

TO: Hawai'i Teachers Standards Board

FROM: Rhonda. S. Black, Professor and Chair
Department of Special Education, University of Hawai'i and Mānoa

SUBJECT: Consideration of the Executive Director's Evaluation

POSITION: Oppose [NBI 25-41](#)

Esteemed members of the committee,

My name is Rhonda Black, Professor and Chair in the Department of Special Education at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the evaluation of Executive Director Felicia Villalobos. I would like to focus specifically on collaboration with Educator Preparation Programs and the clarity and consistency of communication.

Strong partnerships with Hawaii's Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) are essential to preparing educators for Hawai'i's schools. However, there are ongoing concerns about whether collaboration and communication have been sufficiently effective to warrant a "commendable" review rating for the Executive Director.

1. Clarity and Consistency of Communication

EPPs rely on clear, stable expectations to meet state requirements. However, there have been instances where communication lacked clarity and consistency, including shifts in expectations that were not formally documented. This creates uncertainty and makes it difficult for programs to respond efficiently and accurately. At times, reviews have been inconsistent with evaluation standards (e.g., Teacher Leader Standards were not used to evaluate the Teacher Leader Add-a-field program). In addition, uninformed characterizations (e.g., Doctoral-level faculty members who have not been teachers in Hawai'i DOE in the last five years lack credibility) and inaccurate statements regarding program components (e.g., that we did not collaborate with the Hawai'i Department of Education, and our program is an asynchronous online program) have been published in publicly available documents (e.g., NBIs).

2. Program Review Criteria and Processes

Of particular concern is that the criteria for program approval have changed without clear, written guidance. Program modification and add-a-field proposals have at times been asked to address questions that are tangential (e.g., whether courses are offered through Mānoa or Outreach College and the cost of tuition) or not directly relevant to established standards (e.g., asking how a master's program is meeting HTSB's requests for changes to a different, baccalaureate program). These practices can give the impression of inconsistent review processes, rather than a transparent and standardized system.

Conclusion

Taken together, these concerns indicate that performance in the areas of collaboration, communication, and transparency does not rise to the level associated with a “commendable” rating. While the role of Executive Director is complex and important, such a rating should reflect consistent, clearly communicated, and well-documented practices in working with Educator Preparation Programs. Based on the issues outlined above, I respectfully oppose assigning a “commendable” rating at this time and encourage the committee to adopt an evaluation that more accurately reflects these areas for improvement.

Thank you for your consideration.

TO: Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board

FROM: Cecily Ornelles *Cecily Ornelles*
Interim Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, College of Education

AGENDA ITEM: Written Testimony for VI.F. NBI 25-41 The Hawaii Teacher Standards Board Executive Director's Evaluation Recommendation for 2025-2026

MEETING: General Business Meeting

POSITION: Oppose

April 22, 2026

I serve as the Interim Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. My responsibilities that pertain to coordinating with the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) include (a) Supporting undergraduate and graduate programs, involved with teacher licensure (initial and added-field) and (b) Coordination and oversight of teacher education programs (procedures, process and approvals).

I acknowledge the vital role of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) in ensuring the licensure of qualified educators and upholding the high standards that support student success across our P-12 system. This is a shared responsibility with the College of Education as we provide programs to prepare, support, and sustain a strong and effective educator workforce for Hawai'i's schools.

In response to critical workforce needs in our state, we have developed and submitted proposals for new programs, (e.g., Reading Intervention Specialist, School Counseling, Special Education Teacher Leader – added field). In addition, we have submitted modifications to long-standing programs to ensure they remain current and effective (e.g., Early Childhood Care and Education, Reading Specialist-added field, Hawaiian Language Immersion). New program and modification submissions have consistently prioritized essential programming, reflected requirements specified through our Hawai'i Administrative Rules as well as evolving accreditation requirements, and modifications are part of our ongoing commitment to program refinement, continuous improvement, and alignment with state and professional standards.

