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LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU  
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## Written Comments

### SCR68

## REQUESTING THE LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU TO CONDUCT A STUDY ON WAYS TO CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Charlotte A. Carter-Yamauchi, Director  
Legislative Reference Bureau

Presented to the Senate Committee on Government Operations

Tuesday, March 23, 2021, 3:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 016

Chair Sharon Y. Moriwaki and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon Chair Moriwaki and members of the Committee. My name is Charlotte Carter-Yamauchi, and I am the Director of the Legislative Reference Bureau. Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit written **comments** on S.C.R. No. 68, Requesting the Legislative Reference Bureau to Conduct a Study on Ways to Close the Digital Divide.

The purpose of this measure is to request the Legislative Reference Bureau to conduct a study on ways to close the digital divide through multidimensional policies and programs that seek to reduce social and digital inequity simultaneously, including but not limited to:

- (1) Tax policies that reduce the upfront costs of devices and communications technology purchased by the Department of Education to provide students with equitable access to distance learning;
- (2) Infrastructure investments and robust competition policies to ensure widespread access to affordable high-quality internet on all islands;

- (3) Policies to ensure that dramatic growth in continued wireless broadband continues and create and distribute digital technology;
- (4) Investment in digital literacy, education, and training programs, to remove computer literacy barriers that impede universal access; including policies promoting affordability, readiness, and relevance of access to broadband internet that remove barriers to unserved and underserved populations; and
- (5) Grant programs to support digital equity projects undertaken by individuals, groups, coalitions, or communities of interest.

The measure further requests the Bureau to submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2022.

The Bureau takes no position on the merits of this measure but submits the following comments for your consideration.

As presently drafted, this measure requests the Bureau to examine potential policies and programs in a very broad range of areas including tax policy, distance education, infrastructure development and investment, digital literacy, and potential grant programs. The Bureau notes that it lacks any specific expertise or experience in matters relating to tax policy, infrastructure development, the Internet, digital access, digital literacy, and telecommunications. Accordingly, it is unlikely that the Bureau would be able to respond informatively with respect to paragraphs (2) and (3) or to provide the Legislature with any authoritative recommendations on how to increase digital equity and close the digital divide. Moreover, given the very extensive scope of the requested study it is unlikely the Bureau can complete the study within the requested timeframe even if it limits its response to purely factual information.

However, we note for the Committee's consideration that, pursuant to section 440G-11.5(a)(4), Hawaii Revised Statutes, the Director of Commerce and Consumer Affairs (DCCA), in conjunction with broadband services, among other responsibilities, shall "[m]ake recommendations to establish affordable, accessible broadband services to unserved and underserved areas of Hawaii and monitor advancements in communications that will facilitate this goal."

Furthermore, according to the website of the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT), in March 2020, DBEDT convened the Broadband Hui "to address gaps in broadband access both near term and long term." In December 2020, the Hui released "Broadband for A.L.L. - A Digital Equity Declaration for Hawai'i" which, among other matters, states that "digital inequity is one of the most pressing issues facing Hawai'i" and establishes a goal for all Hawaii residents to "be able to seamlessly connect to the digital resources they need to be connected and successful in their everyday life."

Further, in November 2020, DBEDT, with support from the DCCA and the Office of Planning, published the Hawaii Broadband Strategic Plan 2020, which includes, among other matters, "Goal 2: Expand Digital Inclusion and Adoption to Achieve Digital Equity," and an objective to "[i]dentify and remove barriers to access and adoption to unserved and underserved."

Based on the foregoing, it appears that the study requested of the Bureau by this measure would be duplicative of existing efforts currently within the purview of executive agencies with specific expertise, knowledge, and responsibilities relating to broadband services. We therefore respectfully submit that it may be a more efficient use of resources to replace the request for the Bureau to conduct a *new study* with a request for DBEDT and DCCA to update the Legislature on the progress of *existing* efforts toward the goals specified in the Hawaii Broadband Strategic Plan 2020.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit written comments.



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Statement of  
**MIKE MCCARTNEY**  
Director

**LATE**

Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism  
before the

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS**

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

3:00 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 016

In consideration of

**SCR68 / SR50**

**REQUESTING THE LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU TO CONDUCT A STUDY  
ON WAYS TO CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE.**

Chair Moriwaki, Vice Chair Dela Cruz, and members of the Committee. The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) provides the following comments on SCR68/SR50, which requests the Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) to conduct a study on ways to close the digital divide.

DBEDT concurs with the testimony submitted by LRB. Much of the work to close the digital divide and achieve digital equity will be done by the Broadband and Digital Equity Office as articulated in SB947, SD2, which is currently being heard by the legislature.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, for the last 52 weeks, DBEDT has helped to convene, the Broadband Hui, a gathering of community stakeholders focused on achieve digital equity as stated in their Digital Equity Declaration.

It is our strong feeling that with the establishment of the Broadband and Digital Equity Office, working in conjunction with the Broadband Hui, much of the work ascribed to in SCR68/SR50 would be accomplished and reported to the legislature. We therefore request that SCR68/SR50 be deferred and allow the Broadband and Digital Equity Office to assume the role described in this resolution.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony.