

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
Governor

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
Lt. Governor



**SHARON HURD**  
Chairperson  
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

**DEAN M. MATSUKAWA**  
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & BIOSECURITY**  
KA 'OIHANA MAHI'AI A KIA'I MEAOLA  
1428 South King Street  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96814-2512  
Phone: (808) 973-9560 FAX: (808) 973-9613

**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD  
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026  
3:00 PM  
CONFERENCE ROOM 225 & VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**GOVERNORS MESSAGE NO. 631**

Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council, Gubernatorial Nominee, **KEITH DEMELLO**, for a term to expire 06-30-2029.

Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Gubernatorial Nominee Keith DeMello to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council for a term to expire 06-30-2029.

The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity supports the confirmation of Keith DeMello to the Hawaii Workforce Development Council (WDC). This would be Keith's second term on the WDC as a volunteer member. During his first term, Keith chaired the WDC's Special Projects Committee, where he prioritized elevating awareness of the American Job Centers and ultimately aiming for a Hawaii where our youth can envision a future for themselves here, in Hawaii.

Keith's career path has prepared him to communicate with various demographic groups, delivering creative, impactful messaging that enhances his service as a member of the WDC.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY  
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G. KUNSTMAN  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS  
KA 'OIHANA PONO LIMAHANA

February 25, 2026

To: The Honorable Brandon J.C. Elefante, Chair  
The Honorable Rachele Lamosao, Vice Chair, and  
Members of the Labor and Technology Committee

Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2026  
Time: 3:00 p.m.  
Place: Conference Room 224, State Capitol

From: Jade T. Butay, Director  
Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR)

**Re: G.M. 631, Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council, Gubernatorial Nominee, KEITH DEMELLO, for a term to expire 06-30-2029.**

The Department of Labor and Industrial Relations **strongly supports** the confirmation of Keith DeMello to the Workforce Development Council.

Mr. DeMello serves as Senior Vice President of Communications and External Affairs at Ulupono Initiative, where he oversees strategies that promote sustainable systems for food, energy, and water in Hawai'i. He brings more than 25 years of experience in strategic communications, having worked in both state government and leading public relations firms. His background includes extensive work in policy development, advocacy, and building partnerships across sectors.

The Department has been very pleased with Mr. DeMello's recent appointment as Chair of the Workforce Development Council. His leadership and collaborative approach have strengthened the Council's ability to address workforce priorities and engage stakeholders effectively. His proven ability to navigate complex issues and drive solutions makes him an exceptional choice for continued service.

Mr. DeMello is a dedicated and highly qualified nominee whose expertise and commitment will benefit the Council and the State. The Department fully supports his reappointment through June 30, 2029.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of Governor's Message 631.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE  
LT. GOVERNOR



WENDY GADY  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII  
**AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**  
HUI HO'OU LU AINA MAHIAI

TESTIMONY OF WENDY L. GADY  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY  
February 25, 2026  
3:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

**GM 631 - Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council, Gubernatorial Nominee, KEITH DEMELLO, for a term to expire 06-30-2029.**

Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Agribusiness Development Corporation, I am pleased to offer our strong support for Keith DeMello's reappointment to the Hawaii Workforce Development Council (WDC) for a second term as a volunteer member.

During his initial term, Keith demonstrated thoughtful leadership and a deep commitment to strengthening Hawai'i's workforce system. As Chair of the WDC's Special Projects Committee, he elevated awareness of workforce resources and advanced a more proactive and communicative approach to workforce-related legislation. His ability to connect strategic policy discussions with practical, community-based solutions has made a meaningful impact.

For Hawai'i's agribusiness sector, workforce development is not an abstract priority—it is fundamental to our economic sustainability and growth. Agriculture and

value-added agribusiness require a skilled, adaptable workforce prepared for careers that range from production and food systems to technology, logistics, and land stewardship. As our industry works to expand local food production, enhance resilience, and create diversified economic opportunities across the islands, alignment between workforce systems, education, and employers is critical.

