

# Resolution

No. 25-119

## URGING THE HAWAI'I TOURISM AUTHORITY BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE TO ENSURE A SAFE AND WELCOMING WORK ENVIRONMENT FOR KANAKA 'ŌIWI AND WOMEN

WHEREAS, the Hawai'i Tourism Authority's mission is to “strategically manage Hawai'i tourism in a sustainable manner consistent with economic goals, cultural values, preservation of natural resources, community desires and visitor industry needs”; and

WHEREAS, HTA's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan recognizes the legal requirement “to perpetuate the uniqueness and integrity of the Native Hawaiian culture and community” for visitors and residents; and

WHEREAS, a regenerative tourism industry centered on kanaka 'ōiwi ensures it aligns with 'Ike Hawai'i to protect their culture, 'āina, and people, rather than extracting from them; and

WHEREAS, until March 18, 2025, HTA's leadership consisted of reputable kanaka 'ōiwi who steered HTA toward regenerative tourism, such as awarding its U.S. Brand Management and Global Support Services contract in 2002 to the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, a kanaka 'ōiwi-led organization; and

WHEREAS, on March 19, 2025, Interim HTA President and CEO Daniel Naho'opi'i, who is kanaka 'ōiwi, sent a resignation letter alleging the work environment was, “at times, outright hostile”; and

WHEREAS, on May 4, 2025, the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* reported HTA and the State of Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism failed to address complaints about a hostile work environment, including alleged racist and sexist comments; and

WHEREAS, one reported incident occurred during an August 2023 meeting when HTA's Vice President of Finance and Acting Chief Administrative Officer was alleged to refer to Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement leaders as “dumb Hawaiians”; and

WHEREAS, a pattern of behavior followed that was “race-based in its inequity,” according to Tyler Gomes, Administrator for the Council for

Native Hawaiian Advancement's Kilohana Collective, as quoted in a *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* article on May 9, 2025;

WHEREAS, the behavior included the delay of earned payments totaling \$3.5 million to the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement and CNHA's Kilohana Collective, despite the invoices being approved by the contract manager; and

WHEREAS, the lack of action resulted in the resignation of five kanaka 'ōiwi members from HTA's leadership team:

- HTA Brand Manager;
- HTA Senior Brand Manager;
- HTA Public Affairs Officer;
- HTA Chief Stewardship Officer; and
- HTA Interim Public Affairs Officer; and

WHEREAS, Governor Josh Green, M.D. stated that he has directed the Attorney General Ann Lopez and Department of Human Resources and Development to investigate and act on the allegations; and

WHEREAS, on May 5, 2025, State Senator Kurt Fevella called for the resignation of HTA's Vice President of Finance and Acting Chief Administrative Officer and the Director of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism; and

WHEREAS, kanaka 'ōiwi leadership in tourism is essential for a sustainable future that honors and preserves authentic cultural practices rather than commodifying and exploiting Hawaiian culture that is disrespectful or inaccurate; and

WHEREAS, profits generated from extractive tourism have historically gone to outside corporations while kanaka 'ōiwi face high costs of living, displacement, and economic marginalization; and

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WHEREAS, kanaka ‘ōiwi-led initiatives ensure wealth stays in the community and create meaningful jobs for community members; and

WHEREAS, Maui County’s Countywide Policy Plan includes the following goals and objectives:

- “Perpetuate the Hawaiian culture as a vital force in the lives of residents”;
- “Perpetuate an authentic image of the Hawaiian culture and history and an appropriate recognition of the host culture”; and
- “Encourage the retention and hiring of qualified professionals who can improve cultural and environmental practices”; and

WHEREAS, according to quotes in a May 4, 2025, *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* article, HTA’s Vice President of Finance and Acting Chief Administrative Officer “has made female board members feel belittled and has created a hostile work environment” and exhibited “a chauvinistic attitude toward women”; and

WHEREAS, the community and local government are responsible to hold those accountable for behavior that counters the values we uphold, emulate, and enshrine in agency mission statements; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the County of Maui:

1. That it urges the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority be held accountable to ensure a safe and welcoming work environment for kanaka ‘ōiwi and women; and
2. That certified copies of this Resolution be transmitted to James Tokioka, Director of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, State of Hawai‘i; Todd Apo, Board Chair, Hawai‘i Tourism Authority Board; the Honorable Governor Josh Green, M.D., State of Hawai‘i; and the Honorable Richard T. Bissen, Jr., Mayor, County of Maui.

INTRODUCED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Keani Rawlins-Fernandez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath it.

KEANI N. W. RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