

Honolulu, Hawaii

MAR 22 2023

RE: GOV. MSG. NO. 528

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
Thirty-Second State Legislature
Regular Session of 2023
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Water and Land, to which was referred Governor's Message No. 528, submitting for study and consideration the nomination of:

DEPUTY TO THE CHAIRPERSON, DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

G.M. No. 528 LAURA KAAKUA,
for a term to expire 12-07-2026,

begs leave to report as follows:

Your Committee reviewed the personal history, resume, and statement submitted by Laura Kaakua for service as the Deputy to the Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources.

Your Committee received testimony in support of the nomination for the appointment of Ms. Kaakua from the Governor, Chief Housing Officer of the Office of the Governor; Department of Land and Natural Resources; Department of Transportation; Office of Planning and Sustainable Development; Department of Labor and Industrial Relations; Department of Agriculture; Department of Budget and Finance; Department of Health; Department of Public Safety; Department of Taxation; Department of Human Services; Department of Defense; Hawaii State Aha Moku; Office of Enterprise Technology Services; Hawaii Public Housing Authority; Office of the Mayor of the City and County of Honolulu; one member of the Honolulu City Council; one member of the Maui County Council; Ko'olau Foundation; Hawaii Regional Council of Carpenters; Matson Navigation Company, Inc.; Hawaii Harbor Users Group; Young Brothers, LLC; Trust for Public Land; Hawai'i Land Trust; Kuahiwi



Ranch; Sierra Club of Hawai'i; Livable Hawaii Kai Hui; Maunaloa Fishpond Heritage Center; Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement; Hui Maunawili-Kawainui; Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana; and sixty-four individuals. Your Committee received testimony in opposition to the nomination for the appointment of Ms. Kaakua from one individual.

Ms. Kaakua has served as the interim Deputy to the Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources since December 2022 and has since worked closely with the interim Chairperson on a number of important issues, including the grounding of a luxury yacht in Honolua Bay, Maui. In addition, Ms. Kaakua has competently and effectively represented the Department before the Legislature during this Regular Session of 2023. Previously, Ms. Kaakua served as the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Hawai'i Land Trust. As President and CEO, Ms. Kaakua established the organization's strategic vision and goals on land protection, land stewardship, community education, and caretaking. Notably, the Hawai'i Land Trust was responsible for more than seven preserves and fifty conservation easements. Prior to that, Ms. Kaakua served as the Native Lands Program Manager for the Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit focused on park creation and public land preservation. At Trust for Public Land, Ms. Kaakua made significant progress on eleven active land protection projects across Hawaii and worked with Native Hawaiian and broader local communities to protect open space lands of critical cultural importance. Ms. Kaakua also co-taught the legal course, *Conservation Transactions*, at the University of Hawaii William S. Richardson School of Law, where she covered basic real estate finance, strategy, and land due diligence relating to conservation issues, and provided practical lessons to the next generation of lawyers regarding the importance of working in Native Hawaiian communities and the need for cultural and historic sensitivity in land management.

Ms. Kaakua has also served, among other positions, as a Coordinator for Envision Hawai'i and as a Law Clerk to the Honorable Greg K. Nakamura, Hawaii Circuit Court Judge for the Third Circuit. Ms. Kaakua is active in community organizations such as the Hawaii State Bar Association and Kupu, where she received an award for excellent service to the community in the field of conservation. Ms. Kaakua received a Juris Doctorate from the University of Hawaii William S. Richardson School of Law and



dual Bachelor of Arts degrees in Political Science and Communications from Boston College, Massachusetts.

Your Committee believes that Ms. Kaakua, with a demonstrated background in law, project management, community engagement, and land conservation, possesses the requisite qualifications to serve as the Deputy to the Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources. Your Committee was impressed with Ms. Kaakua's proactive and engaged response in helping to resolve the grounded luxury yacht fiasco in Honolulu Bay. Further, testifiers commented on Ms. Kaakua's dedication, as evidenced through her work and community service, to land protection and stewardship, making her an ideal candidate to carry out the mission and responsibilities of the Department. Your Committee notes the tremendous amount of positive testimony in support of Ms. Kaakua's nomination, which highlight not only her career achievements, but her collaborative, honest, accountable, and responsive approach to leadership. Your Committee believes that these qualities will benefit the Department as it strives to fulfill its mandate. Therefore, your Committee recommends that Laura Kaakua be appointed as the Deputy to the Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources based on her knowledge, experience, and commitment to public service.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Water and Land that is attached to this report, your Committee, after full consideration of the background, experience, and qualifications of the nominee, has found the nominee to be qualified for the position to which nominated and recommends that the Senate advise and consent to the nomination.

Respectfully submitted on
behalf of the members of the
Committee on Water and Land,


LORRAINE R. INOUÉ, Chair



