



TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY

MARCH 15, 2024

**HCR 34/HR 23, DECLARING DISINFORMATION AND DIGITAL HATE SPEECH AS
THREATS TO DEMOCRACY AND URGING DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES TO
ADDRESS THESE THREATS**

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawaii **supports** HCR 13/HR 6, which declare disinformation and digital hate speech as threats to democracy and urge state departments and agencies to address these threats.

Democracy is fragile.

On January 6, 2021, far-right ideologues tried to tear apart the delicate fabric with which our society's governing bonds are woven and forcefully overturn the will of our nation's voters. The insurrection at the United States Capitol left citizens reeling from the audacity of the attempted coup and searching for answers about how to prevent future assaults on our republic.

Even in Hawaii, the aftermath of the January 6th attacks was painfully felt. Security barricades were erected on the grounds of the Hawaii State Capitol in advance of Inauguration Day, after threats were made against political officials throughout our country. At a time when pandemic protocols emptied the people's house of visitors, the Capitol riots only further alienated elected leaders from the constituents they serve.

As Congress's investigation into the insurrection has revealed, much of the madness that occurred on January 6th was organized online. Cyberspace is no longer an undiscovered frontier. Today, our virtual and actual lives have become inextricably comingled. If we are not careful, though, technological advancement can generate the digital reproduction of inequality, discrimination, and violence.

According to a 2018 report published by the data clearinghouse Statista, 64 percent of teenagers in the United States have encountered hate speech on social media. At the same time, incidents of political violence have been escalating. The Washington Post reported in 2021 that right-wing extremists have been involved in 267 plots or attacks in the U.S. since 2015, resulting in 91 fatalities.

Furthermore, over half of the deaths caused by right-wing confrontations were committed by people who voiced support for white supremacy. Many of those outbursts were organized virtually amidst the shadows of social media. Washington Post's investigation found that from 2015 to 2020, the use of websites and social media by right-wing extremists rose in five of the six years that the news outlet studied, leading Georgetown professor George Hoffman to call social media a "propellant" for the spread of violent extremism.

During the pandemic, disinformation about vaccine safety and healthcare protocols spread almost as rapidly as the virus itself. To effectively cure our society of anti-scientific hysteria, it is imperative that we equip our state to identify factual evidence and employ sound reasoning when addressing the consequences of misinformation, disinformation, digital discrimination, and online hate speech.

It can be easy to neglect the foundations of our democracy. From housing insecurity to financial instability to the climate crisis, our society is simultaneously facing many pressing challenges. If we safeguard the pillars of our public sphere from digital mayhem, however, then we will give future generations a chance to resolve those concerns with tranquility and hope.

Mahalo nui loa,

Kris Coffield
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
(808) 679-7454
kriscoffield@gmail.com

Abby Simmons
Co-Chair, Legislative Committee
(808) 352-6818
abbyalana808@gmail.com

HR-23

Submitted on: 3/13/2024 6:05:12 PM

Testimony for HET on 3/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
B.A. McClintock	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this important bill. Mahalo.

HR-23

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 8:50:36 AM

Testimony for HET on 3/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abby Simmons	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair and esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Abby Simmons and I'm in strong support of HR23.

Online hate speech and targeted disinformation have resulted in increased physical violence and attacks on marginalized communities and minorities. A lot of this hate speech and targeted misinformation comes from foreign state sponsored bad actors who operate "troll farms" to spread hate, misinformation and discord in our society. A good example is the former "Wagner Group" who has operated known "Troll Farms" in Belarus. Foreign state sponsored actors are not the only participants in online disinformation and hate speech. Domestic hate groups and extremists use Social Media Platforms to target minorities, women and LGBTQ+ folks, spreading hate speech. All you have to do to confirm my testimony is go to any social media platform, choose any member of a minority, look at their posts and then look at the comment section.

In addition to hate speech, online platforms have become an echo chamber for intolerant and extremist views. When legitimized by extremist politicians, the unthinkable can happen, as we've witnessed on January 6th.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo nui loa,

Abby Simmons

Testimony for HCR 34

Hello Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela and members of the committee.

My name is Elijah Cristobal and I am in strong support of HCR 34 which declares digital hate speech as a threat to democracy.

This resolution is important to me because my wife has received threats to her work from digital hate. She nor any other government employee should have to be afraid to go to their office and do their job.

I worry about my wife when she goes to work. People online have threatened that her and her coworkers should be killed because of the work they do.

I want to protect my wife but there is nothing I can do when she leaves for work in the morning. I look to you all, the policy makers and the leaders to help keep my wife and everyone else safe from online hate and threats.

Thank you to Vice Chair Kapela for introducing this important measure and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.