

FINAL

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM (DBEDT)

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT DIVISION (BDS)

MINUTES OF THE HAWAII SISTER-STATE COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2021 AT 11:30 A.M. VIA ZOOM

Committee Members Present were:

Kay Matsui (Chair)	-	Hawaii State Association of Counties
Kaho'okeleholu Hannahs	-	Native Hawaiian Cultural Organization
Debra Nakama	-	Speaker of the House of Representatives
Jean E. Rolles	-	East-West Center (Interim Appointment)
Eduardo Topenio, Jr.	-	President of the Senate

Guests were:

Marilyn Higashide	-	Member, Honolulu Yamaguchi Kenjinkai
Cheryl Shintani	-	President, Koi Yamaguchi Kenjinkai
Art Kimura	-	President, Big Island Kenjinkai
Deb Thompson	-	Board Member, Kauai Yamaguchi Kenjinkai
Bob Miyake	-	Hawaii Yamaguchi Kenjinkai

Committee Administration:

Margaret Ahn	-	Attorney General
Dennis Ling	-	DBEDT/BDS
Mark Ritchie	-	DBEDT/BDS
Leslie Kawamoto	-	DBEDT/BDS
Timothy Tiu	-	DBEDT/BDS
Marlene Hiraoka	-	DBEDT/BDS

CALLED TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Matsui on Monday, March 15, 2021 at 11:30 a.m., via ZOOM.

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 18, 2018 MEETING MINUTES:

Motion was made by Ms. Rolles and seconded by Mr. Hannahs to approve the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, December 18, 2018, unamended.

Roll call vote was conducted by Ms. Kawamoto and the following committee members approved the motion: Ms. Nakama, Mr. Hannahs, Ms. Rolles and Chair Matsui.

The motion was approved with majority votes.

OLD BUSINESS:

▪ Review of Current Committee Members' Terms:

Mr. Ritchie stated that there are two (2) members of the Sister-State Committee that are holdovers - Ms. Nakama and Mr. Topenio. They are eligible to serve another term but will not be able to continue serving after June 30, 2021, unless they are reappointed. Information relating to members' terms is posted on DBEDT's website. Mr. Ritchie then informed the committee that the Boards and Commissions person in the Governor's Office is aware of the holdovers, and that members who are interested in serving another term should advise DBEDT as well as the Boards and Commissions person in the Governor's Office. Holdovers are able to serve for another legislative session or two, provided that they do not exceed the eight (8) years that is allowed by law.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Discussion and Recommendation on Sister-State Application from Yamaguchi Kenjin Kai:

Mr. Ling welcomed and thanked the guests for attending the meeting in support of the Yamaguchi Sister-State application and asked that they introduce themselves. The guests met the Sister-State Committee members through the roll-call vote.

Mr. Ling gave an overview of the Yamaguchi Kenjin Kai's application for a sister-state relationship.

Mr. Ling stated that DBEDT received an application from the Yamaguchi Kenjin Kai to establish a sister-state relationship between the State of Hawaii and the Prefecture of Yamaguchi to foster cultural, economic and government ties between the two (2) jurisdictions. The applicant of the request is the Yamaguchi Kenjin Kai in Honolulu.

Mr. Ling noted that Yamaguchi Prefecture played a pivotal role in the modernization of Japan and since the time of the Kanyakuimin from Japan which is the 150th anniversary of immigration from Japan to Hawaii where over 10,000 people from Yamaguchi Prefecture immigrated to Hawaii. Mr. Ling also noted that Yamaguchi and Hawaii have enjoyed exchanges between Honolulu, Kauai, Hawaii Island, Kona and Maui in education, travel and government relations throughout the years.

Also, DBEDT received a letter from Governor Tsugumasa Muraoka stipulating that he would also be applying for a sister-state relationship between Yamaguchi Prefecture and Hawaii. Recently, the Legislature introduced a resolution recommending the sister-state relationship between Hawaii and Yamaguchi. This relationship has a lot of support, and Yamaguchi has been involved in schools exchanges, it developed a museum in Yamaguchi Prefecture dedicated to immigration to Hawaii, it has participated in Honolulu Festivals and other events here in Hawaii, and it is very active in fostering both the cultural as well as economic relations between Hawaii and Yamaguchi. Mr. Ling also noted that this is now a government related matter with the sister-state relationship and DBEDT hopes that the Sister-State Committee will provide strong support. He then advised that DBEDT supports the sister-state relationship between Yamaguchi Prefecture and the State of Hawaii.

