

Chairman Donovan Dela Cruz

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Testimony on Senate Bill 3281

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this bill, and in particular in strong support of the changes made by the culture and arts committee clarifying the official state designation of the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum as the official State of Hawaii Museum of Natural and Indigenous History.

Hawaii is a small place and everyone knows everyone, especially in our small museum industry. We are writing today on behalf of our experience with the six organizations we have collectively worked for over the last forty years, and while we must do so anonymously, please understand we do so only to make sure we protect our organizations and colleagues who are all working so hard to promote our unique history and culture here in Hawaii. We would hate for them to be singled out because we spoke up and made waves.

The Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum is a wonderful institution, and our organizations work with them from time to time. We know many colleagues who have worked there over the years, members of the board, and leaders who have come and gone. However, Bishop is the 800 pound gorilla in Hawaii among history museums and institutions. They are able to command and control funding that is available to countless other small museums, institutions, non-profits. They choose who they will collaborate with, who gets opportunities for partnerships with third parties like prominent companies and government projects. Because we often compete for the same streams of grants, they sometimes -and often do- make or break smaller organizations. So you can understand why we wish to be cautious as we raise these issues.

There are dozens, even hundreds, of smaller museums, non-profits and institutions dedicated to events and perspectives on moments or themes in Hawaii's culture and history. You are probably familiar with some of these institutions on each of your own islands. Unfortunately, most don't get direct support or funding from the state and must compete for grants and funding.

Often third parties such as schools, private companies, or community organizations present ideas or opportunities to Bishop. Bishop frequently turns many of these down because it doesn't fit their mission or may be controversial and so those ideas end up presented to another smaller local organization. But when that smaller institution begins moving on it and starts working on grants and sponsorships, Bishop can sometimes throw their weight around to ultimately collect the funding or sponsor for themselves. It can be incredibly frustrating for smaller organizations and museums who must invest the time, energy, and most of all staffing into projects that depend on grants and contributions that Bishop Museum always has the edge to receive.

Everyone applauded when Bishop won their official state designation decades ago. The state designation has done two things for Bishop. It allows them to receive direct state funding, and

because it is broad and encompasses all of “culture” in Hawaii, it is often used as a catch-all official designation to intervene and get the edge to collect funding for projects that smaller local museums or institutions are sometimes better positioned with a dedicated mission to execute and present.

Despite this, it was fantastic that Bishop was able to leverage their state designation to receive the millions of dollars from the state it has been getting recently. It's great that more support is available for history and culture in Hawaii. I think we can speak for many others when we say that having that funding available is a good thing. However, we are writing today to support the changes to this bill made in the culture and arts committee that clarify the state designation of Bishop Museum, which will give many other smaller museums and institutions who don't receive state funding a better chance to compete for grants and opportunities.

We strongly support the clarification in the state designation making Bishop Museum the State of Hawaii Museum of Natural and Indigenous History. This clarification reflects and reinforces Bishop's core mission, and will allow Bishop to continue receiving the millions of dollars in state funding that it is now receiving. It will not limit Bishop's activities or broad focus on whatever it chooses to pursue, as it is the museum's own mission which dictates what it does and chooses to focus on, not a state designation.

However, this clearer state designation will importantly make it easier for Hawaii's smaller museums and institutions to compete for grants and other private funding in each of the niche areas they may specialize and focus on because there isn't one large institution that can leverage a broad state designation as the museum of all “culture” to dominate every single grant or other opportunity. If Bishop or any museum wishes to compete for funding for any project or purpose, it should do so on a level playing field with all of Hawaii's other institutions that have an equally legitimate mission and benefit for our local community. It is unfair to all of Hawaii's other local institutions to both provide Bishop with millions of dollars in support that others do not get, and then also grant it the broadest of state designations that gives it the edge to outcompete everyone else for private grants, partnerships, and non-state funding opportunities in every possible category.

We are happy to see Bishop Museum receive the state funding it is now getting and we wish it the best success. We just hope others will be given a fair opportunity to compete in their own areas of specialty for the other limited funds and resources out there.

Mahalo for your time and attention, from our other local organizations.

J.A.

B.T.

