



Highlights from the 2023-2024 Hawai‘i Legislature Legislative Effectiveness Scores

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Executive Summary

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) is pleased to announce the release of the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) for the recently completed 2023-2024 Hawai‘i State Legislature legislative session. This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We identify the top-10 most effective legislators in the majority party in both chambers, the top-3 most effective minority-party lawmakers in the House of Representatives, and the most effective minority-party lawmaker in the Senate. Many listed lawmakers continued their patterns of highly effective lawmaking that they exhibited in the previous legislative session.
- We identify the top lawmaker across both chambers with the longest streak of being in our prestigious “Above Expectations” category.
- Due to the small number of Republicans in the legislature, partisanship is not the defining lawmaking feature in Hawai‘i. Rather, institutional positions such as being Speaker of the House, President of the Senate, and committee chair in both chambers offer legislators influential posts for lawmaking.
- Across both chambers, consistent with our prior research, serving as a committee chair is related to greater lawmaking effectiveness. Indeed, those lacking a committee chair position or leadership position played a relatively minor lawmaking role in 2023-2024, offering only 94 bills that became law, compared to 422 arising from proposals of committee and chamber leaders.
- In addition, our findings indicate that effective lawmakers in one legislative session are likely to remain effective lawmakers across sessions, as several legislators appear among the top-10, top-3, or top most effective lawmakers list in both the 2023-2024 and 2021-2022 legislative sessions.

Introduction and Methodology

The State Legislative Effectiveness Scores discussed here are based on the combination of fifteen metrics capturing the bills that each member of each state legislature sponsors, how far their bills move through the lawmaking process, and how substantial their policy proposals are. The scores are normalized to an average value of 1.0 in both the House of Representatives and the State Senate in each legislative session. More on our [methodology](#) and [scores](#) can be found at our website.

For each member of the House of Representatives and State Senate, we also identify a Benchmark Score, based on the average lawmaking effectiveness of legislators who share that legislator’s majority- or minority-party status, level of seniority, and chair position on a committee. Controlling for these considerations is important in order to describe legislators on a more level playing field. For example, in the 2023-2024 Hawai‘i House of Representatives, minority-party lawmakers had an average SLES of 0.22 compared to 1.10 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average SLES of 1.14. In the State Senate, those averages were 0.21 in the minority party, 1.07 in the majority party, and 1.14 among committee chairs.

We then label each lawmaker as “Above Expectations” for those outperforming their benchmark scores by 50% or more, “Below Expectations” for those below 50% of their benchmark, and “Meeting Expectations” for all other legislators.

Finally, within each party, we rank each member according to their SLES. This ranking is used to generate the lists of top performers highlighted in the tables below. Given the substantial lawmaking benefit that follows from being in the majority party, ranking the entire Hawai‘i State Legislature together would be inappropriate, but these comparisons within each party are quite informative.

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Hawai‘i House of Representatives

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Democrats in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives. Nine of the top ten were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—House Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	Scott Saiki (District 25)	17.87	None
2.	Linda Ichiyama (District 31)	2.08	Chair
3.	Scot Matayoshi (District 49)	1.81	Chair
4.	Cedric Gates (District 45)	1.63	Chair
5.	Kyle Yamashita (District 12)	1.48	Chair
6.	Nicole Lowen (District 7)	1.47	Chair
7.	David Tarnas (District 8)	1.38	Chair
8.	Justin Woodson (District 9)	1.24	Chair

9.	Amy Perruso (District 46)	1.21	Chair
10.	John Mizuno (District 29)	1.03	Chair

At the top of the list is Representative Scott Saiki from District 25 (Kāhala and Moiliili) with a score of 17.87. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, he introduced 699 bills, 469 received action in committee, 391 received action beyond committee, 322 passed the House of Representatives, and 136 became law. Rep. Saiki has served in the House of Representatives since 1994.

While in office, Rep. Saiki served as the Speaker of the House from 2017-2024 and as the Majority Leader from 2013-2017. In addition, Rep. Saiki served as the President of the National Conference of State Legislatures from 2021-2022. He holds a B.A. in political science from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and a J.D. from the William S. Richardson School of Law. After earning his J.D., Saiki began practicing disability law and personal injury litigation.

In 2024, Rep. Saiki lost his seat in a close primary election to Rep. Kim Coco Iwamoto. Since leaving public office, Rep. Saiki has been appointed by Governor Josh Green as the Insurance Commissioner in the Hawai‘i State Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs.

Four Democratic Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. Scott Saiki (District 25), Rep. Linda Ichiyama (District 31), Rep. Nicole Lowen (District 7), and Rep. David Tarnas (District 8).

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Hawai‘i House of Representatives

The following table identifies the top-three highest-scorers in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives among minority-party Republicans.

Top Three List—House Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Lauren Matsumoto (District 38)	0.39	6
2.	Gene Ward (District 18)	0.23	9
3.	Diamond Garcia (District 42)	0.18	1

Topping our list is Representative Lauren Matsumoto of District 38 (Schofield, Waialua, Kūia, Waipio Acres, and Mililani), with a State Legislative Effectiveness Score of 0.39. She introduced 47 bills in the 2023-2024 legislative session, 10 of which received action in committee, and 6 of which received action beyond committee, 5 of which passed the House and 1 of which became law.

Rep. Matsumoto has been the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives since 2022. She is a 6th-generation Hawai‘ian, a member of the Daughters of Hawai‘i, a former Miss Hawai‘i, and a 2012 Miss America contestant. Rep. Matsumoto holds a B.A. in film production from the

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and was a Division-1 water polo player. Rep. Matsumoto currently works on her family's farm, Petersons’ Upland Farm, which was established in 1910.

