

LATE

GM-568

Submitted on: 3/5/2025 1:50:36 PM
Testimony for PSM on 3/5/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chelsea Fernandez	Testifying for Maui County Veterans Council	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

On Behalf of the Maui County Veterans Council, we fully support the appointment of Aris Banaag to the OVS Advisory Board. He has already shown great leadership as an officer in our national guard and has stepped up in leadership roles also within our Veterans Community here in Maui County. He will be a great asset to the board to bring on great ideas and keep our Maui Veterans well represented and heard.

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GM-568

Submitted on: 3/5/2025 1:54:44 PM

Testimony for PSM on 3/5/2025 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chelsea Fernandez	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Chelsea Fernandez and a veteran of Maui County. I am in full support of Aris Banaag's appointment to represent Maui on the Office of Veterans Services Governors Advisory Board. I have had the opportunity to work with Aris on opening up the first Veterans Resource Center on the UH Maui College campus and most recently bringing The Wall That Heals to Maui. His leadership is what we need and will help our Maui Veterans stay connected. Mahalo.

LATE

Testimony in Support of Major Aris A. Banaag for Representation on the State of Hawaii Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and esteemed members of the Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs,

My name is Sharon Banaag, and I am honored to submit this written testimony in full support of my husband, Major Aris A. Banaag, for a seat representing Maui County on this committee. I firmly believe that there is no one more qualified for this position, given Major Banaag's extensive and diverse military background, leadership experience, and unwavering commitment to serving both our state and nation.

Major Banaag's military career has come full circle. He began his service as an enlisted member of the United States Air Force and later transitioned into the Army, where he earned his commission as an officer. His unique experience in both enlisted and officer ranks gives him an invaluable perspective on the challenges and responsibilities faced by service members at all levels. Now, as a Major in the Hawaii Air National Guard's 292nd Combat Communications Squadron, he brings a wealth of knowledge, leadership, and firsthand experience to the table.

Throughout his career, Major Banaag has answered the call to serve in a variety of capacities, including multiple deployments overseas, where he operated under Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) missions. His ability to adapt, lead, and support both strategic and tactical operations has proven critical to mission success. His dedication to service extends beyond the battlefield—he has actively led domestic response efforts here in Hawaii.

Notably, Major Banaag played a vital role in the 2018 Hawaii Island volcanic eruption response, where his leadership and expertise were instrumental in coordinating military support for local recovery efforts. More recently, after completing an overseas temporary duty assignment (TDY), he immediately returned to assist in the recovery of Lahaina, working on wildfire debris cleanup and relief operations following the devastating August 2023 fires. His commitment to Maui's recovery showcases his deep-rooted dedication to our island community, ensuring that military support is effectively integrated into emergency response efforts.

However, Major Banaag's service is not limited to military operations—he is equally dedicated to community service and strengthening the connection between the military and the people of Hawaii. One of his most notable contributions was his role as Chair for the first-ever Maui visit of The Wall That Heals, a three-quarter-scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Through his leadership, he worked tirelessly to bring this deeply meaningful tribute to Maui, ensuring that logistics, coordination, and execution were flawless.

Despite being stationed overseas at the time, Major Banaag made it his priority to coordinate with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, the County of Maui, and federal contacts in Washington, D.C. He successfully navigated the complexities of government collaboration, sat down with the Mayor of Maui to present his plan, and led countless virtual meetings at all hours with his Maui-based team of volunteers. His ability to work seamlessly across time zones and commitments, while balancing military duties, speaks volumes about his dedication, leadership, and commitment to honoring our veterans and community.

Upon returning home, Major Banaag continued his leadership in person, ensuring that the event was a success and that Maui residents, including veterans and their families, had the opportunity to experience

this profound tribute. His tireless dedication to both military service and community engagement demonstrates his ability to bridge the gap between the armed forces and civilian leadership, making him the ideal representative for Maui County on this committee.

A Deep Commitment to Community and Public Service

Beyond his military service, Major Banaag's life has been defined by a commitment to education, mental health, and advocacy for our community. A proud Maui native, he embodies the spirit of resilience and hard work. He personally put himself through college at UH Mānoa using his Montgomery GI Bill, balancing both military service in the Army National Guard and his education. He successfully earned his bachelor's degree in psychology, later going on to complete his master's degree in family counseling.

His dedication to helping others extended into his civilian career, where he became the first-ever mental health counselor at UH Maui College. In this role, Major Banaag directly supported hundreds of students of all ages, guiding them through personal challenges and ensuring that mental health services were accessible to the student body. His passion for helping youth was evident long before this role—he previously managed multiple facilities that supported troubled youth, always working to uplift and guide those who needed support the most.

Even while balancing his military and professional responsibilities, Major Banaag has never hesitated to serve his community. He has coached basketball, track, and other sports, always stepping up whenever Maui's youth needed a mentor or leader. His leadership extends far beyond the sports field—he has chaired numerous nonprofit initiatives and community movements, including:

The "Walk a Mile in Her Shoes" campaign, which he personally brought to Maui through UH Maui College, raising awareness for domestic violence survivors.

The Men's March Against Violence, an initiative promoting awareness and support for victims of domestic violence.

The PAU Violence Awareness Initiative, advocating for those affected by the trauma of violence.

The Suicide Prevention Task Force, working to address and prevent suicide within the community.

Multiple anti-domestic violence campaigns, ensuring that victims have resources and community support.

Major Banaag's energy, passion for service, and tireless advocacy for his community are truly unmatched. He is deeply rooted in Maui, understands its people, and has dedicated his life to serving others—whether through his military leadership, mental health counseling, youth mentorship, or nonprofit work.

A Military Family's Perspective

On a personal note, I am proud to say that we are a military family. I am a United States Air Force veteran, having served on active duty. I understand the unique challenges and sacrifices that come with military service, and I wholeheartedly support my husband's appointment to this committee.

As a father of five—two boys and three girls—Major Banaag lives his values every single day, setting an example for both our family and our community. He has spent his life dedicated to serving others, leading with integrity, and ensuring that Hawaii's military members, veterans, and families have the resources and representation they deserve.

We are incredibly fortunate to have someone of his caliber leading our community. If given this position, Major Banaag will bring unmatched dedication, leadership, and advocacy to the State of Hawaii Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs. His appointment would not only be an honor but a true blessing for all of us who care about the well-being of Hawaii's service members, veterans, and their families.

I strongly urge this committee to recognize Major Aris A. Banaag's exceptional qualifications and grant him the opportunity to serve our military and veteran communities in this critical role.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Banaag

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