



TESTIMONY FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY

MARCH 15, 2024

**HCR 34/HR 23, DECLARING DISINFORMATION AND DIGITAL HATE SPEECH AS
THREATS TO DEMOCRACY AND URGING DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES TO
ADDRESS THESE THREATS**

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Democratic Party of Hawaii **supports** HCR 13/HR 6, which declare disinformation and digital hate speech as threats to democracy and urge state departments and agencies to address these threats.

Democracy is fragile.

On January 6, 2021, far-right ideologues tried to tear apart the delicate fabric with which our society's governing bonds are woven and forcefully overturn the will of our nation's voters. The insurrection at the United States Capitol left citizens reeling from the audacity of the attempted coup and searching for answers about how to prevent future assaults on our republic.

Even in Hawaii, the aftermath of the January 6th attacks was painfully felt. Security barricades were erected on the grounds of the Hawaii State Capitol in advance of Inauguration Day, after threats were made against political officials throughout our country. At a time when pandemic protocols emptied the people's house of visitors, the Capitol riots only further alienated elected leaders from the constituents they serve.

As Congress's investigation into the insurrection has revealed, much of the madness that occurred on January 6th was organized online. Cyberspace is no longer an undiscovered frontier. Today, our virtual and actual lives have become inextricably comingled. If we are not careful, though, technological advancement can generate the digital reproduction of inequality, discrimination, and violence.

According to a 2018 report published by the data clearinghouse Statista, 64 percent of teenagers in the United States have encountered hate speech on social media. At the same time, incidents of political violence have been escalating. The Washington Post reported in 2021 that right-wing extremists have been involved in 267 plots or attacks in the U.S. since 2015, resulting in 91 fatalities.

Furthermore, over half of the deaths caused by right-wing confrontations were committed by people who voiced support for white supremacy. Many of those outbursts were organized virtually amidst the shadows of social media. Washington Post's investigation found that from 2015 to 2020, the use of websites and social media by right-wing extremists rose in five of the six years that the news outlet studied, leading Georgetown professor George Hoffman to call social media a "propellant" for the spread of violent extremism.

During the pandemic, disinformation about vaccine safety and healthcare protocols spread almost as rapidly as the virus itself. To effectively cure our society of anti-scientific hysteria, it is imperative that we equip our state to identify factual evidence and employ sound reasoning when addressing the consequences of misinformation, disinformation, digital discrimination, and online hate speech.

It can be easy to neglect the foundations of our democracy. From housing insecurity to financial instability to the climate crisis, our society is simultaneously facing many pressing challenges. If we safeguard the pillars of our public sphere from digital mayhem, however, then we will give future generations a chance to resolve those concerns with tranquility and hope.

Mahalo nui loa,

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House Committee on Higher Education & Technology

Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action (HAPA) Supports: HCR34

Friday, March 15, 2024 2:00 p.m. Conference Room 309

Aloha Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action (HAPA), I am writing to express our strong support for House Concurrent Resolution 34 (HCR34) - aimed at combating disinformation and digital hate speech. As an organization committed to promoting social justice, equality, and the well-being of all communities, we believe that addressing these issues is crucial to safeguarding our democracy and fostering a more inclusive society.

The proliferation of disinformation and digital hate speech poses significant threats to our democratic principles and the safety of marginalized communities. Numerous studies, including a June 2019 report titled "Hate Speech on Social Media: Global Comparisons," have highlighted the alarming link between digital hate speech and the rise in violence targeting minorities worldwide. Furthermore, a 2018 report published by Statista revealed that a staggering 64 percent of teenagers in the United States have encountered hate speech on social media platforms.

The impact of online hate speech extends beyond mere words on a screen; it perpetuates harmful stereotypes, fuels discrimination, and incites real-world violence. Left unchecked, these toxic narratives can sow division, undermine social cohesion, and threaten the fabric of our society.

By passing HCR34, we have an opportunity to take proactive measures to combat this growing menace. This resolution represents a crucial step towards:

Raising awareness: By acknowledging the dangers of digital hate speech and disinformation, we can educate the public about its harmful effects and empower individuals to recognize and confront it.



Promoting accountability: HCR34 encourages policymakers, tech companies, and civil society to work together to develop effective strategies for monitoring and combating online hate speech, ensuring that those who perpetrate such behavior are held accountable.

Protecting vulnerable communities: By creating mechanisms to identify and address digital hate speech, we can better protect marginalized groups from the harmful consequences of online discrimination and violence.

In conclusion, we urge you to support HCR34 and take a stand against the scourge of digital hate speech and disinformation. By doing so, we can uphold the values of tolerance, diversity, and equality that lie at the heart of our democracy.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Frederick', is positioned above the typed name.

Anne Frederick
Executive Director

HCR-34

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 5:53:25 AM

Testimony for HET on 3/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Justin Hughey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Disinformation and digital hate speech are threats to our democracy. In a June 2019 report entitled "Hate Speech on Social Media: Global Comparisons", the researchers noted that digital hate speech has been linked to a global increase in violence toward minorities. Moreover, a 2018 report published by Statista found that 64 percent of teenagers in the United States have encountered hate speech on social media. Please pass these resolutions, which will help to prevent our society from falling prey to the civil unrest caused by internet-based discrimination, misinformation, and social violence.

justin Hughey

HCR-34

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 8:26:43 AM

Testimony for HET on 3/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nanea Lo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for HCR34, which addresses the critical issues of disinformation and digital hate speech. As a concerned citizen, I believe that these phenomena pose significant threats to our democracy and societal harmony, and I urge you to pass this resolution without delay.