Keith understands the importance of this alignment. His commitment to strengthening connections between industry and workforce partners directly supports the long-term viability of Hawai'i's agribusiness economy. By fostering collaboration and encouraging forward-looking workforce strategies, he helps ensure that residents are prepared for meaningful careers that contribute to our state's food security and economic independence.

We believe Keith's continued service will further strengthen the Council's ability to respond to the evolving needs of key sectors such as agriculture. His community-centered approach and dedication to creating pathways for Hawai'i's residents—particularly our next generation—to envision a future here at home are values we strongly share.

For these reasons, the Agribusiness Development Corporation fully supports Keith DeMello's reappointment and respectfully urges your favorable consideration.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Email: [communications@ulupono.com](mailto:communications@ulupono.com)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY  
Wednesday, February 25, 2026 — 3:00 p.m.

**Ulupono Initiative supports GM 631, Submitting for Consideration and Confirmation to the Hawaii Workforce Development Council, Gubernatorial Nominee, Keith DeMello, for a Term to Expire 06-30-2029.**

Dear Chair Elefante and Members of the Committee:

My name is Micah Munekata, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy and clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

**Ulupono supports GM 631.** Ulupono Initiative is pleased to offer its strong support for the confirmation of Keith DeMello to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council. Mr. DeMello currently serves as our Senior Vice President of Communications and External Affairs, where he leads the firm's communications and government affairs teams in advancing Ulupono's mission of building a more sustainable and resilient Hawai'i. With nearly three decades of professional experience spanning the private sector, state government, and the nonprofit community, Mr. DeMello brings a uniquely broad perspective on workforce issues, public policy, and strategic communications. His tenure in the Office of the Governor as Deputy Director of Communications, as well as his service as Senior Communications Manager for the Office of Enterprise Technology Services, has given him firsthand insight into the interplay between government, industry, and the workforce needs of our community.

Mr. DeMello's record of professional excellence and civic leadership further distinguishes him as an outstanding candidate for this Council. He is the recipient of the 2022 Gregg W. Perry Public Relations Professional of the Year Award from the Public Relations Society of America – Hawai'i Chapter, the Hawai'i equivalent of the nationally esteemed Gold Anvil Award, in acknowledgement of his contributions to the profession. He also received PRSA Hawai'i's President's Leadership Award in 2020 for his significant contributions to the chapter and the profession. Beyond these accolades, Mr. DeMello has demonstrated a sustained commitment to civic engagement through board service with organizations such as the Honolulu Zoological Society, the Portuguese Chamber of Commerce of Hawai'i, and the American Advertising Federation – Hawai'i Chapter.

Ulupono Initiative is confident that Mr. DeMello will continue to be a valuable and dedicated member of the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council, and we respectfully ask the Committee to support his nomination.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Micah Munekata  
Vice President of Government Affairs

*Investing in a Sustainable Hawai'i*

**DR. JOSH GREEN**  
GOVERNOR

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



**JADE BUTAY**  
DLIR DIRECTOR

**WILLIAM KUNSTMAN**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

**KEITH DEMELLO**  
CHAIRPERSON

**BENNETTE E. MISALUCHA**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**  
**Department of Labor and Industrial Relations**  
830 Punchbowl Street, Suite 317, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
Phone: (808) 586-8815 Web: <http://labor.hawaii.gov/wdc/>

To: The Honorable Senator Brandon Elefante, Chair,  
The Honorable Senator Rachele Lamosao, Vice-Chair, and  
Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Technology

Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Place: Conference Room 225, State Capitol

From: Bennette E. Misalucha

Executive Director, Workforce Development Council

**Re: GM 631: Gubernatorial Nominee, Keith DeMello**

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL IN STRONG SUPPORT**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of the Senate confirmation of **Keith DeMello** to serve on the Workforce Development Council.

Keith's continued service on the Council reflects both his professional expertise and his demonstrated commitment to Hawai'i's workforce and economic future. He represents the business sector and serves as Vice President of Ulupono, an investment company focused on strengthening Hawai'i through support for local enterprises and socially responsible initiatives. His work naturally aligns with many of the challenges and opportunities facing our workforce system.

