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Gary Y. Murai
Wailuku, Maui
January 27, 2019

OFFICE OF THE
COUNTY COUNCIL

TO: Michael Molina, Chair, Governance, Ethics and Transparency Committee

FROM: Gary Y. Murai

RE: Testimony in Support of the appointment of Patrick K. Wong as Corporation Counsel, GET-1(2)

I wholeheartedly support confirmation of Patrick K. Wong as Corporation Counsel for the County of Maui.

I have firsthand knowledge of Mr. Wong's knowledge of the law and analytical skills because I have served as a Deputy Corporation Counsel under Mr. Wong since he was appointed in 2011. When Mr. Wong was first appointed, he was criticized for not having experience as a government lawyer. That criticism has been proven wrong. Mr. Wong has shown himself to be an extremely quick study who has an innate ability to make the right call. Mr. Wong has also shown himself to be a skilled manager and director of a county department.

During Mr. Wong's current (and third) confirmation, I have heard criticism leveled at Mr. Wong that he favors outside interests over the interests of the County of Maui. While that opinion may be sincerely held, it is mistaken. The Corporation Counsel is unique in that it and the Prosecuting Attorney are the only department directors that are bound by the Rules of Professional Conduct that govern lawyers in Hawaii. Those rules govern the conduct of lawyers and impose the duties of care and loyalty to their client. In Mr. Wong's case, his client is the County of Maui. As a result, the Corporation Counsel must have the courage to say "no" or render advice that is unpopular, but correct. I have never seen Mr. Wong's adherence to the rule of law or his duty of loyalty to the County of Maui swayed by politics or public opinion.

As you can see from the testimony of my fellow Deputies Corporation Counsel, we are extremely loyal to Mr. Wong and each other. I believe this loyalty is due in large part to Mr. Wong's respect for us as lawyers. When our office takes actions that are unpopular, Mr. Wong will never assign blame to his deputies. He is a "the buck stops here" kind of boss and we appreciate that.

I join with my colleagues in support of Mr. Wong's appointment and urge the Committee to pass GET-1(2) to the full Council.