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LAW CENTER

House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs
Honorable David A. Tarnas, Chair
Honorable Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

RE: Testimony with Comments on H.B. 686, Relating to Community Outreach Boards

Hearing: February 13, 2025 at 2:00 p.m.

Dear Chairs and Members of the Committees:

My name is Ben Creps. I am a staff attorney at the Public First Law Center, a nonprofit organization that promotes government transparency.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony with **comments** on H.B. 656. We strongly support the intent of increasing opportunities for public participation in government. We offer two amendments to better effectuate the intent of this measure and curb potential abuse.

First, section 5 creates a loophole by allowing part VII boards to “organize” meetings “on matters relating to official board business” without following the open meeting requirements of the Sunshine Law. The intent behind HRS § 92-82 is to allow board members to attend informational meetings organized by *other* groups. If a meeting about board business is organized by a board, it should be a regular meeting – not a permitted interaction as proposed here. We thus **recommend deletion of “or organize” at page 4, line 5** and conforming the preamble consistently.

Second, section 2 authorizes county *commissions* to create community outreach boards. That appears to be unnecessary. The examples of community outreach boards cited by Senate Standing Committee Report No. 317 (2025), regarding this bill’s companion (S.B. 869 S.D. 1), are groups organized by the County of Hawai`i’s planning department only. Additionally, commission members may already attend informational meetings organized by community groups and others under HRS § 92-2.5(e). We thus **recommend deletion of “county commission or” at page 2, line 6**.

We further note that this measure does not provide a process or framework for the creation of a community outreach board, nor does it set any parameters or guidance on board composition.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify with comments on H.B. 686.

