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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

RE: HR148, URGING THE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION TO REQUEST
HCR179 THE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO CHANGE THE NAME OF
PRESIDENT WILLIAM MCKINLEY HIGH SCHOOL BACK TO THE
SCHOOL'S PREVIOUS NAME OF HONOLULU HIGH SCHOOL AND
TO REMOVE THE STATUE OF PRESIDENT MCKINLEY FROM THE
SCHOOL PREMISES.

THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2021

JODI KUNIMITSU, CHAIR, HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS COMMITTEE
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Kapela, and members of the House Committee on Education:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association's Human and Civil Rights Committee **supports HR 148 and HCR 179** in urging the Superintendent of Education to request the Board of Education to change the name of President William McKinley High School back to the school's previous name of Honolulu High School and to remove the statue of President McKinley from the school premises.

Our committee is made up of educators across the state who are passionate about racial and social justice work. We strive to promote non-discriminatory spaces for educators and learners, and advocate on behalf of our students and communities; a reflection of HSTA's value to uphold high standards of truth and ethics.

We are speaking out today because we believe the name President William McKinley High School is damaging to our students, especially those in our Native Hawaiian community. It does not matter that this name has been in place for more than a century. We cannot turn a blind eye to this dark stain in Hawai'i's history, and the continued oppression and harm it causes to this day.

Communities across the country are taking bold steps to scrutinize, change, even take down monuments, names, and mascots as we learn and understand more about colonization and white

supremacy and their devastating impacts on indigenous groups and communities of color.

It's time for Hawai'i to do the same.

Changing this school's name will not erase or diminish the impressive accomplishments, pride, and accolades of its students, alumni, faculty, staff, and supporters. The school's proud legacy never relied on a mere name, but rather the people who make up its distinguished, vibrant community. A person's love of school and love of name are not the same.

Furthermore, reverting back to Honolulu High School will have nowhere near the devastation that the naming of President William McKinley High School did in 1907. The decision to honor a man who annexed a country against the will of her queen and people reflected a larger movement to indoctrinate students and erase their cultural identity. We cannot expect Native Hawaiian students, or those of any oppressed cultures and people, to pursue an education under the shadow of a figure who robbed their elders of their own education.

The school has a tradition that discourages anyone from crossing the oval ground surrounding the statue as a sign of "respect." Whether they realize it or not, students must practice a form of reverence every time they cross the quad. We must acknowledge and dismantle the institutionalized racism that pervades our system and perpetuates generations of trauma.

Opponents will label this as cancel culture. But we believe it's an opportunity to celebrate; a chance to truly honor a great school with a better name. Names are a cornerstone of our identity. In Hawaiian culture, names are chosen with great deliberation to imbue their possessors with sacred story and energy. Therefore, **we ask for your support of HR 148 and HCR 179** to change the name of McKinley High School to one that is more honorable and appropriate for our islands.

The testimony submitted by HSTA, also in support of this resolution, is available to view online at hsta.org/honoluluhigh and explains the key themes behind this movement. If you would like more information on our position or this topic, we are happy to continue this conversation.

Mahalo nui for your time and consideration to do what is right for future generations of Hawai'i's keiki.

Hawaii State Teachers Association
Human and Civil Rights Committee

Jodi Kunimitsu, State Chair
Heidi Alvarez, Kaua'i Chapter
Jill Fletcher, Leeward Chapter
Roy Hannu, Central Chapter
Kit Brizuela, Windward Chapter
Kaleo Ramos, Honolulu Chapter
Sarah Jane Larkin, Moloka'i Chapter

Brenda Palumbo, Lāna'i Chapter
Kapolei Kiili, Maui Chapter
Nicole Heinlein, Maui Chapter
Karina Hernandez, Kona Chapter
Elizabeth Sharrock, Hilo Chapter
Daphna Ehrenhalt, Hilo Chapter
Dana Gorelangton Turnbull, HSTA-Retired