



HAWAI'I STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

State of Hawai'i · Bishop Square, 1001 Bishop Street, ASB Tower 970 · Honolulu, Hawai'i

Committee: Senate Committee on Judiciary
Bill Number: SB 2215
Hearing Date/Time: January 26, 2024, 9:30 a.m.
Re: Testimony of the Hawai'i State Ethics Commission in **SUPPORT** of SB 2215, Relating to Administrative Fines

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Committee Members:

The Hawai'i State Ethics Commission ("Commission") **supports** SB 2215, which increases the maximum administrative fine allowed for violations of Haw. Rev. Stat. chapters 84 and 97.

In recent years, instances of ethical violations underscore the need for a more robust deterrent to dissuade individuals from engaging in activities that compromise public trust. Increasing the maximum fine would proactively discourage unethical behavior. The current maximum fine (\$1,000) may not always be commensurate with the severity of some ethical violations, and a higher penalty can reflect the gravity of a particular transgression.

The Commission surveyed comparable administrative fines for ethics violations in other states and counties.¹ It appears that most jurisdictions have a maximum between \$5,000 to \$10,000. Hawaii's current maximum fine amount of \$1,000 appears to be on the low end of the scale.

Our state needs to maintain the highest standards of ethical behavior among public officials and employees. By supporting the proposed increase in the maximum fine for the Hawaii State Ethics Commission, this Legislature demonstrates its commitment to preserving the public's confidence in government institutions and fostering a culture of accountability.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 140.

Very truly yours,

/S/ Robert D. Harris
Robert D. Harris
Executive Director and General Counsel

¹ The results of this survey can be found with the Commission's June 21, 2023 meeting materials (available at <https://ethics.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023-06-21SunshineLawMaterials.pdf>).