

**The Honorable Colleen Hanabusa (HI-01)**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies**  
**March 1, 2017**

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. In my testimony, I will highlight the importance of federal funding for Native Hawaiian Education and Native Hawaiian Health programs. As the host culture of the State of Hawaii, the obligation of the United States to this group cannot be understated. Congress has acknowledged this responsibility through the passage of various Congressional acts, including the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920 and United States Public Law 103-150, commonly known as the Apology Resolution, which was passed in 1993. It is imperative that we continue to address our country's special relationship with Native Hawaiians and the unique needs they face now and in the future.

**Native Hawaiian Education**

One area of critical need is in education, where Native Hawaiians have typically underperformed other groups in test scores and graduation rates. As a result, Congress included funding for Native Hawaiians in Title VII, Part B of the Education and Secondary Act of 1965, as amended, the purposes of which *(1) authorize and develop innovative educational programs to assist Native Hawaiians;(2) provide direction and guidance to appropriate Federal, State, and local agencies to focus resources, including resources made available under this part, on Native Hawaiian education, and to provide periodic assessment and data collection;(3) supplement and expand programs and authorities in the area of education to further the purposes of this title; and (4) encourage the maximum participation of Native Hawaiians in planning and management of Native Hawaiian education programs.*

Federal programs designed to address the educational needs of Native Hawaiians are critical to improving success rates for youth, from preschool through post-secondary education and beyond. Many of the federally-funded initiatives incorporate cultural and language components that supplement the traditional critical thinking and analysis found in conventional educational curricula. Reintegrating culturally-driven education into a curriculum facilitates an important process by which, students and their families are able to reestablish important connections to Hawaiian cultural self-identity, while pursuing educational excellence.

These programs also provide a foundation for students pursuing post-secondary or advanced degrees, programs where Native Hawaiians are dramatically under-represented. Federal resources are critical to increasing the number of Native Hawaiian students participating successfully in these programs.

Many Native Hawaiian educational organizations owe their success to federal appropriations. These programs have a proven track record of successfully implementing a variety of approaches to tackle the educational challenges that face Native Hawaiians at every level of education.

### **Preschool Education**

Investing in preschool programs is a crucial first step in improving a young student's cognitive development. Preschool grantees of Native Hawaiian education funding provide a multitude of culturally-driven services early in a child's life that helps develop a strong foundation for attaining future educational success. This funding also allows for the integral professional development of preschool teachers; engages families through a multitude of support resources; and implements accurate assessment tools for student development and cognition. Family participation is a vital component of Native Hawaiian preschool programs. It is

especially vital in a facilitating a child's ability to develop a deeper cultural understanding, which enables students to participate confidently in their future educational endeavors.

For example, *'Aha Punana Leo (APL)*, a grantee with numerous preschools in my district, has led efforts to revitalize the use of the Hawaiian language since 1984, when the language was on the brink of extinction. APL has since provided a high-quality preschool education for children conducted entirely in the Hawaiian language. The APL utilizes a "language nest" model that fully engages a child's family in the Hawaiian language curriculum. Parents are required to enroll in Hawaiian language classes held at the school and participate in school activities with the child as a condition of a child's admission to an APL preschool. Requiring parent participation serves a dual purpose in cultivating a culturally appropriate home environment for families to thrive, while encouraging active family participation in a child's education from the earliest possible stage. The services and programs provided by APL have led to a vast expansion of Hawaiian language immersion programs and are a leading source of curriculum material throughout the state and throughout the world.

### ***Environment & Socio-economic factors***

Improving educational success rates for Native Hawaiian youth also requires assessing a student's home environment and socio-economic footing. Many Native Hawaiian families come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and many in that group are afflicted by poverty-living in communities that lack access to education resources. Federal funding provides children facing this reality with increased resources, targeted tools, and other basic life necessities that effectively offset the barriers that come with challenging home dynamics, greatly improving students' likelihood of success in school and beyond.

Grantees like *The Partners In Development Foundation* help countless poverty-stricken Native Hawaiian families through innovative initiatives like “Ka Pa’alana” and “Malama Mobile,” which deliver critical services to families facing homelessness. Additionally, Partner’s In Development partners with other community resource centers to maximize outreach efforts in communities with high incidences of poverty. Together with community partners, these programs remove access barriers and bring resources directly into communities in specially modified vans that serve as mobile educational resource and social service outlets.

The economic and social hardships faced by Native Hawaiian students also make it difficult for students to excel academically. As a result, federal educational funding is critical to providing culturally-relevant programs for at-risk Native Hawaiian youth and their families, regardless of their financial circumstances or ability to pay. The *Institute for Native Pacific Education and Culture (INPEACE)* provides crucial resources in the areas of Early Childhood Education and Workforce Development, while integrating both Hawaiian language and culture into their approach. The goal of INPEACE is to improve school readiness needs of at-risk Native Hawaiian children by concentrating on family inclusiveness and participation in every aspect of the child’s educational experience. Since 1994, this organization has grown to serve more than 2,000 students annually by administering seven programs aimed at improving the educational success rates for at-risk Native Hawaiian students.

### **Native Hawaiian Health**

Another significant area of need is Native Hawaiian Health. Congress understands the unique health needs of Native Hawaiians and enacted the Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act (“NHHCIA”) for the purposes of (1) raising the health status of Native

Hawaiians to the highest possible health level; and (2) providing existing Native Hawaiian health care programs with all resources necessary to effectuate this policy.

NHHCIA created *Papa Ola Lokahi*, an organization charged with executing the purposes of the law. This includes researching prevalent illnesses in the Native Hawaiian community, coordinating health care programs, and training Native Hawaiian cultural and medical practitioners and community educators. *Papa Ola Lokahi* has community health centers on Hawaii Island, Maui, Molokai, and Kauai. These health centers provide local rural communities with access to critical healthcare and services like dental care, nutritional counseling, and physical fitness. With diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol extremely prevalent in the Native Hawaiian community, these services are invaluable to improving the health of Native Hawaiians. *Papa Ola Lokahi* has worked diligently to improve Native Hawaiians' health, but needs federal support to continue their endeavors.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, Native Hawaiians face educational, economic, and social hardships that inhibit their ability to lead healthy lives and contribute to the betterment and progress of our community. Congress must continue to uphold its commitment to Hawaii's indigenous people by appropriating funds that support the unique needs of Native Hawaiians.

Therefore, I support continued funding by this Congress to address the educational, economic, and social needs of Native Hawaiians, and I respectfully urge this committee to allocate robust funding to support crucial programs like these. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.