Our teams of faculty, composed of individuals with expertise in content areas and in teaching, have met with the Executive Director and Licensing Specialist prior to submitting each application and during the review processes to field questions regarding submitted applications. The process has been inhibiting. In some cases, questions and requests for information extend beyond the established review template and appear to exceed the intended scope of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board's review. Each of our faculty teams have met multiple times (in-

person, via Zoom, by phone) in effort to address all of the questions raised during the review process, yet on several occasions, they have been asked to provide a great deal of information within 48 hours in order to be included on an upcoming HTSB agenda. The current procedures have created challenges for timely and focused program advancement. At present, the lack of clear, well-defined guidelines and processes have been extremely challenging. The ambiguity has led to uncertainty in expectations and inconsistencies in the review process, making it difficult to move needed programs forward efficiently.


The role of Executive Director is critical in grounding the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board in clear organizational structures and in guiding HTSB team members (staff, review teams) to fulfill their defined roles and responsibilities. At the same time, it is important that the Executive Director guides HTSB staff and review teams to operate within appropriate boundaries, ensuring that oversight remains supportive and does not extend beyond its intended scope in ways that hinder the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs. Our working relationship has not consistently reflected a collaborative approach. In some instances, communication has emphasized potential punitive consequences for not responding as requested, including delays in candidate licensure, possible revocation of licenses, and resulting institutional risk. These conditions create significant concern for our programs and underscore the need for a more constructive, transparent, and partnership-oriented approach. It is with my direct experiences working with our COE faculty teams on multiple submissions through HTSB as well as with review of the evaluations for the Executive Director that were submitted that I oppose the overall recommendation of "commendable" for Executive Director Villalobos.

**TESTIMONY TO THE HAWAI'I STATE TEACHERS STANDARDS BOARD
GENERAL BUSINESS MEETING**

Item: **NBI 25-41 and NBI-42**

Position: **Oppose**

Hearing: **Friday, April 24, 2026, Queen Lili'uokalani Building Room 404**

Submitter: 

Aloha e ka Papa Ho'okō,

I am writing to **oppose** NBI25-41 approving a performance rating of *commendable* for Executive Director Felicia Villalobos for the period of July 1, 2025 through June 20, 2026. I question the rationale provided for Standard 1: Leadership.

Villalobos is purported to include legislative advocacy and stakeholder collaboration in her practice, however I was present at the Education Committee hearing on March 30 wherein legislators probed the HSTB regarding their inability to work collaboratively with them. I also went over minutes from board meetings over the past year where protests and requests to return to work groups for discussions were ignored and measures were passed with detrimental results for our rising educators. In my experience as a veteran educator, evidence of performance must be provided in order to assess whether or not an individual has reached a standard. I did not see this provided in the rationale - just opinions and broad statements. The 9 member survey results attached to NBI25-41 also contained some lengthy and worrisome details in the comments for giving Villalobos a less than commendable score. This makes me really question if the board understands standards-based practice and why they would give commendable when there was strong opposition voiced.

Furthermore, NBI25-42 is a deplorable dying swan song of a board that has largely been removed, and I strongly oppose it.

Attached to this NBI was a long list of supporters for Villalobos; many were veteran or retired teachers and principals. With all due respect, what are their qualifications to speak to current standards and licensure processes in order to have any ability to assess the worthiness of Villalobos' performance? Comparatively, in my capacity as a teacher leader, several young teachers and licensure candidates have shared the unreasonable barriers created by the lack of foresight about impacts of decisions made by "raising standards" under Villalobos' tenure. Any good teacher knows that you cannot change the criteria mid-stride after assigning students a long-term project. Why, then, did the HTSB think that changing policies and criteria for students who are in the middle of certain teacher pathways is fair or prudent during a teacher shortage crisis?

