

HAWAII STATE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (Commission)  
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY, March 10, 2025, 9:00 A.M.  
Hybrid: In-Person & Virtual Meeting

**IN PERSON:** Leiopapa A Kamehameha, State Office Tower, 235 S Beretania St., Conference Room 405, Honolulu, HI 96813, 4th Floor.

**VIRTUAL:** Via Teams. **Meeting ID:** 213 451 264 881, **Passcode:** 6Xx2sk3H

**Commissioners Present:** Deja Ostrowski, Chair (via Teams); Jennifer Stotter, Hawai'i (via Teams); Edie Ignacio-Neumiller, Kaua'i (via Teams, husband in kitchen); Marisa Adaro, O'ahu (via Teams); Stacey Moniz, Maui (in person); Melissa Sotelo, O'ahu \* (in person); Rose Medina Kemna, O'ahu \* (in person).

\*Commissioner Awaiting Senate Confirmation

**Ex-Officio Present:** Jonathan B. Kimura, Designee for DHS (via Teams); David J. Rodriguez, Designee for DLIR (via Teams); Keli Acquaro, Designee for DOH (in person); Elizabeth Higashi, Designee for DOE (via Teams)

**Members of the Public Present:** Dianne Deanna (in person), Marina Karides (in person), Stef Mariani (in person), Kat Vogl (via Teams), Ariana Kwan (via Teams), Sarah Moriarty (via Teams), Women & Crime class (via Teams), Alana Rose (via Teams), Jess Shaffer (via Teams), Trinity (via Teams), M. Ishii (via Teams), Aekta Shah (via Teams)

**Commission Deputy Attorney General Present:** Lili Young (via Teams)

**Commission Staff Present:** Llasmin Chaine, Executive Director (in person)

**AGENDA**

**I. PUBLIC NOTICE, CALL TO ORDER, ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM**

- a. Chair called meeting to order at 9:06 a.m., and quorum was declared, 5 of 7 Commissioners present.

**II. PUBLIC COMMENT**

- A. Public testimony on any item relevant to this agenda may be taken at this time, or a testifier may wait to testify at the time the agenda item is called for discussion. Pursuant to section 92-3, Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS). Oral testifiers are limited to 2 minutes per person total.
  - i. Dianne Deanna member of the public, PhD student at University of Hawaii (UH) commented on agenda item VII executive actions and discussed Executive Orders (EOs) impacts upon the UH community, female students of color, leadership recommendations regarding DEI compliance and urged the Commission: to bolster UH leadership and the institution's commitment to DEI and status of women, to endorse house resolution 205, and to help advocate for women and girls in the university system.
  - ii. Marina Karides member of public, Professor in geography at UH, commented on agenda item VII executive actions and discussed federal action impacts, written testimony submission, mixed response from leadership, pushback from UH community members, statewide impacts, and asked the Commission to consider

supporting: UH leadership and the restoration of scrubbed DEI content, and resolution 205 - urging UH to publish an equity statement.

B. Written testimony received:

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Subject: Testimony Opposing UH's Removal of Programs and Website Scrubbing

Aloha Commissioners,

I am writing to express my deep concern over the University of Hawai'i's recent removal of critical online content, programs, and resources that have long supported gender equity, women, and LGBTQI+ communities. As a state that has historically led the nation in Title IX protections and the Respect for Marriage Act, it is alarming to see UH erasing these digital spaces and failing to stand against federal actions that threaten diversity, equity, and inclusion.

By removing key programs, UH is sending a message that these communities are no longer a priority. The removal of the Women's Center website, for example, signals a shift away from supporting women's rights, creating a more hostile and unwelcoming environment for students and faculty alike.

I urge the Commission to call on UH to:

Restore all removed content and programs that support gender equity and LGBTQI+ rights.

Issue a public statement reaffirming its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Reject compliance with federal policies that undermine Hawai'i's long-standing values of equality and justice.

