



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
March 3, 2009 at 10:00 am

by

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HB 0984, HD3 – RELATING TO TECHNOLOGY

Chair Oshiro, Vice Chair Lee and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to present this testimony today not in my capacity at the University of Hawaii, but as Chair of the Hawaii Broadband Task Force. The Hawaii Broadband Task Force was established by the 2007 Legislature with a mix of public and private sector members appointed by the Speaker of the House and Senate President to provide recommendations on how to advance broadband within the State of Hawaii. I was honored to be elected chair by my fellow task force members.

As the task force completed its work at the end of last year, we greeted with great enthusiasm the words of then President-Elect Obama on December 6, 2008: "It is unacceptable that the United States ranks 15th in the world in broadband adoption. Here, in the country that invented the Internet, every child should have the chance to get online, and they'll get that chance when I'm President - because that's how we'll strengthen America's competitiveness in the world."

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the State Auditor and her office in facilitating our work. We fulfilled our duties under full Sunshine, through public meetings that were fully noticed and with our minutes published on the web. One interim report was provided to the Legislature before the 2008 Session and made public at that time. And as we neared completion last fall, numerous intermediate drafts of our final report were publicly available on the web.

While there wasn't enough time or money to do everything we had hoped, the Task Force unanimously put forward four key recommendations, summarized as follows.

- 1) **Broadband is Vital to Hawaii**
Broadband is critical infrastructure for Hawaii's 21st century advancement in education, health, public safety, research & innovation, economic diversification and public services. One national study estimated the positive economic impact of advanced broadband in Hawaii at \$578 million per year. The task force recommends that Hawaii establish an aggressive and forward-looking vision that positions the State for global competitiveness.

- 2) **Driving Broadband Deployment**
The task force found that the U.S. as a whole is dramatically lagging the leaders in the developed world in our broadband capabilities and pricing, and is falling farther behind each year. While Hawaii is doing well on some measures relative to some other parts of the U.S., the State also falls to the bottom in many national broadband studies. The task force recommends that the State consolidate all relevant regulatory and permitting responsibilities in a new, one-stop, broadband advancement authority that promotes Hawaii's policy objectives and provides advocacy at all levels of government.
- 3) **Maximize Hawaii's Connectivity to the World**
Hawaii's "lifeline" for broadband to the rest of the world is expensive submarine fiber. While Hawaii was once the crossroads for trans-Pacific telecommunications, all of the new fiber systems built across the Pacific since 2001 have bypassed Hawaii. The task force recommends that Hawaii aggressively promote the landing of new trans-Pacific submarine fiber in Hawaii, including a shared access cable station that reduces barriers to fiber landing in Hawaii.
- 4) **Stimulate Broadband Adoption and Use**
The task force believes supplying advanced broadband at affordable prices is just one side of the equation. The task force recommends that Government lead by example in demonstrating the value of broadband to our citizenry, deploying broadband services to the public, and ensuring that we do not leave behind the economically disadvantaged members of our communities who may be inhibited from full participation in the 21st century.

There is much more detail and data in our full report, which was provided to each Legislator and the Governor just before the end of the year.

Five bills were introduced this session to implement our key recommendations, including bills prepared by the House Majority, House Minority, Senate Majority and State Administration.

The "sausage-making" is now well underway. While there are many ways this Bill will continue to be improved throughout the legislative process, there are also nay-sayers and special interest requests that could make it more difficult to enact meaningful legislation that advances our broadband capabilities to those of the world's leaders.

I hope the Legislature can maintain a focus on the goals and approaches recommended to you by your Task Force. If Hawaii is able to enact the basic recommendations of the Task Force this year we will be well-positioned for the future, including through the help of federal stimulus funds that will be available for competitive award through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.