Testimony in Support of the Application for Sister-State:

- 1) **Cheryl Shintani, Kauai Yamaguchi Kenjin Kai** advised that the Kauai Yamaguchi Kenjin Kai fully supports the Sister-State relationship between Yamaguchi Prefecture and the State Hawaii. Kauai has always been very close to Yamaguchi Prefecture and there is a Sister-City relationship between Suo-Oshima (located in Yamaguchi Prefecture) and Kauai. Ms. Shintani mentioned that there is a Yamaguchi University Exchange students program with Kauai. The Kauai Matsuri was started by the Chairman of Japan Assembly Mr. Yanai who is part of Yamaguchi Prefecture. Governor Muraoka visited Kauai twice and participated in community activities. Ms. Shintani also mentioned that she met the Minister of Defense from Iwakuni City in Yamaguchi Prefecture and that the Ministry has an agreement with Barking Sands Navy Base in Kauai and there are a lot of State connections as well as Kauai County connection with Yamaguchi Prefecture.
- 2) **Marilyn Higashide** shared that she is a retired teacher from Hokulani Elementary School. She shared her support for the Sister-State relationship between Hawaii and Yamaguchi Prefecture. She advised that on three (3) different occasions, Hokulani Elementary School took a group of students between the ages 9 and 11 (4th & 6th graders) to Yamaguchi and they were very warmly welcomed. They toured various sites including an elementary school in Iwakuni City which was quite special because many people immigrated from Iwakuni City to Hawaii and it was nice to visit there and to see where some of her ancestors came from. They also met various government officials. She also informed committee members that in February every year, Honolulu Kenjin Kai welcomes Otsu Ryokuyo High School, a prefectural high school in Yamaguchi that conducts fisheries training, tours aboard their ship, receptions, picnics, etc., They have also distributed large numbers of brochures and products from Yamaguchi during the Honolulu Festivals because their Kenjin Kai staffs a booth during the Festival. These brochures and products are sent annually by the Yamaguchi Prefectural

Government to Honolulu Yamaguchi Kenjin Kai aboard the Otsu Ryokuyo High School fisheries ship, the Kaiyu Maru. She shared other educational activities that the students participated in and enjoyed in Yamaguchi that made their trip very educational and memorable.

Lastly, at their recent Yamaguchi Kenjin Kai board meeting, members shared what they would like to see take place in the future with their clubs as well as with other Yamaguchi Kenjin Kais around the world. She said because we are home with the pandemic, we would like to show some interesting sightseeing areas and spots on our websites and contact Yamaguchi Kenjin Kai in other countries. A relationship that is cemented formally can help facilitate communication and enable programs to be developed that are of interest to the Kenjin Kais and Yamaguchi Prefecture.

- 3) **Debra Nakama from Maui** advised that Maui has a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Yamaguchi and that they have been in a relationship with them since 2017. There have been many exchanges between the two (2) campuses. She also mentioned that they have a new international director and are currently transitioning from Ms. Amy Wilson to the new director. In the past, the focus was on aging, health and fitness programs and their Center on Maui focused on activities for seniors. Yamaguchi students visited the Maui Language Institute and participated in their non-credit courses. The new focus, moving forward, especially during the pandemic, will be online learning and making sure that innovative ways are considered to keep the relationship active by using technology to further the relationship until travel opens up between Japan and Hawaii. Ms. Nakama stated on behalf of the University of Maui College, that they are looking forward to this sister-state relationship.

Ms. Shintani said she felt that one of the most important things in Yamaguchi Prefecture is the Museum of Japanese Immigration to Hawaii on Suo-Oshima Island. For a fee of US\$4.00, anyone from around the world would be able to find their roots and would not have to be from Yamaguchi Prefecture to do so. They would be able to track their ancestors that would include birthdates, and when they left Japan to emigrate to Hawaii, or to other places, and also provide addresses.

Ms. Shintani recently participated in a virtual tour of the museum and commented that it is a marvelous place.

A question was raised about the process of establishing the sister-state relationship.

Mr. Ling replied that the Legislature is waiting for the Sister-State Committee to make its decision and that a resolution would be drafted that will state that the Sister-State Committee has met and has approved the relationship and that they will then urge the signing of a sister-state agreement.

Ms. Nakama asked if there were any costs involved in the sister-state relationships. Mr. Ling replied that there is no cost involved to establish a sister-state relationship.

Mr. Ling said that one of the most important things about the sister-state relationship is the sustainability of the relationship and it is good to know that there are Kenjin Kai in each county of the neighbor islands and that will help sustain the relationship and move it forward.