Two Republican Representatives on our current list were also among the top-3 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. Lauren Matsumoto (District 38) and Rep. Gene Ward (District 18).

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 2023-2024 Hawai‘i State Senate

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Democrats in the 2023-2024 State Senate. Nine of the top ten were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—Senate Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Committee Chair</u>
1.	Ronald Kouchi (District 8)	4.47	None
2.	Karl Rhoads (District 13)	2.08	Chair
3.	Donovan Cruz (District 17)	1.68	Chair
4.	Chris Lee (District 25)	1.68	Chair
5.	Joy San Buenaventura (District 2)	1.44	Chair
6.	Jarrett Keohokalole (District 24)	1.29	Chair
7.	Sharon Moriwaki (District 12)	1.25	Chair
8.	Stanley Chang (District 9)	1.12	Chair
9.	Lorraine Inouye (District 1)	1.08	Chair
10.	Mike Gabbard (District 21)	1.07	Chair

Among Democrats in the State Senate, Senator Ronald Kouchi from District 8 (Kaua‘i, Ni‘ihau, Lehua, and Kaula) ranked first with a SLES score of 4.47. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, he introduced 490 bills, 256 received action in committee, 226 received action beyond committee, 135 passed the Senate, and 52 became law. Sen. Kouchi has been in office since 2010. He is the former Vice President and current President of the Senate.

Before joining the Senate, Sen. Kouchi served for 22 years on the Kaua‘i County Council. He was the Council Chair for 12 years and served as the Director of the National Association of Counties. Professionally, he is a former lobbyist for the County of Kaua‘i and is a former legislative analyst. Rep. Kouchi attended Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. In the community, he is involved in the Kaua‘i Chamber of Commerce, Kaua‘i Visitors Board, and other local organizations.

Seven legislators on the list were among the top-10 highest scoring Senate Democrats in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Sen. Ronald Kouchi (District 8), Sen. Karl Rhoads (District 13), Sen. Donovan Cruz (District 17), Sen. Chris Lee (District 25), Sen. Sharon Moriwaki (District 12), Sen. Stanley Chang (District 9), and Sen. Mike Gabbard (District 21).

Highly Effective Republican Lawmaker in the 2023-2024 Hawai‘i State Senate

Most Effective Senate Republican Lawmaker (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

The following table identifies the top scorer in the 2023-2024 State Senate among minority-party Republicans.

	<u>Name</u>	<u>LES</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Kurt Fevella (District 20)	0.31	3

Senator Kurt Fevella from District 20 (‘Ewa Beach, Ocean Pointe, ‘Ewa by Gentry, Iroquois Point, and ‘Ewa Village) had the highest SLES for Senate Republicans in the 2023-2024 legislative session, with a score of 0.31. He introduced 78 bills, 19 received action in committee, 15 received action beyond committee, and 10 passed the Senate.

Sen. Fevella joined the Senate in 2018 and was the first non-Democrat elected to the body since 2014. He is currently the Senate's Minority Leader. He was born and raised in ‘Ewa Beach and is a former school custodian at ‘Ewa Makai Middle School. Before public office, Sen. Fevella was a member of the ‘Ewa Neighborhood Board and President of the ‘Ewa Lions Club.

Sen. Fevella was also the top Republican Senator during the 2021-2022 legislative session.

Lawmakers with Long-Standing Patterns of “Above Expectations”

Those who significantly exceed their benchmark score, which is calculated based on their seniority and status as a majority party member and/or committee chairperson, are identified as being in our “Above Expectations” category. The lists below identify the Representatives with the longest active streaks of exceeding expectations in consecutive sessions continuing through (and including) the 2023-2024 legislative session.

**State Representative with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Scott Saiki (D-25)	4 Legislative Sessions	17.87	15 Legislative Sessions

Representative Scott Saiki (D) of District 25 (Kapahulu and Moiliili) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations," with 4 legislative sessions, and a SLES score of 17.87 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. Since the 2017-2018 legislative session, Rep. Saiki has held the top SLES score across the House of Representatives.

**State Senator with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Streak</u>	<u>SLES (2023-2024)</u>	<u>Seniority</u>
1.	Ronald Kouchi (D-8)	5 Legislative Sessions	4.47	7 Legislative Sessions

Senator Ronald Kouchi (D) of District 8 (Kaua‘i, Ni‘ihau, Lehua, and Kaula) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations," with 5 legislative sessions, and a SLES score of 4.47 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. Sen. Kouchi has held the top spot as the most effective legislator in the Senate since the 2015-2016 legislative session.

Other Findings

In terms of broader patterns, due in part to the very few Republican lawmakers in Hawai‘i, effective lawmaking in the legislature is organized on grounds other than partisanship. In particular, the vast majority of lawmaking runs through leadership positions – namely through the Speaker of the House, President of the Senate, and committee chairs in both chambers.

To give a sense of the scope of this institutionalized influence, the average SLES among those not in such leadership positions in 2023-2024 was 0.43 in the House and 0.44 in the Senate. Put another way, of the 516 laws produced during the term, only 94 were sponsored by legislators not in such privileged positions, compared to 234 coming from committee chairs, another 52 sponsored by the President of the Senate, and 136 sponsored by the House Speaker.

Conclusion

The 2023-2024 Hawai‘i legislative session demonstrated consistent patterns in legislative effectiveness, with experienced legislators, committee chairs, and majority-party members continuing to hold a distinct advantage in advancing their policy agendas. Across both chambers, many of the most effective lawmakers continued their high performance from previous sessions, indicating a durable capacity for lawmaking among key figures. These findings underscore the importance of institutional positions and experiences in shaping legislative outcomes in Hawai‘i.