

February 1, 2022

JoAnn Tsark, MPH
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Aloha BLNR Board Members,

Re: Item #2 under State Parks: Request to Amend General Lease SP0042 to Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services.

Mahalo for this opportunity to support the request by Kokua Kalihi Valley/Ho‘oulu ‘Āina to extend their lease in Kalihi Valley, and their request to be allowed to conduct mission-related commercial activity.

My name is JoAnn Tsark and I want to share the multiple relationships I have had professionally and personally with Ho‘oulu ‘Āina and the impact they have had on me and the institutions and programs I work for.

I am a privileged and grateful public beneficiary of Ho‘oulu ‘Āina and in the role I had at POL as its research director for 18 years and now at the John A. Burns School of Medicine, I can confidently say they too have benefited from Ho‘oulu ‘Āina’s cultural, educational, agricultural, and recreational programs.

As an educator, Ho‘oulu ‘Āina has, and continues to serve as a learning site for UH students from PH, Nursing, and Social Work. Ho‘oulu ‘Āina provides students hands on, culture in practice. They don’t talk about Mālama ‘Āina, they practice it and they create opportunities for engagement. When our students put hands in the earth, clean pili grass, learn the history and significance of place, work together with community members and staff, the teaching of Mālama ‘Āina, Kuleana, Kōkua coupled with the “lived experience” transforms—it is learning that does not come in a western curriculum. These values are applicable to all walks of life, all relationships. That’s the nurse, the public health educator and social worker that HA helps to nurture, the ones I want in our communities, taking care of my family.

One of my responsibilities as faculty at the Medical School is to nurture trust-based research collaborations with communities to foster equitable partnerships in research. Ho‘oulu ‘Āina is one of the community programs I rely on to support research that is relevant to their community and to hold researchers accountable to conducting research that is respectful to the communities their research claims to help. We can teach theory and methodology on campus, but we cannot give the “lived experience” of working with a community not because they are “subjects”, but as

partners and teachers--modeling respectful researcher conduct and research that has tangible benefits for the community

Ho‘oulu ‘Āina also is an ideal conduit to disseminating research findings beyond the academic campus and back to communities. Their recent research webinar featuring their staff, researchers and invited guests had 400 individuals tune in, demonstrating their reach to community and community interested in research.

Personally, I wish we were advocating for the lease to be extended in perpetuity. The DLNR mission, to, *“Enhance, protect, conserve and manage Hawaii’s unique and limited natural, cultural and historic resources held in public trust for current and future generations of the people of Hawaii nei, and its visitors, in partnership with others from the public and private sectors.”*

You could not have found better stewards than KKV and Ho‘oulu ‘Āina staff for this ‘āina. The program leaders and staff I have come to know over the past 10 years are future focused, conservationists, educators, cultural practitioners, and they love and respect this space. They know and teach the place names, history, and respect for the ‘āina--repurposing invasive plants, implementing organic soil science, restoring, and reclaiming space for native plants, and food crops that feed their community. One in four children in Hawai‘i are at risk for food insecurity. Hawa‘ii has the second highest rate of child food insecurity in the U.S. Ho‘oulu ‘Āina is one solution for their community and they are building skills and capacity in their community by modeling self-sufficiency. On their monthly volunteer Saturdays, I was always one at least 100 to 200 other volunteers joining to pull weeds, clean pili grass, clean ‘ōlena, harvest herbs. Everyone has kuleana--kupuna to keiki alike and the bounty from the farm is shared at lunch, and always something from the garden to take home for the family.

In closing, I want to express my mahalo to KKV and Ho‘oulu ‘Āina for their exceptional vision to care for this ‘āina that continues to feed, inspire, teach and heal.

Mahalo piha,



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