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Testimony of Ms. Ka'iulani Laehā, CEO, 'Aha Pūnana Leo, Inc.

United States House of Representatives  
House Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples of the United States  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Subcommittee Hearing: Strengthening Indigenous Communities Through  
Cultural and Environmental Preservation

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Pūnana Leo o Kaua'i

Pūnana Leo o Maui

Pūnana Leo o Moloka'i

Pūnana Leo o Wai'anae

Pūnana Leo o Kona

Pūnana Leo o Waimea

Pūnana Leo o Mānoa

Pūnana Leo o Ko'olau Poko

Pūnana Leo o Lahaina

Pūnana Leo o Hāna

Pūnana Leo o Nu'uanu

Pūnana Leo o Waialua

October 26, 2022

Chair Teresa Leger Fernandez and committee members and Aloha to  
committee member Representative Case,

Mahalo nui for coming to visit our program in Hilo, Hawai'i in August along with  
Representatives Case and Kahele. I am Ka'iulani Laehā, the Chief Executive  
Officer of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo, a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization dedicated  
to the revitalization of the Hawaiian language and the longest standing  
indigenous language medium language nest program in the United States that  
contributes to an educational pipeline from early childhood through to the  
doctorate all taught through the Native Hawaiian language. E ola ka 'ōlelo  
Hawai'i, the Hawaiian language shall live is the vision that drives our work.

As a Native Hawaiian serving organization we know firsthand that our work is  
crucial to the cultural preservation of Hawai'i's indigenous people as identified  
in Hawai'i's statutes HRS 10H-1 statement of recognition:

The Native Hawaiian people are hereby recognized as the only indigenous,  
aboriginal, maoli people of Hawaii. [L 2011, c 195, pt of §2]

We have tirelessly advocated to earn recognition in federal statute including  
the Native American Languages Act 1990 (NALA), the Native Hawaiian  
Education Act, the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, and others. While these  
recognitions have been beneficial to our local communities, we need to be  
given the opportunity to represent Native Hawaiians in discussions and federal  
hearings regarding indigenous communities.

We are part of a larger consortium partnership with Ke Kula 'o  
Nāwahīokalani'ōpu'u (Nāwahī) and Ka Haka 'Ula o Ke'elikōlani Hawaiian  
language college, that is a P-20 model that demonstrates successful private-  
public partnership and best practices in language revitalization. We are  
nationally and internationally recognized as leaders of indigenous language  
revitalization. The effort within our state served thousands of students preschool  
to grade 12 through Hawaiian. We advocate for policies in federal programs  
aligned to NALA and would be able contribute to discussions focused on  
indigenous and cultural preservation.

Mahalo nui loa,

Ka'iulani Laehā

E O I a K a ' Ō l e l o H a w a i ' i