

HAWAII

Lawmakers: UH Regents' Finances None Of Your Damn Business

Arguing against too much “openness,” education chairs push a bill to exempt the University of Hawaii Board of Regents from a 2014 financial-disclosure law.

JANUARY 22, 2016 • By Nathan Eagle   

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Hawaii lawmakers are expected to consider [a bill](#) this session that would exempt members of the University of Hawaii Board of Regents from a law making their annual financial disclosure statements public.

[House Bill 1532](#) is the brainchild of Rep. Isaac Choy, chair of the House Higher Education Committee. Sen. Brian Taniguchi, who heads the Higher Education and Arts Committee, has introduced the [legislation](#) in the Senate at Choy's request. He said he supports it for similar reasons — namely, he said, to improve the quality of applicants to serve on the board.

Advocates for government transparency say that financial disclosure helps prevent and expose conflicts of interest.

Choy said the current 15-member board — which includes lawyers, educators, business people and a retired Supreme Court justice — isn't cutting it. He wants to see the heads of big banks at the helm, people he believes can bolster the university by utilizing their governance experience in large, publicly traded companies.

Cory Lum/Civil Beat



Rep. Isaac Choy, seen here during a hearing last session, says the University of Hawaii needs a better Board of Regents.

“A certain amount of openness is needed, but to get some of the really talented people, they’re not going to want to do that,” Taniguchi said, referring to making their financial disclosure statements public.

“I don’t think it’s the cure-all,” he said of his bill. “But it might get one or two people in there that might help turn the university around. I couldn’t tell you who those people are though.”

The Legislature unanimously passed [a bill](#) in 2014, which Gov. Neil Abercrombie [let become law](#) without his signature, that added 15 powerful state boards, including the Board of Regents, to the list of those whose members must publicly disclose their financial interests. Members of the Public Utilities Commission, Land Use Commission and Hawaii Community Development Authority were among those added.

Members of these boards already had to submit financial disclosure forms to the [Hawaii State Ethics Commission](#), but those forms remained private. The commission said, in its

support of the 2014 law, that it lacked the resources to review the hundreds of filings on its own, and that making the forms public would improve accountability.

Critics of the transparency provisions say that public disclosure deters people from serving on state boards because they don't want to share where their financial interests are or how much money they make. The forms don't disclose exact salaries but do provide broad ranges, along with stock holdings and board affiliations.

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Supporters who worked for years to get some form of this legislation passed have maintained that the bill represents a major boost in government transparency and helps weed out conflicts of interest.

Carmille Lim, executive director of [Common Cause Hawaii](#), a good-government nonprofit that advocated for the 2014 bill, said that shielding the Board of Regents from disclosing their financial ties would be a blow to ethics and transparency.

"It's definitely one of the more alarming bills that's come up on our radar so far," she said.

"Bill introduction deadline is next week, and we know many legislators are still scrambling to file bills. At the end of Opening Day, we noticed that Rep. Choy has already filed many sketchy bills that would water down government transparency and ethics," Lim said.

Cory Lum/Civil Beat



Sen. Brian Taniguchi, seen here during a hearing Thursday, has introduced a bill to protect UH regents from disclosing their financial interests.

When asked how he responds to those who don't want to erode recent government-transparency gains, Choy said, "This is better government when you have better managers."

Taniguchi said it's a balance. Right now, he said, the university needs better regents more than it needs openness.

“Rep. Choy has already filed many sketchy bills that would water down government transparency and ethics.” — Carmille Lim, executive director of Common Cause

Four [regents resigned](#) before the 2014 law took effect, but the [vacancies have been filled](#). Abercrombie had considered vetoing the legislation, but it became a campaign issue when Gov. David Ige touted his support for the public disclosure.

Hawaii.

Four regents' terms end June 30.

Ige was given a list in November of [candidates to choose from](#) to fill those seats. Two are for Honolulu, one is for Big Island and the other is a student seat.

[Senate Bill 2080](#) has been referred to the Higher Education and Arts Committee, which Taniguchi chairs, and the Judiciary and Labor Committee, headed by Sen. Gil Keith-Agaran. No hearing has been scheduled yet on the Senate side, and Taniguchi said he's inclined to let Choy take the lead on it in the House and see how it fare there first.

