Hawai‘i Sister-State and International Partnerships Commission

Meeting Minutes
Date: May 13, 2026
Time: 7:50 p.m. (1 hour 16 minutes)
Location: Virtual (Zoom) & In-Person Hybrid

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1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by staff facilitator **Jamie Lum**, who opened the session while awaiting the arrival of all commissioners.

2. Roll Call & Quorum Verification

Commission members, legislative members, and invited staff gradually joined the meeting. Those present included:

- **Senator Chris Lee** (Non-voting, ex officio) – present
- **Representative Greggor Ilagan** – present
- **Brian Taniguchi** – present
- **Sherry Menor** – present
- **Karen Knudsen** – present
- **Wes Fong** – present
- **Deputy Attorney General Nicholas K. Kido** – present
- DBEDT staff: **Jamie Lum**, **Marlene Hiraoka**, **Tim Tu**

All five appointed commissioners were present, constituting a full quorum.

3. Introductions

Members exchanged greetings and informal updates regarding the legislative session and ongoing international affairs responsibilities. Several individuals introduced themselves to new members.

4. Election of Officers

4.1 Election of Chair

- **Nomination:** Senator Chris Lee nominated **Brian Taniguchi** for Chair.
- **Second:** Multiple seconds were offered.

- **Vote:** Unanimous approval; no other nominations.
  Result: Brian Taniguchi elected Chair.

4.2 Election of Vice Chair

- **Nomination:** Sherry Menor was nominated for Vice Chair.
- **Discussion:** Sherry initially deferred but ultimately accepted.
- **Vote:** Motion to close nominations passed; unanimous approval.
  Result: Sherry Menor elected Vice Chair.

5. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the **April 13, 2026** meeting (where quorum was not reached) were reviewed.

- Motion to approve: **Brian Taniguchi**
- Second: **Sherry Menor**
- Vote: Approved, with an abstention from Sherry due to absence at that meeting.

6. Sister-State Applications

6.1 Okayama Prefecture, Japan

DBEDT provided background on the application:

- Strong gubernatorial support from Okayama
- Application submitted with backing from the Hawai‘i–Okayama Kenjin Kai
- Active educational exchanges ongoing; additional agreements with DOE forthcoming
- Legislative resolution already passed

Commission Discussion:
Members expressed support noting benefits in education, cultural exchange, and economic ties.

Motion: Recommend proceeding with the sister-state relationship between Hawai‘i and **Okayama Prefecture**.
Vote: Unanimously approved.

6.2 Yamagata Prefecture, Japan

DBEDT described strong interest from Yamagata leadership and extensive community, educational, and agricultural ties:

- Active student exchanges (Stevenson Middle School, Tokai University system)
- Agricultural collaboration opportunities (particularly rice cultivation trials)
- Cultural and economic engagement already underway

Commission Discussion:
Questions were raised regarding how agricultural collaboration benefits Hawai‘i.
DBEDT clarified:

- Yamagata rice could be grown in Hawai‘i due to faster growing cycles
- Marketed as premium Japanese rice produced in Hawai‘i, benefiting local industry and job creation
- Educational exchanges strengthen international exposure for students

Motion: Recommend proceeding with the sister-state relationship between Hawai‘i and **Yamagata Prefecture**.
Vote: Unanimously approved.

7. New Business

7.1 Future Scope of Commission Work

Discussion was held on how the Commission should approach its broadened mandate under recent legislation enabling **international partnerships** beyond traditional state–prefecture structures.

Examples included New Zealand, Singapore, Tahiti, and others. Members expressed interest in identifying strategic opportunities and establishing guidelines for future international partnerships.

7.2 Review & Possible Renewal of Existing Sister-State Relationships

Members noted the need for periodic review of inactive sister-state agreements:

- Some long-standing partnerships show minimal recent activity
- Options discussed included: review every 5–10 years, revitalization efforts, or pausing relationships rather than terminating them
- Members acknowledged the historical significance of earlier-established relationships and encouraged efforts to re-engage partners before considering termination.

8. Upcoming Events & Announcements

8.1 Sister-State Summit – May 21, 2026

- Held at Hilton Hawaiian Village
- Governor to attend morning session
- Signing ceremony for the **Okayama sister-state agreement** scheduled during the morning plenary (approx. 8:30 a.m.)
- Members encouraged to attend; attire: aloha wear

8.2 Hawai‘i–Philippines Business Symposium – May 19, 2026

- Hosted at Lōkahi Hotel
- Includes marketplace, symposium, and reception
- Governor Marcos visiting Hawai‘i
- Commissioners will receive formal invitations; event begins at 3 p.m.

8.3 Upcoming Yamagata Signing Event

- Scheduled for July 30, 2026
- To include cultural and culinary elements (Yamagata delicacies, sake, etc.)
  Members will receive invitations through DBEDT.

9. Ethics and Legal Guidance

Deputy Attorney General Kido was asked to research two issues:

1. Whether commissioners must file annual financial disclosure forms
2. Whether commissioners may attend receptions or events hosted by partner jurisdictions without violating ethics rules

DAG Kido will consult with the State Ethics Commission and report back.

10. Scheduling of Future Meetings

Due to member travel schedules and upcoming events, the Commission agreed to hold the next meeting on:

Wednesday, July 15, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. (HST)

Members discussed potentially adopting a regular meeting schedule in the future (e.g., quarterly).

11. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 9:06 p.m. (based on transcript end