

May 3, 2006

The Honorable Robert Bunda, President  
and Members of the Senate  
Twenty-Third State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 003  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Mr. President and Members of the Senate:

Re: House Bill No. 1233 HD1 SD1

On May 2, 2006, House Bill 1233, entitled "Relating to Civil Rights" became law without my signature, pursuant to Section 16 of Article III of the State Constitution.

The bill would prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in public accommodations. The measure would also prohibit discrimination in public accommodations based on gender identity or expression.

"Sexual orientation" has been defined to mean having a preference for heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality, having a history of any one or more of these preferences, or being identified with any one or more of these preferences. Hawaii law currently prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation in the areas of housing (HRS 515-3) and employment (HRS 378-2).

Further, it should be noted that HRS Chapter 368 contains the following language in the purpose and intent: "The legislature finds and declares that the practice of discrimination because of race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, ancestry, or disability in employment, housing, public accommodations, or access to services receiving State financial assistance is against public policy." (underlines added) Thus, it would appear that the Hawaii Civil Rights Commission already has a basis in law to enforce prohibitions against discrimination in public accommodations based on sexual orientation and this portion of HB 1233 restates what is already a protected class.

This bill further defines "gender identity or expression" to include a person's actual or perceived gender, gender identity, gender-related self-image, gender-related appearance or gender-related expression, regardless of whether that gender identity, gender-related self-

image, gender-related appearance, or gender-related expression is different from that traditionally associated with the person's sex at birth.

This part of the bill is problematic. The definitions are broad, subjective, and contain no limiting terms or interpretational guidelines. The Hawaii Civil Rights Commission currently interprets "sex discrimination" to include the abuses related to the treatment of individuals who have a gender identity or expression that is different from their birth sex. This interpretation of prohibited sex discrimination is in line with recent court cases in our federal judiciary and sister states. However, the definition in this bill is broader than the current interpretation of sex discrimination. Undefined and overly broad language can lead to disputes and create the potential for escalating reasonable actions by the owners and operators of public accommodations into legal proceedings. Such broad and subjective definitions should not be allowed to become a proxy for socially unacceptable behavior in public places.

It is also unclear how the definitions of gender identity or expression found in section 2 of this bill impact section 489-4 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes. Section 489-4 allows a public accommodation to provide separate facilities for male and female patrons for the protection of personal rights of privacy. People have a legitimate right to privacy and it appears the broad language of this measure could interfere with these legitimate rights. This lack of clarity may result in unintended and unwanted confusions and litigation in public accommodations law that should be addressed promptly by the Legislature.

Because this bill restates an existing protection for the class "sexual orientation" and clarifies those protections extend to public accommodations in Section 489-2 and Section 489-3 of HRS, there is merit in these provisions of the measure.

For the foregoing reasons I allowed House Bill 1233 HD1 SD1 to become law as Act 76 effective May 2, 2006 without my signature.

Sincerely,

LINDA LINGLE