Hawai'i has always been at the forefront of protecting marginalized communities. We cannot afford to move backward. I ask the Commission to take action and hold UH accountable for upholding its identity as a truly equal opportunity institution.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Jana Ireijo

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Subject: Testimony - DEI site removal at UH - Commission On The Status Of Women

Hello my name is Katlyn Vogl and I am a senior at UH Mānoa in the Sociology program. I am absolutely disgusted by the cowardly actions undertaken by the University. After executive orders were put into place banning language that "promotes gender ideology", the University responded by removing various sites supporting "DEI efforts". When you try to search up the Women's center and lgbtq+ center, the pages are "under construction" or "in the process of being deconstructed". The College of Social Sciences as well as Ocean and Earth Technology have removed their diversity and inclusion pages. When clubs are applying for funding this semester, we were told to avoid the language banned by presidential orders as we would incur scrutiny from the University. At this time we were told it wouldn't affect funding but who knows how that could change in the near future. Title IX was started here in Hawai'i by Patsy Mink. The law was and is

so important in removing many barriers that once prevented people, on the basis of sex, from participating in educational opportunities and careers of their choice. Hawai'i is and has always been a pillar in the battle for diversity, equity, and inclusion, women's, and lgbtq+ rights, and this move from the University goes against that and tears the moral fabric of this society. This is a University and place founded on diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and the fight for equal rights for all, so to remove anything related to that from University sites is a disgusting, cowardly act that can not be forgotten about. UH needs to restore its digital content to how it was prior to executive orders, and withhold from removing anything else. The University should also issue an apology and statement. UH is showing its allegiances right now and is making women, queer people, feel unsupported and fearful of the future in this academic space. I plead with the University to stand on its morals and values and to resist the detrimental, exclusionary executive orders that have been issued by Trump.

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Subject: Testimony

To the State's Commission on the Status of Women:

I am writing to this Commission in response to the disturbing news that the University of Hawaii has failed to show leadership in the face of current pressures to erase DEI programs/language per event executive orders. In demonstrating anticipatory obedience to the clear authoritarianism that these executive orders hope to obtain, UH is failing the state, the diverse communities who sustain this special place and women to be very clear. The University has scrubbed websites and language in such obedience and this suggests a moral compass that we do not want at the helm.

More importantly, as THE academic center for the state it sends a message of valuing perceived security over doing what is right for all people, especially those who are being targeted and marginalized now. If we have learned nothing from history may we at least recall that when one group is subjected to this kind of erasure - all are at risk. I hope that this Commission can support UH to find a way to (even privately) apologize to those directly affected by these acts. I can understand the need to be savvy and strategic financially in these times but there are ways to communicate that one's values remain at the center (ie yes, language around "women" may be removed from scholarships publicly but they will still be making selections or acting in a way consistent with trying to promote DEI programs/initiatives).

As someone who hails from the mainland originally, I understand if my voice may feel less relevant. However, coming from a state where the governor (Janet Mills, Maine) recently showed great courage in not letting Trump and these threats of executive orders bully her into obedience, I know that now is a time we must look to one another no matter where we are from and hold tight to what is the right thing to do.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Alana Rose

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7 March 2025

Aloha Executive Director Llasmin Chaine,

Congratulations on your new post in leading the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women. I write to you with deep concern over the actions occurring across the University of Hawaii System which impact women students and employees on every island. Below is a summary collaboratively written by a group of women graduate students and myself outlining the deep concerns with University leadership "scrubbing" our websites for terms such as "women," "gender," as well as disappearing the content from websites such as the Women's Center and LGBTQIA+ Center. we have over the removal of the Women's Center. Yesterday I learned that at an event led by our graduate program, students were told that if they have any gender related problems, they can seek out a confidential advocate, but there is no system of university support available as has been the case for decades.