This nomination marks Keith's second term, having first been appointed in 2022. During his prior service, he provided steady leadership as Chair of the Special Projects Committee. In that role, he helped guide efforts aimed at elevating the visibility and effectiveness of the American Job Centers, particularly through modernization and marketing strategies designed to better connect residents and employers with available services. These initiatives required not only strategic thinking, but also practical understanding of how systems function on the ground.

Keith brings valuable perspective shaped by experience in both the private and public spheres. He has

consistently demonstrated the ability to approach workforce issues with a balanced, solutions-oriented mindset, recognizing the needs of businesses while also understanding the broader community and economic context. His collaborative style and thoughtful approach have made him an effective contributor to Council discussions and initiatives.

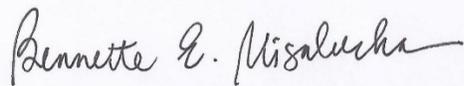
In 2025, Keith was appointed by Governor Green to serve as Chair of the Workforce Development Council, a reflection of the confidence placed in his leadership and judgment.

His service on numerous community boards further underscores his longstanding engagement with and dedication to Hawai'i's civic and economic well-being.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support the confirmation of Keith DeMello. He will continue to serve the Council and the State with professionalism, integrity, and a genuine commitment to advancing workforce opportunities in Hawai'i.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bennette E. Misalucha". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a light blue rectangular background.

Bennette E. Misalucha  
Executive Director  
Workforce Development Council



P.O. Box 253, Kunia, Hawai'i 96759  
Phone: (808) 848-2074; Fax: (808) 848-1921  
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February 25, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY

**TESTIMONY ON GM 631**

Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council, Gubernatorial Nominee, KEITH DEMELLO, for a term to expire 06-30-2029

Conference Room 225 & Videoconference  
3:00 PM

Aloha Chair Elefante, Vice-Chair Lamosao, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawai'i's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate, and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

**The Hawai'i Farm Bureau strongly supports the confirmation of Keith DeMello to continue serving on the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council.**

Mr. DeMello brings a unique blend of private sector leadership, public service experience, and strategic communications expertise that will be an asset to the Council's work. His current role as Chair of the WDC reflects the confidence placed in him to help guide workforce policy during a critical period for our State's economic development.

As Senior Vice President of Communications and External Affairs at Ulupono Initiative, Mr. DeMello works across key sectors, including locally produced food, renewable energy, and resource management, areas that directly intersect with Hawai'i's long-term workforce and economic priorities. His professional background and public service experience provide valuable insight into how workforce development strategies must align with industry needs.

From an agricultural perspective, workforce availability remains one of the most pressing challenges facing farmers and ranchers across the State. Strengthening career pathways, workforce training programs, and cross-sector collaboration is essential to ensuring Hawai'i can build and retain a skilled agricultural workforce. Mr. DeMello understands the importance of aligning workforce systems with local industry realities, including food production and rural economic sustainability.

Continuity in leadership on the Workforce Development Council is important as Hawai'i continues to modernize and coordinate its workforce strategies. Mr. DeMello's experience, collaborative approach, and ongoing commitment to sustainable economic development make him well-positioned to continue contributing meaningfully to the Council's mission.

The Hawai'i Farm Bureau respectfully urges the Committee to confirm Keith DeMello to continue his service on the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.



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**Executive Officers**

**Kit Okimoto**, Okimoto Corp., *Chair*  
**Jayson Watts**, Mahi Pono, *Vice Chair*  
**Jill Tamura**, Tamura Super Market, *Secretary/Treas.*  
**Lauren Zirbel**, HFIA, *President and Executive Director*  
**Paul Kosasa**, ABC Stores, *Advisor*  
**Toby Taniguchi**, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*  
**Joe Carter**, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, Odom, *Advisor*  
**Eddie Asato**, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*  
**Gary Okimoto**, Safeway, *Advisor*  
**Maile Miyashiro**, C&S Wholesale, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Labor and Technology  
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION  
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: February 25, 2026

TIME: 3pm

RE: GM631 Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council, gubernatorial nominee, KEITH DEMELLO, for a term to expire 06-30-2029

Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

HFIA is in support of this measure. We have had the pleasure of working for several years with Keith and Ulupono on issues related to sustainable food and Hawaii's food systems. He brings over 25 years of experience in strategic communications, including prior roles with the State of Hawaii and top public relations firms. Workforce development is a critical issue in Hawaii right now. With Keith's skills, experience, and dedication to creating positive change for our state make him an ideal candidate for this important role and we are pleased to testify in support of his nomination.



