



# HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 411 HONOLULU, HI 96813 · PHONE: 586-8636 FAX: 586-8655 TDD: 568-8692

February 17, 2021

Videoconference, Room 329, 10:00 a.m.

To: The Honorable Cedric Asuega Gates, Chair  
The Honorable Matthew S. LoPresti, Chair Vice Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Culture, Arts & International Affairs

From: Liann Ebesugawa, Chair  
and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

## Re: H.B. No. 242

The Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) has enforcement jurisdiction over Hawai‘i’s laws prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, public accommodations, and access to state and state funded services. The HCRC carries out the Hawai‘i constitutional mandate that no person shall be discriminated against in the exercise of their civil rights. Art. I, Sec. 5.

H.B. No. 242 would amend H.R.S. § 8-1 to change the name of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. How Would They Feel Day. The measure is meant to encourage empathy for the struggles of other people and the added phrase is based on song lyrics.

**HCRC opposes H.B. No. 242.** While considering how others feel is an important concept, the change in name dilutes the importance of the holiday, currently the only federal and Hawai‘i state holiday honoring and celebrating an African American, the importance of the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the history of the civil rights. Changing the name diminishes the importance of work that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others did to advance racial equality.

It took a long and bitter struggle from the time of Dr. King's assassination in 1968 until enactment of the legislation that made Martin Luther King, Jr. Day a federal holiday in 1983. It wasn't until 2000 that all 50 states finally observed the MLK holiday – and several Southern states did so grudgingly, combining Martin Luther King, Jr. Day with holidays celebrating Robert E. Lee and other Confederate figures. Now is not the time to roll back our own acknowledgement and celebration of the life and work of Dr. King.

**The HCRC opposes H.B. No. 242.**