It also did not go unnoticed that only **one** Educator Prep Program submitted testimony to support Villalobos. One would have expected many more EPPs and stakeholder groups to support her if she was truly the collaborator the letters make her out to be. These types of practices are not the indicators of a good leader or organizer.

Please reconsider your actions for the good of all students and future educators of Hawai'i.

Mahalo,

[REDACTED]

Teacher leader



The Senate
Ka 'Aha Kenekoa

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

April 23, 2026

Aloha Chair and Members of the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board,

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TO NBI 25-42 – HAWAII TEACHER STANDARDS BOARD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECOMMENDATION

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **opposition** to the reappointment of Felicia Villalobos as Executive Director of the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board for a four-year term beginning July 1, 2026.

This position carries significant responsibility. At a time when Hawaii continues to face a severe teacher shortage, this role requires urgency, innovation, collaboration, and a clear commitment to removing barriers that keep qualified educators in our classrooms.

However, under the current Executive Director's leadership, the direction of the Board has exhibited a pattern of moving in the opposite direction. The agency is maintaining the status quo of complacency and failing to collaborate with stakeholders to streamline the teacher workforce pipeline.

Rather than expanding pathways into the profession, the Board has maintained and advanced a rigid system of policies that limit access for qualified educators, particularly those serving in high-need and hard-to-fill areas. Rather than building partnerships with stakeholders, the Board has developed a reputation for failing to collaborate meaningfully with the very communities, educators, and institutions working to solve our teacher shortage.

There are also broader concerns regarding excessive administrative requirements placed on educator preparation programs. Testimony from stakeholders has described burdensome documentation demands and unnecessary procedural hurdles that slow approvals and create obstacles instead of helping programs produce more teachers.

The impact of these decisions is felt statewide, including on Maui. Maui schools continue to rely heavily on emergency hires and international educators to keep classrooms staffed. Many schools also depend on J-1 visa teachers who serve students in critical shortage areas. Yet inflexible licensure requirements and a lack of practical transition pathways place these educators at risk of leaving the system, despite their value to our communities.

Senator Troy N. Hashimoto

District 5 - Wailuku, Kahului, Waihe'e, Waikapū Mauka, Wai'ehu

Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 222 || Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813 || Phone: (808) 586-7344 || Email: senhashimoto@capitol.hawaii.gov

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This is not sustainable.

Furthermore, moving forward with this reappointment is entirely premature. The composition of the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board is currently undergoing significant changes as a result of the Senate confirmation process. Additionally, the legislature is actively advancing Senate Bill 3262, which would fundamentally alter the selection and appointment process for the Executive Director. **The Board should pause and await the conclusion of these legislative actions rather than rushing to lock in a four-year executive contract under the current system.**

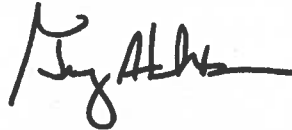
At a time when families are asking for stability, when principals are struggling to fill vacancies, and when students need qualified teachers in every classroom, Hawaii needs leadership that is solutions-oriented and responsive. We need a Board that sees its role as opening doors, not standing in the doorway.

The next chapter of educator workforce policy in Hawaii should be defined by collaboration, flexibility, and urgency. The public record under the current leadership proves that this reappointment does not advance those goals.

For these reasons, **I respectfully urge the committee to reject the reappointment of Felicia Villalobos as Executive Director of the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Troy N. Hashimoto
State Senator
District 5

Senator Troy N. Hashimoto

District 5 - Wailuku, Kahului, Waihe'e, Waikapū Mauka, Wai'ehu

Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 222 || Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813 || Phone: (808) 586-7344 || Email: senhashimoto@capitol.hawaii.gov

Date: April, 23, 2026

Subject: Opposition to NBI 25-42: The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board Executive Director's Recommendation to the Board of Education

Aloha Members of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board,

My name is Shawna Nishimoto, and I am a 7th-grade science teacher at 'Ilima Intermediate School. I am writing to formally submit testimony in opposition to NBI 25-42, the recommendation of Felicia Villalobos to the Board of Education.

