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STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 1059 HD1
RELATING TO THE HAWAII EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
LABOR

BY

MAJOR GENERAL STEPHEN F. LOGAN
ADJUTANT GENERAL AND
DIRECTOR OF
THE HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

FEBRUARY 10, 2025

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice-Chair Lee, and members of the committees:

I am Major General Stephen Logan, Adjutant General and Director of the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA), State of Hawai'i, Department of Defense.

The Department of Defense would like to provide written testimony in **SUPPORT of HB1059 HD1.**

The purpose of this bill is to alleviate some of the high vacancies within HIEMA, through hiring flexibility by exempting certain key positions. This is particularly important in emergency and disaster response to maintain readiness and capacity and will provide HIEMA the ability to hire qualified candidates swiftly and efficiently. This flexibility is also essential to HIEMA's ability to enable new hires to quickly gain experience and insights into the agency's operations. Once new hires are established and contributing, HIEMA can revisit work performances and transition exempt staffers into civil service roles, bolstering HIEMA's workforce with individuals who are already aligned with their mission.

This approach not only enhances HIEMA's operational efficiency, but also strengthens their capacity to respond to emergencies more effectively.

I ask for your support in exempting key positions in HIEMA. This is a strategic tool for improving recruitment, retention, and overall agency performance in an area that cannot risk staffing challenges. Allowing civil service exemptions for key positions will streamline the hiring process and allow for a more flexible employment framework and ensure that our state will always have in place skilled and experienced individuals in critical times.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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STATE OF HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 1059 HD1,
RELATING TO HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
LABOR

BY

JAMES DS. BARROS
ADMINISTRATOR
HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

FEBRUARY 11, 2025

Aloha Chair Sayama, Vice-Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to **SUPPORT** House Bill 1059 HD1.

HIEMA strongly supports this legislative House Bill 1059 HD1 - to shift vacant, civil service positions to exempt positions within its agency. The current civil service recruitment process is often slow and encumbered by bureaucratic hurdles, which directly impacts our ability to respond to pressing staffing needs. The time period in which a position is posted through the closing period – is too long of a timeframe. Applicants don't always have the luxury of waiting up to six or eight months for a position to be filled within the state system.

As reference, HIEMA currently has 24 vacant civil service positions. Three positions were filled in 2024 from 10 recruitment lists, which were received within that same year. We would like to note that 10 positions were vacant since 2022, 19 positions total since the year 2020.

Exemption positions would empower HIEMA to expeditiously hire qualified candidates and allow us to recruit skilled individuals, who can quickly immerse themselves within our agency. This would not only facilitate a smoother integration but also equip new

hires with the skill-set and knowledge they need to effectively serve our emergency management agency and our communities.

Utilizing exemption positions creates valuable opportunity, as it provides a trial period for assessing performance while allowing these positions to experience HIEMA's mission and operations. Once they are established, transitioning them into a civil service role becomes a seamless process, enhancing HIEMA's overall workforce and retention efforts.

I urge you to support this initiative of allowing HIEMA to move its vacant, civil service positions into exempt status.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a testimony on House Bill 1059 HD1.

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HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION
AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

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The Thirty-Third Legislature, State of Hawaii
House of Representatives
Committee on Labor

Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 11, 2025

H.B.1059, H.D. 1 – RELATING TO THE HAWAII EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO opposes the purpose and intent of H.B. 1059, H.D. 1, which converts the Emergency Management Specialist series positions at level V and higher in the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency from civil service status to exempt status.

The HGEA raises serious concerns for the need to exempt Emergency Management Specialist at level V and higher. We would like to emphasize that if there is employees within these existing positions they would lose their civil service rights. The use of exempt employees, which are considered "at will" by the state, is completely contrary to the principles of civil service. Exempt employees do not have the same rights and benefits of civil service employees. We have consistently opposed the creation of more exempt positions in state government and have advocated for sensible civil service reform.

This proposed measure goes to the larger issue which is that the civil service system must become more flexible, competitive, and adaptive to the current job market and public demands. The state needs to invest in its current and future civil service workforce – increasing the position pay and offering modern and attractive recruitment and retention incentives, along with reforming the state's administrative rules to streamline hiring is paramount. Hiring of exempt employees is a band-aid fix and does not address the underlying recruitment and retention issue that faces our workforce. Furthermore, we urge the state to reprice these positions if they are not competitive with the market rate.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition of H.B.1059, H.D. 1.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira
Executive Director

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 1059
Relating to Emergency Management Staffing
Hearing Date: February 11, 2025

Aloha to the Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I am submitting testimony in **strong opposition** to HB 1059, which proposes converting Emergency Management Specialist V and higher positions from **civil service** to **exempt** status. While the intent to enhance hiring flexibility is acknowledged, I believe this approach overlooks the **fundamental issues** within Hawaii's hiring processes and poses significant risks to the effectiveness and integrity of our emergency management system.