Ms. Hiraoka said currently, DBEDT has five (5) sister-state relationships with the Prefectures of Okinawa, Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Ehime and Hokkaido. All of those relationships have been very active, whether it be via educational exchanges, youth sports exchange or participating in Economic Summits. In 2022 a Hawaii Japan Sister-State Convention is being organized by the Japan America Society of Hawaii. This is an opportunity to bring together all of the sister relationships that DBEDT has with Japan Prefectures as well as cities. The Prefectures are very active and they have developed their own priorities in terms of how they want to continue their interaction with Hawaii.

Ms. Shintani informed the committee members that from October 25-27, 2021, the Yamaguchi Prefecture Kenjinkai World Grand Meeting will be held in Yamaguchi City and about 30 people from Kauai are planning to attend in person. There will be a lot of tours especially to the immigration museum, to ancient Japanese sites and also to Yamaguchi University.

Mr. Kimura testified that he strongly supports the sister-state relationship, not only because there were thousands of migrants from Yamaguchi who immigrated to Hawaii but also because these immigrants greatly impacted Hawaii's economy, education and social fabric. He expressed that he has been fortunate to be able to trace his ancestry back 400 years now. He indicated that he has taken several trips to Yamaguchi and in 2019, guided 58 people on a tour to Yamaguchi. There is a lot of interest in Hawaii residents finding their roots in Yamaguchi. He felt that establishing a formal sister-state relationship would enable formal requests for information, etc. with the Yamaguchi Prefectural government. He said that on the education side, he is a teacher and has been offering virtual activities with Japanese schools and recently offered the same to Yamaguchi Prefecture. He is hoping that through education, they can build relationships between their students and those in Yamaguchi.

Mr. Topenio, Jr. asked about the population base of Yamaguchi Prefecture, the major source of the economy and if there were any affiliations with the University of Hawaii. He also asked what Yamaguchi's expectations were regarding the sister-state relationship with Hawaii.

Mr. Ling said the population of Yamaguchi Prefecture is similar to Hawaii's population with about 1.5 million people.

The main economic activity in Yamaguchi is fishing.

For several years, there have been many exchange activities such as visits and opportunities for student exchange with Yamaguchi University, Community Colleges and the University of Hawaii systems in Kauai. Kauai Community College is planning to bring over high school students from their Sister-City Suo-Shima so that they can eventually enroll in Kauai Community College.

Chair Matsui requested a motion to approve the Sister-State Relationship.

Motion was made by Ms. Rolles and seconded by Mr. Hannahs to approve the Sister-State Relationship between Yamaguchi Prefecture and the State of Hawaii.

Roll call vote was conducted by Ms. Kawamoto and the following committee members approved the motion: Ms. Nakama, Mr. Hannahs, Ms. Rolles, Mr. Topenio and Chair Matsui.

Motion was passed unanimously.

B. Review of 2020 Sister-States Annual Report to the Legislature:

Mr. Ritchie shared the 2020 Sister-State Annual Report with board members.

Mr. Ling reminded the Sister-State Committee members of the following:

- 2022 Japan Hawaii Sister-State Convention in Honolulu
- The Filipino Chamber of Commerce is planning the Hawaii Philippines Summit virtually at the moment, but he will see if they also would like to go live.
- Virtual Sister-State Summit would be in 2021 – will see if they would like to go live sometime in 2022.

Mr. Hannahs commented that now that we will be recommending the establishment of this relationship to the Hawaii State Legislature, he asked about the time-frame for the signing of the agreement given COVID-19 travel restrictions

Mr. Ling explained that the Legislature will pass a resolution regarding the sister-state relationship that will be sent up to the Governor with the Sister-State Committee's recommendations to enter into a relationship. As for the signing, in the interest of time it could be done virtually with Governor Ige signing here in Hawaii and Governor Muraoka signing in Yamaguchi. However, he believes that the Yamaguchi side also needs to approve their authorization to enter into the Sister-State Agreement.

Ms. Higashide will find out from her end, if the approval is in place so that the Governor of Yamaguchi can sign the Sister-State Agreement. She will then provide an update to DBEDT.

NEXT MEETING:

TBA

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 pm, on a motion by Ms. Nakama and seconded by Mr. Topenio.

Roll call vote was conducted by Ms. Kawamoto and the following committee members approved the motion: Ms. Nakama, Mr. Hannahs, Ms. Rolles, Mr. Topenio and Chair Matsui.

Motion was passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Kay matsui

Kay Matsui
Chair

Apr 13, 2021

Date