I am fully aware that this testimony is being reviewed by the current Board, and I am choosing to speak because what has occurred under the current leadership has had direct and measurable impacts on educators, including myself.

For the past four years, I have been teaching in Hawai'i's public schools. Under the Educator Evaluation System (EES), I have been evaluated annually as an emergency hire and have received proficient or higher ratings every year, including distinguished, the highest possible rating, for the past two years. I have completed all requirements for licensure, and last week, I was issued my license. However, the process by which that license was delayed raises serious concerns about consistency, clarity, and accountability.

During COVID, the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board allowed teacher candidates to complete student teaching prior to passing the Praxis exam. The guidance I followed came directly from Chaminade University, my educator preparation program. There was no clearly defined sunset date, expiration, or formal guidance outlining a required timeline for completion. I followed the guidance that was provided at the time. After passing my Praxis in October 2025, I should have been issued my license shortly thereafter. Instead, I was denied on the basis that my student teaching and Praxis were completed "out of order," and I was told I would need to redo 450 hours of student teaching.

Throughout this process, I was not provided with a clear or consistent explanation for why my name could not be added to Chaminade University's completer list, despite having met all requirements. The only justification repeatedly given was that my components were completed "out of order," without further clarification or guidance on how to resolve the issue with something other than redoing 450 hours of student teaching. This decision was made despite strong, documented support from multiple sources, including my principal, curriculum leadership at my school, former students, and the Hawai'i State Department of Education, which formally urged the Board to honor my completed student teaching and issue my license. In addition to inconsistent policy application, the process was marked by significant delays and a lack of responsiveness. My case was not brought before the Board for months, and communication regarding my status and next steps was repeatedly delayed.

These delays had direct consequences. I was not issued my emergency hire permit until mid-February—after the hiring window had effectively closed. As a result, I am forced to continue to work as a substitute teacher without benefits, stability, or summer pay. While I was ultimately issued my license, that outcome does not negate the process that led up to it.

The lack of clear policy, the absence of a defined timeline, the inconsistent application of requirements, and the delays in communication reflect a breakdown in systems that should be designed to support qualified educators, not create barriers for them. Processes that lack clear guidance and are applied inconsistently create uncertainty and inequity for educators navigating licensure. At no point was I provided with a clear, actionable pathway to resolve the issue. Instead, I was repeatedly told what could not be done, rather than being supported in identifying a reasonable path forward to meet licensure requirements.

These issues did not occur in isolation. They occurred under the current leadership and administration of the Hawai‘i Teacher Standards Board. I am not the only educator who has experienced these challenges.

At a time when Hawai‘i is facing ongoing teacher shortages, we cannot afford systems that delay, discourage, or destabilize qualified teachers who have met all requirements to serve.

Based on my experience, I do not believe that the current leadership has demonstrated the level of consistency, clarity, responsiveness, and accountability required for this role. For these reasons, I do not support the renewal of the Executive Director’s contract.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Shawna Nishimoto

7th Grade Science Teacher

‘Ilima Intermediate School

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

**STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804**

OFFICE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT

HTSB TESTIMONY

DATE: April 24, 2026

FROM: Sean Bacon, Assistant Superintendent

MEETING: General Business

AGENDA ITEM: VI.U: NBI 25-32 Establish Committee to Strengthen Program Review Process

POSITION: Support

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony (support) on [NBI 25-32](#) Establish Committee to Strengthen Program Review Process. We support the establishment of a temporary committee to strengthen the HTSB program review process, review and recommend improvements to enhance transparency, consistency, and responsiveness to community concerns, and report back to the Board within one year.