Systemic Hiring Challenges in Hawaii

The **Department of Human Resources Development (DHRD)** currently employs an **inefficient hiring process** that contributes to substantial delays in filling critical positions:

- **Prolonged Hiring Timelines:** The existing process often spans **6-8 months**, making it challenging to attract and retain qualified professionals who may seek more timely opportunities elsewhere.
- **Batch Processing of Applications:** DHRD's practice of waiting until a specific number of applications are received before forwarding them to agencies further delays the hiring process.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Complex procedures and requirements deter potential candidates and impede the timely onboarding of essential staff.

Instead of removing civil service protections, efforts should focus on **reforming these processes** — reducing delays, increasing outreach, and making state employment more competitive (i.e. salary/benefits) against private-sector and federal opportunities.

The Importance of Civil Service in Emergency Management

Emergency management is a long-term investment in preparedness, response, and recovery. Unlike at-will/exempt employees, civil service employees provide:

- **Stability & Retention** – In times of disaster, institutional knowledge is critical. High turnover from exempt status weakens response effectiveness.
- **Workplace Protections** – Civil service employees have due process rights that prevent politically motivated terminations, ensuring continuity of operations.

- **Competitive Benefits** – The pension, healthcare, and job security associated with civil service roles make them more attractive, improving retention and expertise in a field that requires years of specialized training.

If these positions become exempt, Hawaii risks losing qualified professionals to federal agencies, private firms, or other states offering greater job security.

The Value of Civil Service Protections

Civil service status offers several key benefits that are crucial for maintaining an effective emergency management workforce:

- **Freedom to Report Dysfunction:** Civil service protections empower employees to **speak out against systemic issues** without fear of retaliation. This is vital in emergency management, where identifying and addressing dysfunctions can prevent failures during critical incidents.
- **Job Security and Stability:** Civil service positions provide job security, encouraging employees to commit to long-term service, which is essential for building and maintaining institutional knowledge.
- **Attracting Qualified Professionals:** The benefits and protections associated with civil service roles make them more appealing to skilled professionals seeking stable and rewarding careers.

Converting positions to **exempt status** may discourage employees from reporting issues due to fear of retaliation, leading to unaddressed problems that could compromise emergency response effectiveness.

Risks of Exempt Positions

Exempt positions, lacking the protections of civil service, can lead to:

- **Reduced Transparency:** Employees may be less inclined to report inefficiencies or misconduct, fearing job loss.
- **Higher Turnover Rates:** The absence of job security can result in increased staff turnover, leading to a loss of experienced personnel and institutional knowledge.
- **Diminished Accountability:** Without the safeguards of civil service, there is a risk of decisions being influenced by political considerations rather than merit and expertise.

Precedents in Other States

Many states recognize the importance of civil service protections in emergency management:

- **California:** Employs civil service status for emergency management roles, ensuring stability and continuity.
- **Florida:** Utilizes civil service positions within its Division of Emergency Management, promoting long-term commitment and expertise.
- **Texas:** Maintains civil service protections for emergency management staff, supporting retention and institutional knowledge.
- **New York:** The Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services employs civil service personnel, ensuring experienced and stable staffing.
- **Illinois:** The Emergency Management Agency staffs key positions with civil service employees, fostering a professional and dedicated workforce.
- **Pennsylvania:** Utilizes civil service positions in its emergency management agency, promoting accountability and expertise.
- **Ohio:** Employs civil service staff in emergency management roles, ensuring consistency and reliability in emergency response.
- **Michigan:** The State Police Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division is staffed by civil service employees, supporting effective disaster response.
- **North Carolina:** Utilizes civil service positions within its Division of Emergency Management, ensuring experienced personnel manage critical functions.
- **Virginia:** Employs civil service staff in emergency management, promoting stability and long-term commitment.

These examples illustrate that maintaining civil service protections is a standard practice that supports effective emergency management across the nation.

Comparative Tenure of Emergency Management Staff

In states where emergency management positions are classified under civil service, employees often have **longer tenures**, contributing to a depth of experience and institutional knowledge. In contrast, Hawaii's trend toward exempt positions has correlated

with **higher turnover rates**, leading to challenges in maintaining a seasoned and knowledgeable workforce.

Recommendation

Rather than converting positions to exempt status, it is recommended that Hawaii:

- **Streamline Hiring Processes:** Reform DHRD procedures to reduce hiring timelines and eliminate unnecessary delays.
- **Enhance Recruitment Efforts:** Implement strategies to attract qualified candidates, emphasizing the benefits and stability of civil service positions.
- **Invest in Employee Development:** Provide opportunities for professional growth to retain skilled emergency management professionals.

HB 1059 is not the solution and should not move forward. Converting Emergency Management Specialist positions to exempt status would weaken job protections, reduce transparency, and increase turnover — directly harming Hawaii’s ability to respond effectively to disasters. Additionally, this bill could set a concerning precedent — if HI-EMA takes the path of converting civil service positions to exempt status instead of addressing the root causes of hiring challenges, other agencies may follow suit, further eroding the stability and integrity of Hawaii’s public workforce.

Instead of dismantling civil service protections, the State should be working to strengthen them, ensuring that Hawaii’s emergency management workforce is stable, experienced, and empowered to speak up when systems are failing.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to oppose HB 1059.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,
A State Civil Servant