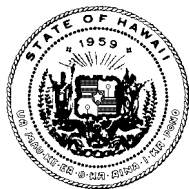


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'ŌKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
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TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
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March 19, 2024

TO: The Honorable Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senate Committee on Judiciary

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director
Lea Dias, Administrator, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

SUBJECT: **GM 591 – Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee, Gubernatorial Nominee, JAMES GASHEL, for a term to expire 06-30-27.**

Hearing: Thursday, March 21, 2024, 10:01 a.m.
Conference Room 016, State Capitol & Video Conference

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the nomination and confirmation of James Gashel to the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee.

Per section 11-10.5, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee is established within the Office of Elections to ensure equal and independent access to voter registration, casting of ballots, and all other Office of Elections services. The advisory committee members identify as voters with accessibility needs arising from disabilities, including visual and hearing impairments that require an accommodation to vote. The advisory committee meets at least annually to review election procedures, services, technology, and access to information and makes recommendations to the Office of Elections.

Mr. Gashel seeks an appointment to the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee. Mr. Gashel has been a tireless advocate for the accessibility needs of

March 19, 2024

Page 2

individuals with disabilities for multiple decades on the U.S. Mainland. Hawaii is fortunate to have had him for a number of years supporting the rights of our blind citizens from keiki to kupuna. He has been a supporter of Ho'opono Services for the Blind Branch of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), as well as a fundamental source of suggestions for program improvements for Ho'opono's consumers for many years.

DHS and DVR recognize the importance of promoting greater participation in voting by individuals with access needs who may otherwise be excluded, including the removal of barriers for persons with voting accessibility needs to ensure that all individuals have equal access to the voting process.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this nomination.

GM-591

Submitted on: 3/19/2024 4:16:28 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/21/2024 10:01:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Patricia A. Morrissey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

March 21, 2024

Testimony on GM591,

the confirmation of James Gashel to

The Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee

Submitted by: Patricia Morrissey, Ph.D.

Chair of the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee

To: The Hawaii Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Chairman Rhoads, Vice Chairman Gabbard, and Committee Members:

I am the Chair of the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee. I offer this testimony in very strong support for the reappointment of James Gashel to the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee. Mr. Gashel currently serves as the Vice Chair of that committee.

I worked with Mr. Gashel in Washington, D.C. for 25 years. He was the principal lobbyist for the National Federation for the Blind and I served in a variety of positions as staff on committees in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. We are now serving on the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee.

Mr. Gashel has taken the lead on advising the Hawaii State Office of Elections on electronic ballot processes. He especially has provided substantial and targeted advice on the need to simplify the voter identification/verification procedure. As a result, in Hawaii, in upcoming elections and beyond, voters who elect to submit ballots electronically will have a much simpler process for establishing their identity prior to voting.

Since Mr. Gashel is very willing and enthusiastic about continuing on the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee, I strongly urge members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, the full Senate, and the Governor to continue Mr. Gashel's appointment on this key committee.

Mr. Gashel has a national network of colleagues who can advise on issues of interest to the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee. But most importantly, he is well known to, connected to, and respected by individuals with disabilities in Hawaii and the organizations that represent them, as well as known to many members of the Hawaii State Legislature. Mr. Gashel's knowledge of advances in technology that can either help or hinder people with vision-related disabilities is invaluable to the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee. Mr. Gashel's ability to explain complicated information in clear and understandable language for the benefit of diverse audiences is another critical asset to the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee. Finally, his life-long commitment to and passion for equality and equity are resources for the State that go beyond accessibility in the election process.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Mr. Gashel. The Legislature will be making a wise decision if it reconfirms Mr. Gashel for a second term on the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee. People with disabilities in Hawaii will benefit greatly from such an action.

Mahalo.

Testimony of James Gashel
Committee on Judiciary (JDC)
HAWAII STATE SENATE
Thirty-second legislature, regular session of 2024
March 21, 2024, 10:01 AM, hearing on GM591

Good morning Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and members. I am James Gashel, nominated by Governor Green for reappointment to the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear and express my interest in continuing to serve on this committee. The Committee was created by section 2 of Act 213 passed in 2021. As legislative chair of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, I was among the principal proponents of the legislation creating the committee.

I have been blind since the day I was born. I have voted in every general and mid-term election from the year I reached age 21 to the present. I was 60 before the election technology allowed me to cast a completely private and independent ballot. That was possible due to accessible election technology resulting from the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).

HAVA sets a non-visual access standard in voting, including the right to vote privately and independently. That's the federal accessibility standard which must be met by all states and local jurisdictions. I worked on that bill while serving as director of government relations at the National Federation of the Blind, a position I held for 33.5 years.

When I retired I moved to Hawaii just before our vote by mail law was passed. I found right away that our brand new vote by mail system was lacking some needed accessibility features. The state's idea was that voters with disabilities could go to voter service centers and use the accessible machines while voters without disabilities could vote with convenience and privacy at home or in the office. That seemed inconsistent with the idea of equal rights and equal opportunity, particularly so when along came the pandemic during 2020.

We need better accessibility solutions rather than just having accessible machines at voter service centers. That's the charge of the Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee. Most importantly, for those not able to vote on their own with mail-in printed ballots, we need simple to use electronic ballot distribution and return technology. Thanks to your help, our law is very good here, so we're working with the Office of Elections to implement accessible ballot transmission technology that is both simple and secure. This should be ready for the primary election this summer.

Working for the National Federation of the Blind I learned it is far better to be part of the solution than to just be part of the problem looking on from the sidelines. With my experience, having worked to pass the voters with disabilities assistance provisions in the federal Voting Rights Act, the accessibility requirements in HAVA, and working with many others to pass the

Americans with Disabilities Act and related laws, I believe I can help the make Hawaii a national accessibility leader among the growing number of vote by mail states. That's my motivation. I am honored to serve voters with accessibility needs in Hawaii.

My resume and responses to questions I received from Chairman Rhoads have been submitted. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this statement and respond to any other questions you may have.