The Honorable Ron Menor, Chair
and Members
City Council Committee on Executive
Matters and Legal Affairs
530 South King Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Menor and Councilmembers:

Subject: Opposition to Resolution 17-308, CD1 – Charter Amendment Relating to Honolulu Police Commission
Hearing: Committee on Executive Matters and Legal Affairs, Tuesday, May 22, 2018 at 1:00 p.m.

On behalf of the Honolulu Police Commission, I am writing in opposition to Resolution 17-308, CD1. I apologize as the Commission is unable to attend Tuesday’s hearing due to attendance at the 2018 State of Hawaii Police Commissioners Conference being held in Kona, Hawaii from May 21 to May 22, 2018. Please accept our letter in lieu of an in-person appearance and please note that this is a very important matter the Commission collectively agreed is not in the best interest of the Honolulu Police Department or the citizens of Honolulu.

Resolution 17-308, CD1, which is proposing a Charter Amendment that would change the way in which the Honolulu Chief of Police is selected, is unnecessary, unjustified, disruptive to the structure of the Police Commission, limits the accountability of the Mayor, and narrows the ability of citizens—unattached to the Honolulu Police Department to hire, fire and evaluate the Chief of the Honolulu Police Department. Due to the recent Charter Amendments approved by the voters just two years ago that allows the Honolulu Police Commission increased powers in hiring and firing the Chief of Police, we respectfully request this Committee defer this Resolution indefinitely. The Commission also requests the Council provide the Commission the opportunity to operate under the new Charter and serve in its capacity as commissioners charged with enhancing public confidence, trust and support in the integrity fairness and respect of the police department, its officers and all employees.

Resolution 17-308, CD1 purports to offer that one of the justifications for shifting appointment authority of commissioners from the Mayor to the Council is that it will “provide the Commission with a broader perspective in its selection of a new Police Chief going forward.”
To the contrary, the change would do just the opposite under the Resolution with appointments to the Commission being made jointly with Council, but the appointment of the Chief sitting with the Mayor, which could lead to a lack of accountability and all such oversight would be held by a single person. The Commission is, and has been, quite broad in its perspective. For decades mayors have been quite sensitive to the need for diversity, and historically, have appointed persons of differing ages, genders, races, and occupations.

Another justification for the resolution is that “having Council appointees on the Commission will better ensure that responses to inquiries from Councilmembers to the Commission are addressed in a timely manner.” In short, the resolution appears to suggest that councilmembers may bypass the Chair of the Police Commission to have questions answered by their own appointees. Current appointees have made it a point to remain accessible to the Council regarding any inquiries the Council may have and would like to continue to have open dialogue if questions arise. One suggestion may be to appear before the appropriate committee on a regular basis to provide updates to the Council as issues arise.

It is important to recognize the strength of our City Charter, which provides the Commission with the power to hire, fire, and evaluate the Chief of Police, a Commission made up of citizens who are free from potential loyalties or grudges with the Honolulu Police Department. Citizens with experience in law, business, community enterprises, victim support agencies, government, science, technology, and education bring a fresh analysis into the room.

We at the Police Commission are at a critical stage, with the majority of members making up a brand new Commission. We have a new Chief, and two new Deputy Chiefs. As a citizen body, we understand that our role is to be as apolitical as possible, as we work with the Chief to improve the Department.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

LORETTA A. SHEEHAN
Chair

c: Office of the Mayor
Members of the Honolulu Police Commission