PO Box 4, Kunia, Hawaii, 96759 || 808-622-9026 || [www.agstewardshiphawaii.org](http://www.agstewardshiphawaii.org)

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February 25, 2026

Aloha Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamasao and Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Technology,

**Re: GM631, Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council, Gubernatorial Nominee, KEITH DEMELLO, for a term to expire 06-30-2029**

Please accept this letter in strong support of the confirmation of Keith DeMello to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council.

Our organization has worked with Keith through his communications and public relations role at Ulupono Initiative since 2022 and have seen firsthand his deep understanding of Hawai'i's workforce needs — particularly within the agricultural sector, as well as across Hawai'i's broader economy. Keith understands both the challenges employers face in finding and retaining skilled workers and the barriers many residents encounter in accessing quality career pathways.

Keith has consistently demonstrated a deep commitment to aligning workforce systems with education and employer needs. His focus on collaboration and community-centered solutions reflects an understanding that sustainable economic opportunity in Hawai'i requires coordination across sectors and meaningful engagement with local communities.

Mr. DeMello's vision — a Hawai'i where our youngest residents can see a viable future for themselves here at home — aligns directly with the mission of the Council. His experience, continuity, and willingness to step into expanded leadership make him well-positioned to help advance workforce strategies that are responsive, equitable, and forward-looking. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to confirm Keith DeMello to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in support.

Dr. Amanda Shaw, PhD, Statewide Food Systems Coordinator  
Email: [amanda@agstewardshiphawaii.org](mailto:amanda@agstewardshiphawaii.org), Tel: 808 429 5310

**GM-631**

Submitted on: 2/21/2026 9:19:35 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Patrick J Sousa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I fully support Keith DeMello on his Ulupono initiatives and ongoing efforts within HWDC relative to the American Job Centers, making the WDC more proactive and communicative on workforce-related legislation. He is deeply committed to strengthening alignment between workforce, education and employers, and hopes to continue expanding into a stronger leadership role to help move the work forward with a community-centered approach — ultimately aiming for a Hawai‘i where our youngest residents can envision a future for themselves here at home.

Patrick J. Sousa, MD (retired)

**GM-631**

Submitted on: 2/22/2026 7:51:49 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Mericia Palma Elmore	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of the nominee for Keith Demello. As a fellow board member on the **American Advertising Federation (AAF)**, Hawai'i Chapter, I have worked with the applicant and can attest to their leadership and professional integrity.

**GM-631**

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 1:50:43 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Nathan Kam	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in strong support of the confirmation of Keith DeMello for a second term on the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council (WDC).

I have known Keith for more than 20 years, both as a friend and a professional colleague. Over these two decades, Keith has stood out as one of the most genuinely passionate individuals I know when it comes to making Hawai'i a better place. His dedication isn't just a professional obligation; it is a core part of who he is. He possesses that rare combination of strategic thinking and a deep, "aloha-driven" concern for our community's future.

During his first term on the WDC, Keith proved that he is a man of action. As Chair of the Special Projects Committee, he focused on tangible results:

- Elevating the American Job Centers: He worked to ensure these vital resources were not just available, but widely known to the people who need them most.
- Legislative Framework: He helped establish a proactive system for the WDC to engage with workforce-related legislation, giving the Council a stronger voice in policy-making.