K. K.

R. T.

Senate Committee on Ways and Means
February 22, 2024

TESTIMONY RE: SB3281 SD1 RELATING TO CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Good afternoon Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and members of the committee,
My name is Dee Jay Mailer and I am the President and CEO of Bishop Museum.

We were very pleased to see our recommended changes regarding Board structure reflected in SB3281 SD1. However, there is another amendment that caught us by surprise and which we recommend be revisited.

This involves a change to Act 398, which designates Bishop Museum as the State of Hawai'i Museum of Natural and Cultural History.

We understood that the Committee on Transportation, Culture and the Arts intended to change this title to include the word "Indigenous." We were startled to see that SD1 went further than that, entirely eliminating the term "cultural." Renaming Bishop Museum as the State of Hawai'i Museum for Natural and Indigenous History is not an accurate description of the Museum's purpose from its inception 135 years ago.

Act 398 was enacted by the 1988 state Legislature and signed into law by then-governor John Waihee. It says, in part, that the Legislature recognizes the Museum's role "in gathering, preserving, storing and sharing of tangible evidence throughout its many years of service in Hawai'i's natural and cultural history."

This is an accurate reflection of our mission and purpose. The Museum's archeology and ethnology departments have studied the cultural heritage of Hawai'i and its ancestral cultures throughout the Pacific for more than a century. Archeology houses the world's largest collection of Hawaiian and Pacific artifacts recovered from excavations of sites that are fundamental to the understanding of the cultural past of Oceania, including the first cultural chronologies for the Hawaiian archipelago. The Museum's ethnology collections include artifacts and records that reflect both indigenous and non-indigenous influences and perspectives that make up Hawai'i's history and provide valued contexts to understanding our diverse communities today.

Our broad purpose is captured in the Museum's mission statement: "Bishop Museum inspires our community and visitors through the exploration and celebration of the extraordinary history, culture and environment of Hawai'i and the Pacific."

Bishop Museum's vision aspires to "a future where all people understand and celebrate Hawai'i's cultural and natural history, and use that knowledge to inspire the future."

In inserting the word "indigenous," Chair Lee assured us that the intent of the Transportation, Culture & the Arts Committee was not to diminish or restrict what has been our historical purview, but to support other, smaller, nonprofits providing cultural programs in their efforts to secure Federal funding.



We acknowledge the value of all nonprofits seeking to share Hawai'i's culture. In fact, just last year we were awarded a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services to provide smaller nonprofits and museums, focused on Native Hawaiian Organizations, with professional development opportunities and training on grant writing. That training is ongoing as we write this testimony. Ignoring the vast, historical and important cultural contributions of Bishop Museum is not the way to increase knowledge of the rich cultures of Hawai'i and the Pacific.

We would be remiss if we did not offer our very deep gratitude to the committees for the ongoing operational funding support contained in SB3281 SD1, as well as the additional CIP support to begin the phased renovation of Bishop Hall. Your support of our operations allows us to continue many of the programs that protect Hawai'i's fragile ecosystem and unique environment, including the annual Hawai'i Biological survey, the Pacific Center for Molecular Biodiversity and the work done to identify and protect against invasive species that threaten our native habitats.

Having said that, we acknowledge the necessary focus on providing financial support for those impacted by the Lahaina wildfires and appreciate your need to create a balanced budget that supports a wide range of needs. We are committed to working with state lawmakers on this issue as the session continues.

Mahalo piha for the opportunity to comment.

Dee Jay Mailer

LATE

SB-3281-SD-1

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Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eric Chang	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha kākou,

As a past/current board member of several local arts nonprofit organizations, including the Hawai'i Museums Association and the Performing Arts Presenters of Hawai'i, I feel an obligation to comment here to advocate for vital funding for museums and arts & cultural organizations across Hawai'i, beyond the invaluable State of Hawaii Museum of Natural and Indigenous History and the State of Hawaii Museum of Monarchy History.

As important as these two institutions are to Hawai'i's past, present, and future, I urge the honorable legislature to also consider increased broader funding across the state, to allow our multitude of arts and cultural organizations and communities to thrive. With your strong support we can ensure that all individuals in Hawai'i have access to art creation and presentation, arts education, and cultural practice and transmission that engages, inspires, enlightens and heals our communities.

Mahalo for your time, and for your service to Hawai'i.

Eric Chang