Hawai‘i Sister-State and International Partnerships Commission

Meeting Minutes

Date: September 28, 2026
Time: 9:00 a.m.–approximately 1:10 p.m.
Location: 250 South Hotel Street, 5th Floor Conference Room 507, Honolulu, HI & MS Teams

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1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Brian Taniguchi at 9:10 a.m.

2. Roll Call & Quorum Verification

Members present (various times during the first several minutes of the meeting):

- Brian Taniguchi, Chair
- Wesley Fong
- Karen Knudsen
- Representative Greggor Ilagan
- Sherry Menor (joined meeting at 9:15 a.m.)
- Deputy Attorney General (DAG) Nicholas K. Kido
- Additional staff and members of the public, including Keith Sakuda and Nikita (Deputy AG staff)
- Marlene Hiraoka (DBEDT)
- Constancio Paranal III (DBEDT)
- Jamie Lum (DBEDT)

Quorum Discussion

A lengthy clarification was held regarding quorum and voting requirements:

- The Commission consists of 7 total members: 5 voting and 2 non-voting legislative members.
- Quorum to conduct a meeting: 4 members.
- Quorum to vote on agenda items or motions: 4 voting members.
- DAG Kido confirmed prior guidance: quorum and voting thresholds are determined by “majority of all members to which the commission is entitled,” not solely voting members.

- Because fewer than four voting members were present initially, voting actions were temporarily restricted.

Sherry Menor's arrival later allowed the Commission to reach full voting quorum.

3. Public Testimony

Mr. Raymond Sin, United States Air Force, provided oral testimony addressing:

- Historical parallels between Hawai'i, Taiwan, and Singapore.
- The importance of diplomacy, multiculturalism, and geopolitical awareness.
- Relevance of military history and potential future regional conflicts.
- Commendation for the Commission's work.

4. Administrative Matters

4.1 Ethics Requirements

DAG Kido presented follow-up guidance from the State Ethics Commission regarding:

- Treatment of ceremonial gifts (must remain State property if intended for the State).
- Event attendance generally not posing a gift/conflict issue.
- The $200 reporting threshold for gifts.
- Conflict-of-interest concerns when attending events after voting on a Sister-State recommendation: no inherent conflict.
- Commissioners encouraged to seek individual guidance when uncertain.

4.2 Financial Disclosure Requirement

There was uncertainty regarding whether Commissioners must file annual financial disclosure statements.

- Wesley Fong and Sherry Menor discussed differences between public vs. non-public disclosures.
- DAG Kido agreed to follow up with the Ethics Commission and provide written clarification.

4.3 Expense Reimbursements

- DBEDT will reimburse eligible expenses (e.g., parking, official participation costs).
- There is no Commission programmatic budget currently.
- Larger expenses (e.g., travel) may require future appropriations.

5. Commission Budget

Discussion addressed the Commission's lack of a current operating budget.

- A prior $200,000 appropriation for a strategic study was referenced; funds appear to be supporting work with the East-West Center.
- Uncertainty remains about availability of prior appropriations.
- Future budget requests must be submitted through DBEDT in time for the Governor's December budget review.

6. Review of Recent Legislation: Act 158 (2025) & Act 181 (2026)

6.1 Expansion to International Partnerships

Staff and commissioners discussed legislative changes enabling international partnerships beyond traditional state–province/prefecture models.
Examples discussed:

- New Zealand
- Singapore
- Regional bodies such as ASEAN

6.2 Legislative Intent & Commission Process

Representative Greggor Ilagan provided legislative perspective:

- He supports routing all new Sister-State or international partnership proposals through the Commission first.
- Legislators may still introduce bills independently, but he will not advance measures unless the Commission has reviewed them.
- Commissioners should begin making decisions rather than waiting to perfect procedures.

7. Sister-State Selection & Retention Process

Commissioners asked DBEDT staff to provide existing written procedures previously used by the Sister-State Committee.
Interest was expressed in:

- Evaluating existing sister-state relationships.
- Reviewing frequency and quality of engagement with partners such as Yamaguchi, Guangdong, Azores, Morocco, and others.

8. Inventory of International Relationships

Commissioners emphasized the need to understand Hawai‘i's broader international ecosystem:

- DOE school partnerships (not well documented previously).

- University of Hawai‘i MOUs.
- Private institutional relationships (e.g., Punahou School international ties).
- State-level international agreements.

DBEDT staff will begin compiling an initial inventory

9. Discussion of Upcoming International Events & Anniversaries

9.1 Sister-State Anniversaries in 2027

Multiple partners have milestone anniversaries next year, including:

- Azores (45th)
- Hiroshima (30th)
- Agusan del Norte, Philippines (25th)

Other anniversaries also pending.

9.2 Hiroshima 30th Anniversary Events

- Delegations expected to travel May 2027 for ceremonies and a “Hawai‘i Night” at a Hiroshima baseball game (date pending release of season schedule).
- A return delegation to Hawai‘i is expected in October 2027.
- Governor Green has been invited; travel decisions expected in December.

9.3 Jeju (Korea) 40th Anniversary

- A delegation will travel to Seoul and Jeju at the end of October.
- A luncheon for the anniversary will be organized with Jeju officials.

9.4 Guangdong Province Engagement

- Guangdong's Lieutenant Governor extended an invitation to Governor Green to visit.
- Commission discussed placing this on a future agenda due to Sunshine Law constraints.

9.5 Taiwan National Day (10/10)

Several commissioners were invited to the celebration event on October 6.

10. Sunshine Law Considerations

Commissioners were reminded:

- To avoid emailing other commissioners directly (to prevent serial communication).
- They may email staff or DAG individually with questions.

- Agenda amendments require a 2/3 vote—which requires all five voting members present.

A motion to add Guangdong/Hainan delegation discussion to the agenda was withdrawn after determining the Commission lacked sufficient voting members for a 2/3 vote.

11. Scheduling Future Meetings

Members agreed to meet:

- October 26, 2026 – 9:30 a.m.
- November 30, 2026 – 9:30 a.m.
- December 21, 2026 – 9:30 a.m.

12. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:10 p.m.