Here is our summary:

Across the US, colleges and universities are standing together in face of two Executive Orders and a "Dear Colleague" letter (later rolled back [a list of FAQs released by the U.S. Department of Education](#)). Unlike UH, they did "not change anything" including the removal of words on campus websites or the transformation of programs. In addition, on February 24, [a preliminary injunction](#) was granted against Anti-DEI Executive Orders by U.S. District Judge Adam B. Abelson in the District of Maryland giving reprieve to higher education with legal advice suggesting [that the lawsuits against the Executive Orders will be successful](#). In a [February 25 press release](#), Massachusetts' governor and attorney generals including Hawai'i's AG, issued joint guidance affirming commitment to equal access to education; On March 4, [ACLU sent a letter of support](#) to urge universities to protect campus speech and dissent.

UH is out of sync with campuses in other Democratic states that have retained their DEI content, remain openly equal opportunity employers, and have directly challenged the EOs. Currently, examples of content removal include: UH's [Women Center](#) and [LGBTQ+](#) Center's websites with messages of being under construction; [UHM](#) and [SOEST](#), student success and diversity statements are no longer available while the [CSS](#) link leads to a new page. Campus programs such as [SEEDS](#), a diversity grant, and other pages have been remade. We also understand that UH campuses are preparing to remove "Equal Opportunity Employer" from letterheads. It seems that mid-level administrators are being coaxed to make these changes by higher-ups using fear of criminal and civil penalties if they don't. Yet given the injunctions, that the "dear colleague" letter is guidance and not a legal document, and the AG's and [State of Hawaii's House of Representatives](#) position urging UH to support DEI, our university's capitulation to the Trump agenda is untenable.

Lastly, I write to you as the PI (2017-2022) of:

**National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE Partnership: Building Relationships to Increase Diversity and Gender Equity in Hawaii's Two-Year College System, No. 1725604, \$1,250,281**

I attach our report (and provide this [link](#) though it may be disappeared), which demonstrates the structural challenges in terms of gender and diversity UH faces. However, I also write to you as a feminist and resident of Hawai'i who is fully aware of the influence of the UH System, the many UH alumni that are employed across the state, and the positive impact that UH, as an equalopportunity employer, has on our workforce. If UH continues to defy its diversity and equity initiatives, consider the impact it will have on women employed across our State. I and many others are requesting your Commission address University leadership and help us with our

requests to not only restore our DEI and women content but like many other campuses in Democratic States, to issue a statement of support (as well as an apology) rather than the fear mongering it has been creating across all our campuses.

Mahalo to you and the Commission for all you do and the feminist position you stand by,  
Marina Karides  
Professor, Geography & Environment, UH Mānoa

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III. MESSAGE FROM DEPARTMENT of HUMAN SERVICES DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

- a. Ex Officio Designee for DHS, welcomed new Commissioners and Staff, and identified themselves as the new point of contact.

IV. ELECTION (Chair) – Discussion and Vote

- a. Chair resigned (effective at end of March 10, 2025 meeting). Commissioner Moniz motioned to have a discussion about the Chair election, Commissioner Ignacio-Neumiller seconded – ALL IN FAVOR, MOTION CARRIED. Discussed appreciation for Chair Ostrowski's efforts, Chair duties, and potential candidates. Commissioner Stotter offered to take on the Chair role.
- b. Commissioner Moniz motioned to nominate Commissioner Stotter as Commission Chair, Commissioner Adaro seconded – ALL IN FAVOR, MOTION CARRIED. Commissioner Stotter is the new Commission Chair.

V. REPORTS

A. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

- i. Women's Coalition Legislative Package, Women's Legislative Caucus Package, and Other Bills of Note
  1. Reviewed meeting packet materials and testimony submitted to date on measures impacting girls and women, future legislative advocacy, context for measures, and any causes for concern.
- ii. Website Updates
  1. Discussed recent website updates, plans to seek direct editing access, and future possibilities.
- iii. Budget
  1. Discussed budget balance in recent quarter report, operating budget of about \$40K, procurement training progress, future Commission sponsorship opportunities, projected purchases and authorization progress.
- iv. Administrative Assistant Recruitment
  1. Discussed ongoing recruitment efforts, recent offer to hire was not accepted, pay concerns/strategies that should be considered, and a third round of interviews to occur.