Workforce development is more than just a series of programs; it is the vital link between our education system and our local economy. In Hawai'i, the stakes are incredibly high. To build a sustainable future, we must:

- Diversify our Economy: By training residents for high-growth sectors beyond tourism.
- Bridge the Gap: By ensuring employers and educators are speaking the same language so our graduates are "job-ready."
- Keep Talent Local: By creating an ecosystem where our youth don't feel forced to move out of state to find a living wage and a fulfilling career.

Keith's ultimate goal is one I believe we all share: a Hawai'i where our youngest residents can clearly envision—and achieve—a future for themselves right here at home.

Having witnessed Keith's integrity and drive for over 20 years, I have no doubt that his continued leadership on the WDC will be a major asset to the State of Hawai'i. I strongly urge the Committee to confirm his appointment.

Mahalo for your time and for the opportunity to testify.

Nathan Kam

Joshua Wisch  
629 Hanale Place  
Kailua, HI 96734  
[joshwisch@yahoo.com](mailto:joshwisch@yahoo.com)

**Committee:** Senate Committee on Labor and Technology  
**Bill Number:** GM 631, Submitting for Consideration and Confirmation to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council, Gubernatorial Nominee, KEITH DEMELLO  
**Hearing Time:** February 25, 2026 at 3:00pm (Room 225)  
**Re:** Testimony in Support of Keith DeMello's Confirmation

Aloha Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Committee Members:

I write in support of Keith DeMello's confirmation to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council (WDC). I have known Keith for over 15 years—dating back to when we served together in the administration of Governor Neil Abercrombie—and I've had the privilege of working with him on multiple occasions since then. Keith is dedicated to Hawai'i, he is a consummate professional, he has high-level experience in the public and private sectors, and he treats everyone with respect. He's a great public servant.

Regarding his duties as a member of the WDC, the fact of his re-nomination to this body shows both his understanding of the topic area and the exemplary job he's already done as a part of it. In particular, Keith understands the importance of meeting federal Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act requirements and fulfilling current legislative mandates, while also ensuring that Hawai'i's workforce strategy reflects our state's unique economic conditions and community priorities.

Sometimes bodies like this can fall into the trap of emphasizing compliance above innovation and inertia above momentum. While Keith recognizes compliance is essential, he also knows the WDC's additional value rests in its ability to convene partners across government, education, labor, and industry—toward a coordinated Hawai'i-driven approach. I have been part of some of the convenings Keith has chaired and have seen firsthand his interest in ensuring everyone is contributing to the conversation.

Keith brings a systems perspective to his work. As part of that, he sees that strengthening alignment across sectors helps to ensure that workforce investments translate into real opportunity for local residents.

It is my honor to testify in support of his nomination. Mahalo for the ability to do so.



Joshua Wisch

**GM-631**

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 4:11:55 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Amy Hennessey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Elefante and Distinguished Committee Members,

It is with great pleasure that I write in strong support of Keith DeMello's reappointment to the Workforce Development Council. I have had the honor of knowing Keith as my friend since our days at the University of Hawai'i, and I've had the added benefit of working with him in various roles throughout my career. He is a dedicated, thoughtful, and hard-working individual with a passion for Hawai'i and all it can be. Keith is especially dedicated to bringing a community-centered approach to his work, prioritizing opportunities for our youngest keiki to feel like they can realistically build a life in Hawai'i, including access to good jobs. He has watched many in his 'ohana leave for the continent in search of a better life, and I believe this has inspired and informed his work.

It's been a delight to watch his work on the Council as an advocate for elevating awareness of the American Job Centers. He has rightly brought his communication and policy expertise to help establish a framework to make the Council more proactive and communicative on workforce-related legislation. I believe that if reappointed, Keith will continue to build on this important work. In addition, he will work to further align the workforce, education, and employers to support the goal of creating a bright future for our homegrown workers.

Mahalo for your consideration of this testimony in strong support.

