

KA LĀHUI HAWAI‘I KŌMIKE KALAI‘ĀINA

Board of Land and Natural Resources
1151 Punchbowl Street
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96813

June 28, 2024

Subject: Agenda Item D4 After-the-Fact Issuance of Revocable Permit to Na Aikane o Maui, Inc. (NAOMI)

Dear Chair Chang, First Deputy Kanaka‘ole and Members of the Board,

Ka Lāhui Hawai‘i Kōmike Kalai‘āina is the ad hoc committee of the Nation of Hawai‘i, a native initiative for self-governance formed by and for native Hawaiians and their descendants (aka Kanaka Maoli) without the interference of the State or Federal governments or its agencies.

First, we would like to commend the Board of Land and Natural Resources on their intent to award NAOMI an after the fact permit for the Cultural Center that was located at 562 Front St, Lahaina on the island of Maui as a way for the NAOMI to recover what they can from FEMA for devastating losses from the Lahaina fires that took place on August 8, 2023. Whatever financial recovery NAOMI will get from FEMA will never be enough to replace the priceless cultural items and personal effects of the Kapu ‘ohana and the West Maui community.

The after the fact lease that is on the table is not enough this Board needs to do more and do better. The lease for the for the Center should have been issued to NAOMI years ago and to only issue it now nearly a year after the fire and to have it expire the day after the Lahaina fire on August 9, 2023 is unacceptable.

NAOMI and the Lahaina Center has been the niho stone of the Kanaka Maoli community across the Pae ‘Āina in rebuilding the foundation for our Lāhui upon which hundreds of kūpuna, mākuā, and ‘ōpio stand. The work that NAOMI has done at the Center has helped many of our people reconnect with our past in order to help us navigate current (sometimes confusing) systems advocating for Kanaka Maoli rights.

NAOMI’s leaders like Ke‘eaumoku and U‘i Kapu have given and hosted hundreds (perhaps thousands) of free workshops at the Lahaina Community center and throughout the islands. The education they have provided are important tools that have empowered families and communities in West Maui and beyond. NAOMI ran the Lahaina Cultural Center as a welcoming place for members of our Lāhui and relatives from around the world. So many of our people have been housed, fed and educated in that hale.

There is a traditional saying that best describes the leadership of NAOMI - "He ōpū ali‘i." The heart of a chief - because after the fires- despite heavy suffering personal losses themselves- Ke‘eaumoku and U‘i Kapu lost no time in setting up a hub and helping the West Maui community during those important first few days immediately after the fire. The hub they set up provided was a lifeline for the community for months after the fire when local governments and authorities were still scrambling to figure to things out.

Is this Board still trying to "figure things out"? Why wouldn’t you give a longer permit for NAOMI an organization that has proven themselves to put community first and frankly deserves our thanks and gratitude? Providing NAOMI with a long term permit would allow them to plan and rebuild for the future of Lahaina - something that is needed now more than ever. Extend the after the fact permit into a 65 year \$1 lease - you did it for the military why not for a Kanaka Maoli community group?

Me ka oiai'o,

M. Healani Sonoda-Pale