. In his short tenure as interim regent, Dr. Abercrombie has proven to be an emerging voice of accountability for university administration, especially with regards to the administration's budget. As the policymaking body of the University of Hawaii, Dr. Abercrombie asserted that the role of regents should focus on setting overall goals for the system that incorporates feedback from administrators to effectively operate the university community while providing avenues for growth, innovation, and revenue generation.

Your Committee additionally notes that Dr. Abercrombie expressed concerns regarding a disconnect between the University of Hawaii administration, the Legislature, the Governor, and the Board of Regents. Dr. Abercrombie affirmed his goal as regent to re-establish and strengthen the cooperative relationship between the Legislature and Governor with the University of Hawaii and the Board of Regents. Additionally, Dr. Abercrombie pledged to engage with university issues as an active, involved regent rather than a receptor of decisions made by the administration. While Dr. Abercrombie has served as an informal liaison between the



Board of Regents and the Legislature, he noted that additional engagement by Board of Regents leadership is imperative to ensuring effective policymaking and initiation of key projects and goals.

Your Committee notes testimony received in opposition to Dr. Abercrombie's nomination by certain students and community members of the University of Hawaii. Your Committee raised concerns that Dr. Abercrombie's decorum at recent meetings of the Board of Regents is troubling. According to the students' testimony, Dr. Abercrombie was not receptive to concerns regarding student representation at Board of Regents meetings. Dr. Abercrombie noted that his response was intense and regrets the reception of his response, as his perspective was based on loyalty to and responsibility of his role. Despite the concerns raised in testimony and in light of Dr. Abercrombie's statements in response, your Committee therefore recommends that Neil Abercrombie be appointed to the Board of Regents of the University of Hawaii based on his extensive public service, experience in higher education, and commitment to public service.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Higher Education that is attached to this report, your Committee, after full consideration of the background, experience, and qualifications of the nominee, has found the nominee to be qualified for the position to which nominated and recommends that the Senate advise and consent to the nomination.

Respectfully submitted on
behalf of the members of the
Committee on Higher Education,


DONNA MERCADO KIM, Chair



The Senate
 Thirty-Second Legislature
 State of Hawai'i

Record of Votes
Committee on Higher Education
HRE
Advise and Consent

Governor's Message No.:* GM 596	Committee Referral: HRE	Date: 2-27-24		
<input type="checkbox"/> The Committee is reconsidering its decision				
The Recommendation is: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Advise and Consent 2340 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Advise and Consent 2345				
Members	Aye	Aye (WR)	Nay	Excused
KIM, Donna Mercado (C)	/			
KIDANI, Michelle N. (VC)			/	
FUKUNAGA, Carol	/	/		
HASHIMOTO, Troy N.	/			
FEVELLA, Kurt			/	
TOTAL	2	1	2	
Recommendation: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Not Adopted				
Chair's or Designee's Signature: 				
Distribution: Original Yellow Pink Goldenrod File with Committee Report Clerk's Office Drafting Agency Committee File Copy				

***Only one Governor's Message per Record of Votes**