

**Testimony of Michael Kahikina, Chairman
Association of Hawaiians for Homestead Lands**

**On HJR55 – Consent of State of Hawaii Act 80 on the
Qualifications of Successor Lessees for Hawaiian Home Lands**

October 4, 2021

To the Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples, Committee on Natural Resources

Aloha mai Honorable Chairwoman Teresa Leger Fernandez and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Michael Kahikina, a native Hawaiian beneficiary of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA), and I am an air force veteran, a former representative in the state legislature, and a former Governor appointed commissioner on the Hawaiian Homes Commission that oversees the administration of our land trust by the state agency, the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands.

I register this testimony as the chairman of the board of the Association of Hawaiians for Homestead Lands (AHHL), registered with the U.S. Department of Interior as a self-governing homestead entity in compliance with the codified definition in 43CFR 47.1. Our homestead association is unique because we were founded in 2008 to represent the interests of native Hawaiians on a waiting list maintained by the State of Hawaii, waiting to receive a homestead or allotment of our trust lands for a residence, a farm or a pastoral lot. The vast majority of homestead associations that exist today, consist of families that have received a homestead land award and are blessed to be living on the lands set-aside by the U.S. Congress.

The HHCA was enacted by the U.S. Congress to place 200,000 acres of land into trust, for the use of the indigenous people of Hawaii defined in the Act. The Congress intended to enable my people to return to our land, to perpetuate our self-sufficiency and our cultural values. AHHL represents over 28,000 native Hawaiians still waiting for a homestead award that we pray, the U.S. Department of Interior Secretary will improve support to my people promised in 1920.

AHHL supports HJR 55 and thanks the Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples of the United States for scheduling a hearing on this important joint resolution addressing the needs of our community. As a former legislator, I appreciate the legislative hearings process not only for members of the committee, but also for citizens in our democracy for which our government serves, with a unique trust responsibility to native Hawaiians, like American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The focus of HJR 55 is successorship, a term used to describe the interest of tracts of land leased to an eligible native Hawaiian, along with improvements made by the lessee, that upon death, vests in certain eligible relatives of the lessee. The essence of our work and many others over the past many years, which culminates in HJR55, is to revise the qualifications of a successor, or heir to be changed from the requirement of at least ¼ Hawaiian to 1/32nd. This change in successor qualification does not displace the constituents of AHHL, but rather ensures that once a homestead award is finally made, our people on the waitlist will have the benefit of successorship to our children or grandchildren that meet the improved qualifications of HJR55.

AHHL requests the committee document in the committee report, the need for expeditious action by the DoI to address the condition of native Hawaiians on the waitlist, as well as protection through clarity for native Hawaiians with homestead awards that are at risk of being evicted and placed back on the waitlist. AHHL believes DoI must do the work of federal rule making, delayed far too long, including Section 209 of the HHCA on the process of successorship and Section 210 on lease cancellations. Both of these Sections need Committee directive to the administration to put in place transparent and common-sense processes, to serve the best interest of all parties of the HHCA. Thank you.

AHHL Waitlist Board of Directors

AHHL has operated for 13 years governed by an elected Board of Directors since 2008, each serving staggered terms through 2024, representing the MokuPuni regions of Kauai, Oahu, Molokai, Maui/Lanai, Hawaii Island & Mokuhonu (continent). In August 2021, AHHL added a second Mokuhonu board seat, to increase representation and engagement with the growing population of native Hawaiians awaiting an HHCA homestead award

Mike Kahikina
West Oahu

AHHL Chairman

Vanessa Garcia Phillips
East Oahu

AHHL Vice Chairwoman

Kainoa MacDonald
Mokuhonu

AHHL Secretary

Liberta Albao
Kauai

AHHL Director

Kalaniakea Wilson
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AHHL Director

Cora Schnackenberg
Molokai

AHHL Director

Kahanu Noa
Maui/Lanai

AHHL Director

Pua Freitas
Central Oahu

AHHL Director

Added August 2021
Mokuhonu (Continent)

AHHL Director

AHHL leaders and enrolled members are dedicated to policy advocacy to deliver homestead and mercantile lots to beneficiaries defined under the HHCA. AHHL participates on the Homestead Policy Committee, administered by the SCHHA.

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