



UNIVERSITY
of HAWAII®
MĀNOA

LATE TESTIMONY

Wednesday 18 February 2009

To confer an honorary degree to outstanding Kūpuna and cultural practitioners, in recognition of their invaluable cultural contributions, acknowledges the value and living-life of ʻike Hawaiʻi. A quick review of honorary degrees awarded to cultural experts at indigenous and indigenous-serving institutions across the globe reveals an impressive listing of stellar community leaders and volunteers, cultural practitioners, advocates for the sustainability of indigenous languages and literacy, gifted journalists and authors, distinguished musicians, ancient and contemporary artists, champions of human rights, and many more. Many of the honorees earn their status not with a piece of paper that notes a Bachelor of Arts or Science degree, or a Master of Arts or Science degree, or even an M.D. or Ph.D. in a focused area of knowledge. Instead, their “degree” has come from a lifetime commitment of service and stewardship that ensures the sustainability and vitality of Native Hawaiian knowledge, our knowledge systems and practices that serve as a place of power and a source of continuance.

As a scholar and life-long learner of indigenous knowledge systems, what I know is that the Hawaiian way of knowing and doing – its methods, evidence, and conclusions – as practiced and taught by our Kūpuna and cultural practitioners, fills the ethical and cultural gaps in Eurocentric education and ways of walking in this world. It assists us, Hawaiians today, to reconceptualize our resilience as indigenous peoples by underscoring the importance of our lineage, our own philosophies.

In closing, there are many moʻolelo we have been told that serve to teach us who we are and how we should serve – I remember our trickster stories of Kamapuaʻa often told to me by my kūpuna. While on the surface they appear to be simple yet cunning stories of right and wrong, they are, at a much deeper level, lessons about living in a world of complications – present in the story are pathways that can provide the light that gives us the wherewithal to thrive. Indeed, honoring our Kūpuna and cultural practitioners affirms who we are as Kanaka Maoli.

Me ka haʻahaʻa,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Maenette Kape'ahiokalani Padeken Ah Nee-Benham'.

Prof. Maenette Kapeʻahiokalani Padeken Ah Nee-Benham, Dean
Hawaiʻinuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge

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HB 1796-Relating to Kupuna Honorary Degree Program

House Committee on Hawaiian Affairs

Rep. Mele Carroll, Chair

Rep. Maile S.L. Shimabukuro, Vice Chair

Date: February 18, 2009

Time: 9:10am

Room: 329

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) supports the intent of the bill but not the specifics of the measure. The bill is coercive because it appears that there has been no consultation with OHA

As finances are not provided in this measure and as 10-31 requires that all projects be self-supporting the bill is doubly concerning. Such an honorary degree program, while worthy, would need, as defined in the bill, to support 12 areas not fully thought out by OHA staff or Trustees. Costs may include transportation and housing for the kōmike kūpuna to meet, in addition to costs for the degree proper and bringing in each recipient and family member.

Moreover, what if the degree program was offered for a kupuna in the area of Hawaiian language? The Hawaiian language is very important to OHA but is not provided for in the bill.

The measure is concerning in that it mentions eligible Hawaiian kūpuna which would mean (by statute) that it concerns Hawaiians worldwide. The bill has already selected a name, pohaku (sic), thereby preempting the duly elected trustees from selecting an appropriate name.

OHA offers the following amendments:

1. Deleting the name of the degree from the bill.
2. Introduce the following verbiage

"10 - Kūpuna Honorary degree program. (a) The office Hawaiian affairs may develop and administer the kūpuna honorary degree to eligible Hawaiian kūpuna.

(b) The degree shall be awarded in the following suggested categories but limited according to the minimum age requirements to be determined by the kōmike kūpuna created in subsection (c):

(c) The office shall establish the kōmike kūpuna, which shall establish standards for award if the degree which shall include at least the following:

- (1) Contributions to the community; and
- (2) Qualifying age for varying categories of degrees
- (3) The kōmike kūpuna shall award to eligible Hawaiian kūpuna the degree, which shall not be restricted to the State of Hawai'i, but shall be awarded to individuals worldwide.
- (4) The office may provide for a financial prize to be awarded to each degree recipient. "

We submit that a resolution asking OHA to consider such a measure would be more appropriate.

Rep. Maile Shimabukuro

From: Keli'i Tau'a [hokutwo@gmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, February 18, 2009 6:37 AM
To: HAWtestimony
Cc: Janice Salcedo
Subject: Honorary Kupuna Degree bill testimony

Testifier: Keli'i Tau'a, Semi-Retired Educator
Committee: Committee on Hawaiian Affairs
Hearing time: 2/18/2009 9:10am
Measure Number: HB 1796

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I, Keli'i Tau'a testify in support of this bill to recognize the unsung heroes of Hawai'i (our special kupuna) who have contributed much to Hawai'i and its culture, who have helped maintain a continuation of aloha throughout the islands, and those who have and continue to walk the walk and talk the talk. I propose that when this bill is passed, a special committee be organized to develop the criteria for candidates to qualify for this award and afterwards, another selection committee be formed to choose the recipients. This degree idea should be perpetual and available to all kupuna candidates who continue to contribute to the culture and people of Hawai'i. In short, I would like to see this bill serve as a tool for all the kupuna who have continued to contribute their time, talents and skills in all facets of life for the betterment and quality of Hawai'i Nei and continue to support Hawai'i No Ka 'Oi.

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Kumu and Chelsea Ann