In recent years, the proliferation of digital hate speech has become alarmingly pervasive. A June 2019 report titled "Hate Speech on Social Media: Global Comparisons" highlighted the dangerous link between digital hate speech and the escalation of violence against minority groups worldwide. This connection underscores the urgent need for decisive action to curb the spread of hate speech online.

Furthermore, studies have shown that our youth are particularly vulnerable to encountering hate speech on social media platforms. According to a 2018 report by Statista, a staggering 64 percent of teenagers in the United States have been exposed to hate speech online. This statistic is deeply concerning and underscores the urgent need for legislative measures to safeguard our young people from the harmful effects of online hate speech.

Passing HCR34 is crucial in combating the proliferation of disinformation and digital hate speech. By declaring these phenomena as threats to our democracy, this resolution will send a clear message that our society will not tolerate discrimination, misinformation, or social violence propagated through online channels.

Moreover, this resolution will pave the way for the implementation of effective strategies to address these issues, including education, awareness campaigns, and regulation of online platforms. By working together to combat disinformation and hate speech, we can create a safer and more inclusive digital environment for all members of our society.

In conclusion, I urge you to prioritize the passage of HCR34 and demonstrate your commitment to protecting our democracy and promoting social cohesion. By taking decisive action against disinformation and digital hate speech, we can uphold the values of tolerance, diversity, and respect that are fundamental to our democracy.

me ke aloha ‘āina,

Nanea Lo, Mō'ili'ili, O'ahu

HCR-34

Submitted on: 3/14/2024 8:48:00 AM

Testimony for HET on 3/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Abby Simmons	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair and esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Abby Simmons and I'm in strong support of HCR34.

Online hate speech and targeted disinformation have resulted in increased physical violence and attacks on marginalized communities and minorities. A lot of this hate speech and targeted misinformation comes from foreign state sponsored bad actors who operate "troll farms" to spread hate, misinformation and discord in our society. A good example is the former "Wagner Group" who has operated known "Troll Farms" in Belarus. Foreign state sponsored actors are not the only participants in online disinformation and hate speech. Domestic hate groups and extremists use Social Media Platforms to target minorities, women and LGBTQ+ folks, spreading hate speech. All you have to do to confirm my testimony is go to any social media platform, choose any member of a minority, look at their posts and then look at the comment section.

In addition to hate speech, online platforms have become an echo chamber for intolerant and extremist views. When legitimized by extremist politicians, the unthinkable can happen, as we've witnessed on January 6th.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo nui loa,

Abby Simmons

HCR-34

Submitted on: 3/15/2024 9:01:49 AM

Testimony for HET on 3/15/2024 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Melvin Dizon	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Respected individuals serving in the House of Representatives,

Greetings, I am Melvin Dizon, and I am an actively involved social worker in our community, dedicated to promoting the overall welfare of our members. Presently, I address this assembly to convey my unequivocal endorsement of House Concurrent Resolution No. 34. This resolution acknowledges the grave dangers that disinformation and digital hate speech present to our democratic system, as well as the pressing necessity to comprehensively tackle these concerns.

Throughout my daily interactions with various populations, I am confronted with the detrimental consequences that disinformation and digital hate speech have. These are tangible, real forces that undermine the trust and unity that are essential for the well-being of our communities. I have personally witnessed the upheaval of families, the indoctrination of young minds with extremist ideologies, and the exploitation of the weak through the cynical tactics of digital disinformation.

There exists a substantial correlation between the rise in prevalence of mental health concerns within our communities and the escalation of digital hate speech. Prolonged psychological trauma may ensue as a consequence of the stress, anxiety, and occasionally severe fear that ensue from the target of or exposure to hate speech. As a social worker, I frequently provide assistance, counseling, and intervention to those impacted on the front lines. However, in light of the expanding magnitude and intricacy of this issue, proactive, systemic solutions are not sufficient; rather, they are mandatory.

The resolution's recommendation to establish public safety plans is an essential measure in protecting our public institutions and personnel against the dangers posed by online organized violence. Nevertheless, this pertains not solely to safeguarding, but rather to fostering resilience. By expanding opportunities for media literacy and providing training on how to recognize and address digital hate speech and disinformation, we enable communities and individuals to resist the spread of false information.

Moreover, the implementation of trauma-informed protocols signifies an acknowledgment of the profound and frequently concealed harm caused by cyberbullying. By adhering to these protocols, individuals can receive the kind of informed, sensitive assistance that is indispensable for their recovery and reestablishment of safety and autonomy.

While advocating for resolute measures from all state departments and agencies, it is crucial to

bear in mind that combating disinformation and digital hate speech transcends policy considerations and touches upon fundamental human dignity. It pertains to safeguarding the well-being, dignity, and respect of each person within our society.

I strongly implore the legislature to adopt this resolution so that it may serve as a model for other states. We can collaboratively create a future in which digital spaces serve as conduits for knowledge, connection, and empowerment, rather than as locations for discord, deceit, and despondency.

I express my gratitude for your dedication and focus on this pivotal matter.

With sincerity,

Melvin Dizon

Testimony for HCR 34

Hello Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela and members of the committee.

My name is Elijah Cristobal and I am in strong support of HCR 34 which declares digital hate speech as a threat to democracy.

This resolution is important to me because my wife has received threats to her work from digital hate. She nor any other government employee should have to be afraid to go to their office and do their job.

I worry about my wife when she goes to work. People online have threatened that her and her coworkers should be killed because of the work they do.

I want to protect my wife but there is nothing I can do when she leaves for work in the morning. I look to you all, the policy makers and the leaders to help keep my wife and everyone else safe from online hate and threats.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.