

Twenty-two years ago, more than 1,000 stakeholders peacefully marched to protest abuses at the highest level of leadership of Kamehameha Schools. The result was a new beginning for Kamehameha and a clear demonstration that its stakeholders are capable of leading and acting in the best interests of the school.

It was time for decisions affecting Kamehameha to be made by us, not merely for us. Today that includes the selection of trustees. That call for greater say by people in matters that impact them is currently being echoed on Mauna Kea and elsewhere throughout Hawaii; it is folly for government leaders to ignore these voices.

In January 2016, a quest to secure (1) a more-transparent Kamehameha Schools trustee selection process, and (2) a dominant role for stakeholders in the process, began with letters to the Probate Court, which went unacknowledged, and to the Hawaii Supreme Court, which took no action.

But the legislators of Hawaii's House and Senate understood that those who are most affected by the decisions of an institution's foremost leaders should be able to speak for themselves and have greater involvement in the selection of those leaders. This past spring, they passed, without dissent, House Concurrent Resolution 133.

Subsequently, the Probate Court directed the state attorney general, the Kamehameha Schools court master and Kamehameha trustees to comment on HCR 133. A July request to meet with the AG regarding her statement did not evoke a response until Aug. 21, the day before her written comments were due, and consisted of a call from a deputy attorney general and a staff member to discuss the issue, after their statement for the AG's signature had already been drafted.

The responses are a matter of public record. In their court filings, the attorney general and court master selected certain provisions of a court order dated Jan. 6, 2000, Regarding the Selection of Kamehameha Schools Trustees, to support their position that the existing implementation is in compliance. The master opined that it is not a "political process" and, therefore, should not involve the Legislature, as though judicial appointments themselves are not susceptible to political considerations.

Further, the court master maintained that the selection process has been handled with total transparency, which is contradicted by the absence of a well-publicized process for people to apply to sit on the trustee selection panel and the fact that since 2000, the qualifications of those selected to serve on the panel vis a vis what's called for in the 2000 court order have not been broadly communicated.

Indeed, one has to Google or search online for the selection panelists to learn more about their backgrounds and their understanding of Princess Pauahi's legacy and the Kamehameha mission, as may be evidenced through the personal and professional lives they have led. We do not agree that the Jan. 6, 2000, court order has been followed as claimed, including the selection of panelists who meet the criteria spelled out in that document.

We do agree, however, with the Kamehameha trustees' call for a review and reassessment of the present process. It has been almost 20 years since the current trustee selection process was adopted and, as preparations begin to select a new trustee, we believe greater transparency in the process and a dominant role for Kamehameha Schools' stakeholders in the selection of their highest leaders are needed.

We further support the trustees' comments regarding HCR 133 and their request for the Judiciary to appoint a special court master to re-evaluate the process. We further believe our stakeholders must be involved in that re-evaluation.

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