Warm aloha,

Amy Hennessey

**GM-631**

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 6:30:05 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sunshine Topping	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

*Chair Elefante and Committee*

*Re: GM631 Testimony*

*February 23, 2026*

*Aloha Chair Elefante and Distinguished Committee Members,*

*I am pleased to offer my strong support for the reappointment of Keith DeMello to the Workforce Development Council. Over the past couple of years, I have had the opportunity to work closely with Keith and have consistently been impressed by his integrity, diligence, and genuine commitment to the people of Hawai‘i. He approaches this work with both heart and strategy, grounded in a deep love for our community and a clear understanding of the challenges local families face.*

*As a former HR administrator and former member of the Workforce Development Council, I view workforce systems through the lens of talent pipelines, employer engagement, and long-term economic sustainability. From that perspective, Keith stands out as a leader who understands that workforce development is not just about programs, but about people — especially our young people. He has been a strong advocate for ensuring that our keiki can envision a viable future here at home, with access to meaningful career pathways and quality jobs. Having witnessed members of his own ‘ohana leave Hawai‘i in search of greater opportunity, he brings both personal insight and urgency to this work.*

*During his time on the Council, I have appreciated his efforts to elevate awareness of the American Job Centers and the vital services they provide. Increasing visibility and access to these resources is critical to strengthening our workforce infrastructure. Keith has also effectively applied his policy and communications expertise to help the Council adopt a more proactive and strategic posture on workforce-related legislation. In my experience, clear communication and alignment between policy and practice are essential to building systems that truly serve employers and job seekers alike. Keith understands this connection and works intentionally to strengthen it.*

*If reappointed, I am confident he will continue advancing efforts to better align workforce initiatives with education systems and employer needs. This kind of cross-sector coordination is foundational to developing local talent, retaining homegrown workers, and creating sustainable economic opportunity in Hawai'i. Keith's leadership, insight, and commitment make him well-suited to continue contributing meaningfully to the Council's important work.*

*Mahalo for your consideration of this testimony in strong support.*

*Sincerely,*

*Sunshine Topping*

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND TECHNOLOGY**

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 — 3:00 p.m.

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF GM 631,  
Submitting for Consideration and Confirmation to the Hawai'i Workforce Development  
Council, Gubernatorial Nominee, Keith DeMello, for a Term to Expire 06-30-2029.**

Dear Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Lamosao, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of my nomination for reappointment to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council (WDC).

I humbly seek the opportunity to continue serving on the WDC for a second term because I believe a strong, well-aligned workforce system is essential to Hawai'i's long-term economic resilience and prosperity for our island residents. The WDC plays a uniquely important role in shaping our State Unified Plan and fulfilling federal Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements. Effective compliance with federal mandates is critical — but I believe our responsibility does not end there.

There is much energy and enthusiasm around elevating workforce development beyond a compliance-driven obligation to a coordinated, Hawai'i-driven strategy that reflects local economic realities, employer needs, and community values in Hawai'i. The WDC's structure allows it to convene employers, educators, labor, community partners, and government agencies under a unified framework. That convening authority is one of our greatest strengths, and I believe it must be used intentionally to strengthen sector partnerships, expand career-connected learning, and create clear pathways to living-wage employment.

During my first term, I chaired the WDC's Special Projects Committee, where I prioritized elevating awareness of the American Job Centers and supported efforts to make the WDC more proactive and communicative on workforce-related legislation. Professionally, my experience in both the private sector and state government — including at the Office of Enterprise Technology Services — has provided direct insight into the challenges of recruiting and retaining talent, aligning public systems with rapidly evolving industry demands, and translating workforce strategy into practical, on-the-ground implementation here in Hawai'i.

If my time on the WDC continues, I'll remain committed to fostering stronger alignment across workforce, education, and employers and ensuring that our strategies are responsive to Hawai'i's evolving labor market. Most importantly, I want our youngest residents to be able to envision a future for themselves and their families here at home — and to see a clear, attainable pathway toward that future.

Mahalo for your consideration and for the opportunity to continue serving.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Keith DeMello

**GM-631**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:01:22 AM

Testimony for LBT on 2/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Myoung Oh	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support of GM 631

RE: Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council, Gubernatorial Nominee, KEITH DEMELLO, for a term to expire 06-30-2029.