The Department strongly recommends including representation from the Kaiapuni community on the committee, such as through the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board Hawaiian Workgroup or other established Kaiapuni community bodies, to ensure that relevant cultural and linguistic expertise is meaningfully represented in committee discussions.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
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OFFICE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT

HTSB TESTIMONY

DATE: April 24, 2026

FROM: Sean Bacon, Assistant Superintendent

MEETING: General Business

AGENDA ITEM: VI.E: NBI 25-40 Approval of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board 2026-2031 Strategic Plan

POSITION: Comment

I respectfully submit testimony (comments) on [NBI 25-40](#), especially regarding *Priority 4: Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement*, in the spirit of strengthening the collaborative relationship between the Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) and the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB).

As the state's largest employer of licensed educators, the Department has a genuine and ongoing interest in the policies that govern teacher licensure in Hawai'i — not only in their substance, but in how they are developed and adopted.

I. Compressed Timelines and Operational Readiness

Several recent Board policies have established requirements with effective dates that do not allow sufficient time for affected parties — candidates, institutions, and the Department — to prepare for compliance. When significant changes to licensure processes, documentation standards, or program requirements take effect within months of adoption, those who must operationalize the changes are placed in a difficult position: adapt quickly with incomplete guidance, or risk non-compliance through no fault of their own.

The Department has experienced this directly in its coordination of educator hiring and licensure support. When policy timelines are not informed by the operational realities facing schools, complex areas, and candidates — particularly those from out-of-state or international backgrounds — the unintended consequence can be a disruption to the very pipeline the Board seeks to strengthen.

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II. Workforce Pipeline Implications of Regulatory Decisions

Teacher licensure regulation and teacher workforce development are closely intertwined. Decisions that affect how programs are approved, what evidence they must submit, and which providers may seek entry into the Hawai'i market have direct consequences for the supply of qualified educators available to fill classroom vacancies — particularly in hard-to-staff subjects and geographic areas.

The Department is deeply invested through its Human Resources Strategic Plan, which seeks to expand the teacher pipeline through a broad and coordinated range of strategies — including grow-your-own programs, alternative and emergency hire pathways, career-change pipelines, targeted recruitment from Hawai'i's own communities, and strengthened partnerships with educator preparation providers. No single pathway, for example, teacher apprenticeships, is sufficient to address the depth and breadth of Hawai'i's workforce needs; the Department's plan reflects a shared commitment to collaboratively build multiple on-ramps across agencies, institutions, and community organizations. When regulatory actions restrict the provider landscape, impose extensive new requirements on existing programs, or limit the pathways available to candidates — without a corresponding analysis of workforce impact — the Department and the students it serves bear those consequences. We respectfully urge the Board to incorporate workforce impact considerations as a standard part of its deliberations on licensure and program approval policy.

III. Equity of Access for Candidates and Preparation Programs

Hawai'i's educator workforce reflects the diversity of its communities, and candidates come to the profession through a wide range of pathways: local university programs, out-of-state institutions, alternative certification, specialized permits, and career-change pipelines. Policies that are designed with one type of candidate or program in mind may create unintended barriers for others.

I have observed that some recent policy directions, while well-intentioned, may have disparate effects on candidates from smaller institutions, rural or international backgrounds, or specialized educational settings such as Kāiapuni Hawaiian language immersion programs. These communities and the educators who serve them deserve to have their circumstances understood at the policy development stage — not discovered as implementation challenges after a policy has already been adopted.

IV. Ensuring That Workgroup Input Is Meaningfully Reflected in Policy

I acknowledge and appreciate that the HTSB convenes workgroups to gather input from educators, preparation programs, and community stakeholders on matters of policy significance. The formation of these workgroups reflects a genuine commitment to inclusive governance, and the individuals who participate do so with the expectation that their perspectives will meaningfully inform the Board's decisions.

However, concerns have been raised that warrant the Board's direct attention: workgroup participants have recently felt that their feedback was not reflected in the policies ultimately

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adopted. When individuals invest time and expertise in a workgroup process and then observe that the resulting policy does not appear to incorporate the substance of their input, it undermines confidence in the process and discourages future participation. Over time, this erodes the very stakeholder relationships the Board relies upon to develop sound, community-grounded policy.

