

TESTIMONY OF  
JAMES P. GRIFFIN, Ph.D.  
CHAIR, PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION  
STATE OF HAWAII

TO THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

February 11, 2021  
9:30 a.m.

Chair Baker and Members of the Committee:

**MEASURE:** S.B. No. 1386

**TITLE:** RELATING TO THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION.

**DESCRIPTION:** Requires the chairperson of the public utilities commission to appoint an administrative assistant, a research assistant, and legal counsel to assist each member of the public utilities commission with commission duties. Prohibits the chairperson from dismissing or re-assigning appointed staff members without the prior written approval of the affected commissioner.

**POSITION:**

The Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”) offers the following comments for consideration.

**COMMENTS:**

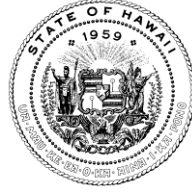
This measure would require the Chair of the Commission to appoint an administrative assistant, research assistant, and legal counsel to assist each Commissioner.

Commissioners currently have access to all staff resources and are free to request their assistance as they see fit. Staff members are assigned by our section chiefs to various dockets and other projects in accordance with their background and specialties, in a manner that most efficiently supports the Commission as a whole. This approach involves creating numerous combinations of staff members across docket teams, which lends to the Commission’s collaborative approach to its work. Assigning staff to specific Commissioners would complicate these internal processes, reduce efficiencies, and likely require reclassification of several positions.

The Commission understands that the proposed process of assigning staff to specific Commissioners may exist in a very limited number of utility-regulating bodies in other states. However, this practice does not tend to exist in commissions with similar, collaborative structures.

For these reasons, the Commission believes that the proposed changes would create unnecessary challenges without clear benefits. However, the Commission will implement the provisions of this measure if so directed by the Legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



DAVID Y. IGE  
GOVERNOR

JOSH GREEN  
LT. GOVERNOR

**STATE OF HAWAII  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS**

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**Testimony of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs**

**Before the  
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection  
Thursday, February 11, 2021  
9:30 a.m.  
Via Videoconference**

**On the following measure:  
S.B. 1386, RELATING TO THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

Chair Baker and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dean Nishina, and I am the Executive Director of the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs' (Department) Division of Consumer Advocacy. The Department offers comments on this bill.

The purposes of this bill are to: (1) require the chairperson of the Public Utilities Commission (Commission) to appoint an administrative assistant, a research assistant, and legal counsel to assist each commissioner, and (2) prohibit the chairperson from dismissing or re-assigning appointed staff members without the prior written approval of the affected commissioner.

The Commission and the Department have been dealing with significant workloads across all of the regulated industries under the Commission's oversight, and the Commission has generally met procedural timelines and has been willing to establish aggressive timelines, such as for the Phase 1 renewable energy projects resulting from Docket No. 2017-0352.

The proposed organizational change may require either: (1) additional funds to add the staff positions to be assigned to each commissioner; or (2) a reorganization that would reassign staff members, who are currently part of the pool of analysts serving Commission objectives, to serve individual commissioners' needs.

The Department generally defers to the Commission on the need for this bill and whether it would improve the Commission's efficiency and/or productivity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.



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COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Senator Rosalyn H. Baker, Chair

Senator Stanley Chang, Vice Chair

DATE: Thursday, February 11, 2021

TIME: 9:30 AM

SB 1386 RELATING TO THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION.

Aloha Chair Baker, Vice Chair Chang, and Members of the Committee

Life of the Land is Hawai`i's own energy, environmental and community action group advocating for the people and `aina for 51 years. Our mission is to preserve and protect the life of the land through sound energy and land use policies and to promote open government through research, education, advocacy and, when necessary, litigation.

The bill would require the Chair of the PUC to appoint an administrative assistant, a research assistant, and legal counsel to assist each Commissioner.

Life of the Land takes no position on the bill. But if it advances, it makes more sense for each Commissioner (akin to judges) to choose their own staff including hiring law interns.

Mahalo

Henry Curtis

Executive Director