VIA EMAIL TRANSMITTAL

May 21, 2019

Board of Land and Natural Resources
State of Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources
Kalanimoku Building
1151 Punchbowl Street, Room 132
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
email: blnr.testimony@hawaii.gov

RE: TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF AGENDA ITEM D1
Grant of Term, Non-Exclusive Easement to Wai'oli Valley Taro Hui, Inc. for Surface Water Diversion and Irrigation Purposes, Wai'oli, Hanalei, Kaua'i, Tax Map Key: (4) 5-6-002:001 (portion)

Aloha Chair Case and Members of the Board of Land and Natural Resources,

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify on this important matter. My name is Reid Yoshida and I come before you as both a taro farmer and also as president of the Wai'oli Valley Taro Hui. I am in strong support of the Land Division's staff recommendations and I humbly request that you approve our application for an easement.

As a Hui, it is our mission to support and enhance the ma uka and ma kai biocultural resources in the Wai'oli Stream and Hanalei Valley watersheds, to protect the natural and cultural resources that enable traditional and customary Native Hawaiian practices, to maintain habitat for endangered Hawaiian waterbirds, and to engage the greater Kaua'i community through educational outreach programs and initiatives relating to the farming of taro and community-based stewardship of water resources. Although our community has always been close, we did not formally organize as a non-profit until the devastating floods of 2018 made it painfully clear that our entire community and way of life was at risk. We appear before you today as part of these recovery efforts, and seek an easement for the traditional mānowai, po'owai, and 'auwai that our community has stewarded for generations.

My family has been in Hanalei for 125 years. My great grandfather came to Kaua'i to work the plantations and lived in Hanalei since the late 1800s. My grandfather was born in Hanalei in 1896 and I still live in the same house that he finished building in 1933. In the 1920s, he started raising rice and slowly started planting taro as a supplemental crop in the 1940s. My grandfather continued planting taro and eventually my uncle took over the taro farm. I also have other uncles and cousins who have farmed in Hanalei because my grandpa's brother and his family were also taro farmers.

I spent my childhood splitting time between O'ahu where I went to school, and Hanalei where I spent my summer/spring breaks, long weekends, and holidays. Every time I was in Hanalei, we always worked the taro farm. My earliest memories from elementary school was of pulling grass, planting huli, and using the tiller to prep the fields.

When I look at my life, I should not be a taro farmer. My path after high school took me to college on the mainland. After getting my engineering degree, I spent 17 years as an engineer/project manager for

a few different contractors in Hawai'i and most recently in Las Vegas where I worked on two high rises on the Las Vegas strip. During that time, I still found that I would return home to Hanalei and work in the lo'i helping my family. I didn't take vacations to go traveling, I took vacations to come home to work in the fields. In 2010, I made the decision to walk away from my career as an engineer and move home to Hanalei. Over the next few years, I spent my time helping my uncle on his farm and some of my friends who are also taro farmers. In 2015, I had the opportunity to take over and re-build a 5-acre taro farm and realized that being in Hanalei raising taro is truly where I am the happiest. A lot of people question my decision to walk away from my career because if I look at it from a purely financial standpoint, leaving my engineering career to become a farmer is the worst possible decision I could make. However, I found that being close to my family, having the opportunity to raise taro in the same area where I grew up, and continuing something that my grandfather started for our family is more valuable than a great salary as an engineer. In no way is it easy, because I do have to live paycheck to paycheck. But, how do you put a price on being able to work the same land that your family has had a connection with for more than 100 years?

After the devastating floods last year, our small taro farming community has struggled. The damage to our water system has created a lot of stress with many of us wondering if there is a future to continue farming taro in Hanalei. Immediately after the flood, our water supply was totally cut off. Luckily, we were able to restore some flow to our system, which allowed us to continue farming, but in no way was the volume close to the pre-flood conditions. Over the last year, we have continued to have weather events that cut off the water supply because the overall system was so heavily damaged. This has created a lot of problems as the low water flow at times has made it hard for me to replant as much as I would like, which in turn makes it even harder to recover from the April 2018 flood. This easement is an important first step, but we still have a long way to go. I am grateful that there was emergency funding allocated to help with repairing our principal water supply. When completed, that will allow me, as well as many other families, to continue raising taro in Hanalei. It is my hope that when I am at the point where I can no longer physically continue with the farm, that there will be a new generation that will want to continue farming. Fixing and having access to the land to maintain our water system will ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to raise taro and have access to the same incredible opportunity that I have.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. Please vote to approve our easement today.

Mahalo,

Reid Yoshida

cc: Ian Hirokawa (ian.c.hirokawa@hawaii.gov)