The House bill, introduced Wednesday, has not been referred to committee yet though it's expected to go to Higher Education, which would give Choy the power to give it a hearing.

Civil Beat has created a searchable, sortable [database](#) that includes the financial disclosure statements of hundreds of board members, state lawmakers and elected officials.

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9 Comments

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Daniel Gardner · Naval Postgraduate School



This was a very positive step forward in 2014 . . . Better transparency and improved ethical performance ought to be the norm and we certainly don't need to back track.

Like · Reply ·  12 · Jan 22, 2016 6:38pm



Robert Manning · Church College of Hawaii

HMmmmmm I wonder how full Choy's pockets are right now?

Like · Reply ·  6 · Jan 22, 2016 7:36pm



Rodney Silva · Works at State of Hawaii

If the people that are applying for any board don't want finances made public then they should not be on any board. I think all politicians baby or anyone working for the state or city or any one holding public office should have their finances made public. It keeps everyone honest . Just Saying

Like · Reply ·  10 · Jan 22, 2016 7:46pm



Kealii Makekau

Oh this certainly champions the democratic process and who knew it was the salaries that was keeping the UH regents from doing a good job

Like · Reply ·  3 · Jan 23, 2016 4:31am



John Kawamoto

Here's the description of Choy's bill, HB1532, that's on the Legislature's website: "Protects from public disclosure the financial disclosure statements of the UH Board of Regents that are filed with the State Ethics Commission." Instead, it should say: "Protects UH Regents from public humiliation and disgrace because they don't have to reveal how they could use their government positions for personal gain."

Those who are committed to public service will be willing to disclose their financial interests. Those who won't disclose their financial interests aren't fit for public service.

Like · Reply ·  12 · Jan 24, 2016 1:17am · Edited



Rick Tubania · University of Hawaii at Manoa

believe that there are many ethical folks who would like to do public service as board members but simply do not want to disclose their financial interests for personal reasons and not take advantage of their "inside" knowledge for personal gain. since the world is not perfect, there will always be a few who step over the line whether there is a disclosure requirement or not. since many board positions are unpaid, this financial disclosure requirement might discourage good and qualified applicants. there has to be some balance or maybe instead of financial disclosure for public view, their financial interests should be disclosed but open to review and evaluation by an ethics board if there is suspicion that a board member may have stepped over the line. there are many ways to skin a cat so there are alternatives to insure integrity and honesty of serving board members.

Like · Reply · Jan 23, 2016 3:25pm · Edited



Karlen Porter

I'm at our town meetings when rep Chow comes to speak. Yes, he is very shady. I don't agree with most of the things he says and believe he is not a true representative of the people. If he doesn't agree with something you say he rolls his eyes, crosses his arms, huffs and puffs, like a kid throwing a quiet tantrum. Thumbs down to him.

Like · Reply ·  4 · Jan 23, 2016 9:36pm



Peter Kalawaia Moore · Honolulu, Hawaii

Why does Manoa keep re electing this guy. He is awful

Like · Reply ·  3 · Jan 23, 2016 11:41pm



Karlen Porter

Peter Kalawaia Moore

Probably because most of the neighborhood does not come to the town meetings so don't know how crappy he is and just recognize his name.

Like · Reply ·  1 · Jan 23, 2016 11:50pm



Robert Manning · Church College of Hawaii

Karlen Porter ...SHEEPLE

Like · Reply ·  1 · Jan 24, 2016 11:57am



Jerry Drelling

Rep. Choy should be reminded that history has demonstrated all too well that you do not get "better government" or "better managers" when the lights are turned off. What's also concerning is the attempt to minimize the impact of this bill by Sen. Taniguchi and Choy. Let's hope voters are paying attention.

Like · Reply ·  3 · Jan 24, 2016 4:19am



Civil Beat

This comment is posted in behalf of Glenn Oshiro:

Legislators should be careful of who they imply is second rate. Randy Moore, chr of UH Board of regents is not second rate, not by any stretch of the imagination. I'm thankful we have him.

Like · Reply · Jan 26, 2016 2:13pm

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