Mr. Keith DeMello is a thoughtful, community-minded leader whose work reflects a deep commitment to strengthening Hawai'i's economic resilience and local capacity. At Ulupono Initiative, he has been a steady bridge between policy, industry, and community priorities, approaching complex issues with clarity, collaboration, and respect. He brings a calm, solutions-focused presence and a genuine desire to elevate local voices.

His ability to connect stakeholders, translate broad goals into practical strategies, and keep community benefit at the center makes him an excellent fit for service on the Workforce Development Council.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Myoung Oh

**GM-631**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:26:15 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
amy agbayani	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I enthusiastically support Mr. Keith DeMello’s confirmation to the WDC. His professional experience and his work during his first WDC term make him a valuable and productive member. During his term on WDC he demonstrated his commitment to WCD mission. For example he chaired the WDC’s Special Projects Committee, where he prioritized awareness of American Job Centers and helped make the WDC more proactive and communicative on workforce-related legislation. He has a deep understanding of Hawaii’s history and appreciates the aspirations of Native Hawaiians and our multicultural community. He brings his professional technical skills to support WDC initiatives.

Mr DeMello has integrity, is thoughtful, analytical, strategic, pays attention to detail, understands the big picture. He is intelligent, hard working, collaborative and able to communicate clearly and honestly.

I want to thank him for his past work with me on a number of community projects, particularly his volunteer work to honor the Filipino World War II veterans. I thank him for his leadership and service as a community volunteer on WDC.

I respectfully request you confirm Mr DeMello to the WDC as I am confident he will be an active and responsible member.!

Sincerely,

Amy Agbayani, Emeritus Director for student diversity UH Manoa  
Former chair, Hawai’i Commission on Civil Rights

**GM-631**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:39:03 PM

Testimony for LBT on 2/25/2026 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Diane Ley	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**Honorable Chair Elefante, Vice-Chair Lamosao and Committee Members,**

**It is my pleasure to offer strong support for Keith DeMello’s nominations to serve a second term on the Hawai`i Workforce Development Council (GM 631).**

**As a former department executive at the county, state and federal levels with responsibilities related to agriculture and rural economic development, I understand the key role workforce development plays in ensuring a strong and vibrant economy. I also understand firsthand the essential assets volunteer board/council members bring to administrative policy and programmatic implementation. Key qualities sought for volunteer members include demonstrated servant leadership, strategic communication skills, and a collaborative approach. A volunteer with the capacity of framing a collective vision is an added plus.**

**Mr. DeMello checks all the boxes and more.**

**A Servant Leader ~~ Mr. DeMello has a strong track record of working across key sectors of Hawai`i’s economy and government. He is a professional committed to making significant contributions to Hawai`i’s communities, businesses, non-profits and government. He makes time and gives his best because he cares.**

**A Strategic Communicator ~~ Listening deeply and asking questions are key to Mr. DeMello’s approach. He learns from a diverse range of stakeholders and subsequently frames complex issues into understandable terms. He then uses the collective input to support efforts to find solutions and develop actionable strategies. He skillfully guides communication to advance understanding and secure collective support for next steps.**

**A Collaborator for Action ~~ Mr. DeMello brings his strong collaborative skills to seek innovative approaches while always striving for the greater good. His demonstrated skills have successfully bridged legislative, administrative, business, non-profit and community interests.**

**A Collective Vision ~~ Mr. DeMello looks for and sees great possibilities and through his collaborative approach leverages and supports community-centered vision and outcomes that provide enhanced public benefits.**

**During his first term on the Council, he helped to elevate awareness of the counties' American Job Centers as key partners for the State in supporting services to job seekers. He also worked with others to elevate processes for the Council to become more proactive on work-force related legislation; thus, affording the Administration and Legislature with enhanced input.**

**I strongly believe Mr. DeMello will continue to provide exceptional service on the Workforce Development Council, and his efforts will undoubtedly benefit ongoing efforts to strengthen Hawai'i's workforce and economy.**

**Mahalo for your consideration.**

**Diane Ley**

**Volcano, Hawai'i**