I am not suggesting that workgroup consensus should dictate Board decisions; the Board must maintain its regulatory authority and consider all relevant factors. What I am asking is that the connection between workgroup input and the final policy be made transparent. When the Board's direction diverges from workgroup recommendations, participants deserve an explanation of why, so that the process feels meaningful rather than routine.

V. Recommendations

I would respectfully recommend that the Board consider the following to be embedded in the strategic plan:

- A documented summary of workgroup feedback should accompany each policy item when it is presented to the full Board, so that members and the public can understand what was heard and how it was considered.
- Where final policy diverges materially from workgroup input, the Board should provide a clear rationale for that departure — not as a defense of its decision, but as a demonstration of good faith to those who participated.
- Workgroup members should be informed of the outcome of the policy process and given an opportunity to offer follow-up comments before a final vote is taken, particularly when revisions have been made in committee.
- Workforce and equity impact considerations — including input from the Department on pipeline implications — should be incorporated as standard elements of workgroup charters and final policy deliberations.
- A component of accountability is necessary, allowing for adjustments and integrating best practices into continuous improvement cycles (e.g., plan, do, check, act).

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



KEITH T. HAYASHI
SUPERINTENDENT

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OFFICE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT

HTSB TESTIMONY

DATE: April 24, 2026

FROM: Sean Bacon, Assistant Superintendent

MEETING: General Business

AGENDA ITEM: VI.F: NBI 25-41 The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board Executive Director's Evaluation Recommendation for 2025-2026

POSITION: Comment

I respectfully submit testimony (comments) on [NBI 25-41](#)

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) and the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board (HTSB) share a fundamental commitment: ensuring that every student in Hawai'i is taught by a well-prepared, fully licensed educator. That shared mission is best advanced through a relationship of transparency, mutual respect, and genuine partnership. I respectfully request that the Board examine its current practices regarding workgroup engagement and policy development, and take steps to ensure that stakeholder participation is a genuine input into decision-making, rather than a parallel process that concludes before decisions are made. I offer this testimony not in opposition, but as a partner invested in the Board's success and the health of Hawai'i's educator workforce.

As the Board considers the appointment and contract renewal of its Executive Director, the Board should view this as a timely opportunity to embed these governance expectations into the leadership accountability structure. The concerns raised in this testimony — around stakeholder engagement and workgroup responsiveness — are not incidental to the Executive Director's role. They are central to it. The Executive Director shapes the staff processes through which policy is developed, workgroups are convened, and stakeholder relationships are maintained.

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As similarly noted in testimony provided regarding NBI 25-40, I respectfully recommend that the Board consider incorporating explicit criteria into the Executive Director's next evaluation cycle that address the following areas:

- The quality and transparency of stakeholder engagement processes, including whether workgroup input is documented, communicated to the full Board, and demonstrably considered in final policy decisions.
- The degree to which policy development reflects awareness of educator workforce implications, including the impact on teacher supply in shortage areas and the accessibility of licensure pathways for diverse candidates.
- The effectiveness of the Executive Director's communication with key partners — including the Department, educator preparation programs, and the broader educator community — particularly when policy directions diverge from stakeholder recommendations.
- The responsiveness of the Board's operational practices to feedback received through formal channels, including public comment, workgroup processes, and interagency engagement.
- A component for accountability is necessary, allowing for adjustments and integrating best practices for continuous improvement cycles (e.g., plan, do, check, act).

Incorporating these criteria into the Executive Director's evaluation framework would signal to stakeholders that the Board takes their participation seriously, and would provide a structured mechanism for holding Board leadership accountable to the governance standards that effective public policy requires. It is a forward-looking step — one that honors the importance of the Executive Director's role while setting clear expectations for how that role supports an inclusive and transparent policy process.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.