Poka Laenui, Chair

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Delegates, Council and Executive Officers

Aloha Kakou,

I am writing to bring you news of movement of the Native Hawaiian Convention. To recall generally, we have met in several gatherings of the Convention to work toward our charge to propose a form of governance for the Native Hawaiian people. At our convention on Kaua`i, we generally concluded on two directions for our recommendation – a form of an independent Hawaiian nation and an alternative form of a Federally recognized Hawaiian “nation” under the domestic laws of the United States. We had reached a stage close to completion for the first recommendation, independence, and were relying on the results of the Akaka bill making its way through the U.S. Congress to give us guidance in proposing the Federal recognition form.

We subsequently turned to the Legislature and to OHA for additional funding for another general meeting to conclude our work and make the recommendations to our Native Hawaiian people. At that point, we hit a roadblock where our request was not even considered by the Senate committee on Hawaiian Affairs. We have been without funding, Ha Hawai`i, the support organization also ran out of funding and shut down, and we have been left without ability to conclude our work.

We have remained in existence. We have not adjourned our convention “sine die”. Meanwhile we have had delegates, moku representatives, and executive council officer pass on. However, we do have operating rules which sets forth our continuing operation. We can take further action to advance our original charge of proposing a form of Hawaiian governance.

During the passing years, I have met many of you outside of the convention and have had your assurance that you favor the completion of our mandate. We have seen various efforts to take up a portion of the question of Hawaiian governance appearing in many different forms. They have not been successful, in my estimation. The most recent attempt which called for a convention in February 2016 (Na`i Aupuni congregation) fell short on many counts.

Now we have an effort which I am fully in support of and ask for your support as well. This is not an effort to form a Hawaiian governing entity, but an effort to stop the discrimination against Hawaiian nationals from full participation withing the present formal and informal society. It is a resolution which I have requested, along with others, to have introduced in the Legislature. Senator Maile Shimabukuro, Chairperson of the Hawaiian Affairs Committee has introduced the resolution. SCR 189 and SR159

The current resolution calls upon the Native Hawaiian Convention (NHC) to convene a working group of 9 people, one of whom shall be from the NHC to act as the group’s chairperson. Four others are to come from government agencies/entities (OHA, AG, Law School, DHHl) and four Hawaiian Nationals nominated by organizations and selected by NHC and the Governor or designee.

Please familiarize yourself with the Resolution. It is now scheduled for hearing for March 17, 2020 at 1:15 p.m. Room number not now available. If not able to attend, you may submit written testimony for these resolutions directly to the committee.

I am completely in support of this resolution and I ask that you support it as well. It does not address our specific mandate for proposing a form of Hawaiian governance as we had contemplated, but I feel it’s a small step in that direction and one which can be put into effect quickly. Someone commented that it could be the role of the NHC which will put it back on the agenda to fund the convention to completion eventually.

Hawaiian Nationals such as many of us have been pushed aside to the margins of the Hawaii society for decades. Once someone claims to retain loyalty to Hawaii and not to the U.S.A., we are discriminated against. When we claim that we are Hawaiian Nationals and not U.S. citizens, we are blocked from getting a job, from getting a driver’s license, from opening a bank account, from serving on a jury in cases where our own Hawaiian Nationals are standing for trial, from voting, from holding public office, and the list goes on. Soon, given the rules of the U.S. transportation security authority, we will not be able to fly inter-island or out of or into Hawaii because we are not U.S. citizens or do not posses a “green card” allowing our entry!

Some of us may get pass the official “checkers” either unintentionally or purposefully. Some of us take a stand that any colonial law which deprive us of our fundamental right to life and human rights need not be obeyed and so we go ahead and check any box which gets us to practice our rights, such as getting employment, traveling, or obtaining medical services. But why should we be put in a place of having to operate with any falsity? This resolution should address this matter and settle Hawaii’s policy of such discrimination.

This will not be an easy matter to settle. There will be continuing questions of Hawaiian Nationals’ contribution to the cost of government services, participation in public offices, and other details. The resolution calls for a period of 3 years for this group of 9 to meet and recommend to the legislature a fair resolution to these questions.

Perhaps finally, we will be able to reach a point where Hawaiian Nationals may be able to choose to participate in the formal aspects of the State without losing our claim of our Hawaiian national allegiance and quest for our Hawaiian nation. Each individual will be given their right to choose to vote, to serve on juries, seek and retain employment, to seek public office, without losing the claim of being a Hawaiian National.

The Native Hawaiian Convention has adopted operating rules which are structured in three steps. When the convention is in session, the convention is the highest authority. When not, the Council made up of Moku representatives and the Executive officers decide the actions of the convention. When the Council is not in operation, the Executive officers are expected to act on behalf of the convention.

We do not have the capacity to call a general Convention of all delegates. The next best thing is to call the representatives of all the moku along with the Executive officers to a Council meeting. If this fails, I will gather the remaining Executive officers to move on this matter.

I would like to hear from all of you after you have reviewed this resolution and considered what action the Native Hawaiian Convention should take. My contacts are in the letterhead above. I especially would like to hear from the Moku representatives, giving me as well your updated contact information. If I do not hear from a majority of the Council, I will contact the remaining Executive Officers for their direction on this matter.

Please try to attend the hearings on this matter. I will use my website at Hawaiian Perspectives.org to keep you updated on this matter. Please check the documents section of that site.

Aloha a hui hou,

Poka Laenui, Chair, Native Hawaiian Convention