B. State Commissioners' Reports and Updates

- i. Edie Ignacio-Neumiller, Kaua'i Commissioner

1. Commissioner discussed Rise of the Wahine screening and the upcoming annual NACW conference in Oklahoma City, July 30 – August 2.
  - ii. Stacey Moniz, Maui Commissioner
    1. Commissioner reported that Maui County CSW has not met the last couple months due to staffing change and lack of admin support, recent event with young women and kapuna panel, and plans to do a women of excellence award.
  - iii. Jennifer Stotter, Hawai'i Commissioner
    1. Commissioner reported that CSW has been busy meeting every month, most recent event was around domestic violence awareness month, sign waving and tabling occurred, upcoming: equal pay project is planned, engagement with social media and press to spread awareness, equal pay day in April, survey, working genius workshops, and a women in leadership campaign.
  - iv. Marisa Adaro, O'ahu Commissioner
    1. Commissioner reported their term is ending at the end of June 2025, interested in reappointment, needs assistance – Executive Director to follow up to connect the Governor's Boards & Commissions' office point of contact to Commissioner.
  - v. Introduction of Melissa Sotelo, new O'ahu Commissioner
    1. Commissioner reported on their confirmation progress, excitement about joining the Commission, personal, educational and professional background (nursing), and a desire to create change in health awareness.
  - vi. Introduction of Rose Medina Kemna, new O'ahu Commissioner
    1. Commissioner reported on excitement to be on Commission, business, entrepreneurial, hospitality and realtor professional background, UH graduate, previous local female empowerment efforts, and interest in workplace equity, home ownership, and improving small business owner experiences for women.
- VI. CURRENT and FUTURE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR and COMMISSION COLLABORATIONS WITH COUNTY COMMITTEES, and UNIVERSITY of HAWAI'I PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION, on the STATUS of WOMEN - Discussion
- a. Discussed recent Executive Director collaboration efforts, possible standing agenda items, previous statewide Commission and County Committees on the Status of Women (CSW) Chair meetings, and options. Commissioners Sotelo, Kemna, and Stotter expressed interest in collaborating with UH Commission and Honolulu CSW.
- VII. RECENT FEDERAL ACTIONS/EXECUTIVE ORDERS PERTAINING TO WOMEN, TITLE IX, DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION - IMPACTS, COMMISSION and/or EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RESPONSE(S)– Discussion and Vote

- a. Discussed recent federal actions, local and national impacts of EOs and federal funding changes/terminations, expressing support for AG's stance/efforts, previous legislative (2024 – HCR205) resolution efforts, testimony submitted, available resources, engaging with UH, and requests for Commission stance/messaging out regarding Commission's response and commitment to support for women and girls.
- b. Discussed collaboration with DHS's Press Information Officer (PIO) on any messaging out efforts, clarification that collaboration with DHS's PIO was at the Commission's discretion, importance of Commission's independence from departmental oversight, and the benefits of collaborating with DHS's PIO for dissemination of information and utilization of DHS PIO's contact list.
- c. Commissioner Moniz motioned for Commission to engage with the UH system and clarify the Commission's position that gender equality and DEI programs are not illegal, and the University should not comply in advance, Commissioner Ignacio-Neumiller seconded - ALL IN FAVOR, MOTION CARRIED.
- d. Commissioner Adaro motioned for the Executive Director and Chair to draft and develop a public statement supporting AG's position on EOs and gender equity policies, on the Commission's position, and policy regarding gender equity, Commissioner Ignacio-Neumiller seconded - ALL IN FAVOR, MOTION CARRIED.

VIII. ESTABLISHING STANDING COMMISSION MEETING DAY and TIME FOR 2025 – Discussion and Vote

- a. Discussed next meeting date and time, Commissioner availability, and public meeting needs, next meeting date and time was identified as Monday, May 12, 2025, from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

- a. Commissioner Ignacio-Neumiller motioned to adjourn the meeting, Commissioner Stotter seconded - ALL IN FAVOR, MOTION CARRIED, meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.