



## Editorial | Our View

# Don't veto public's right to know

By [Star-Advertiser staff](#)

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Gov. Neil Abercrombie has signaled that he might veto a bill that would require members of powerful state boards and commissions to file financial statements for public disclosure, which could reveal potential conflicts of interest. By failing to promptly sign this measure, the governor is putting the privacy concerns of a limited number of influential individuals ahead of the public interest.

The public interest must always come first. Like the state Ethics Commission and good-government groups such as Common Cause Hawaii, we urge the governor to overcome his reservations and sign Senate Bill 2682 by the July 8 deadline, or let it become law without his signature. If he goes ahead with the rejection, state lawmakers — who unanimously approved this bill in the House and Senate — should override the veto.

Approval of this bill would make Hawaii's government more transparent and accountable by increasing the number of powerful boards and commissions whose members are subject to public disclosure requirements. Similar scrutiny, we note, already is endured without harm by numerous parties, including elected officials, candidates for statewide office and department directors. All accept this reasonable disclosure requirement as part and parcel of public service.

Members of selected appointed boards already are covered, too, including the state Board of Education — which has no shortage of able, willing volunteers. That fact makes it all the more irksome that the University of Hawaii's Board of Regents is not covered, and that some of its members are leading the charge to kill this bill.

Moreover, they seek to elude the scrutiny that leaders of the very institutions they oversee accept, for the UH president, vice presidents, assistant vice presidents,

chancellors and provosts are among the state employees whose financial disclosure statements already are made available for public inspection.

SB 2682 would rightly add the Board of Regents and 15 other state boards, commissions and agencies to the list, including the Public Utilities Commission, the Hawaii Community Development Authority, the Hawaiian Homes Commission, the Board of Land and Natural Resources, the state Land Use Commission and the Ethics Commission.

Currently, members of those boards must file financial disclosure forms with the Ethics Commission, but the commission holds on to them; they are not available to the public. The Ethics Commission, which supports the bill, lacks the staffing and other resources to properly review all those forms for potential conflicts of interest. Interested members of the public can do it, and they should have the right to — especially considering the great authority the affected boards wield over the lives of everyday citizens and the future of our state. Higher education, water and energy use, land development, and on and on — the most important issues of our day fall within the realms of these boards and commissions.

Critics contend that having to publicly reveal details about their finances will dissuade highly qualified volunteers from serving on these important government panels. We believe this fear is overblown. The loss of the few appointees who might resign over approval of this bill pales against the greater good. Board members themselves should embrace this new approach. Their responsibility to the taxpayers is clear, and should override any personal unease.

Hawaii needs a more open government, and Senate Bill 2682 helps provide it. Sign this bill, Gov. Abercrombie, and strike a blow for the public's right to know.