



TESTIMONY OF
CAROLINE ANDERSON
Interim President & CEO
Hawai'i Tourism Authority
before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM
Tuesday, March 31, 2026
1:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Room 229

In consideration of
GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE NO. 602
CONFIRMATION OF LEAH BELMONTE
ADVISORY BOARD OF DIRECTORS, HAWAII TOURISM AUTHORITY

Aloha Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of Leah Belmonte's nomination to serve as a member of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) Advisory Board of Directors.

As a member of HTA's Advisory Board, Ms. Belmonte serves on the Administrative Standing Committee, which oversees the contract terms of the president and chief executive officer and makes recommendations related to their evaluation; on the Ho'okahua Hawai'i Standing Committee, which provides strategic guidance on destination stewardship, Hawaiian culture, visitor experiences, workforce development, and implementation of HTA's Strategic Plan, Destination Management Action Plans and the state Tourism Functional Plan; and on the CEO Search Permitted Interaction Group, which recruits, hires and establishes contract terms for HTA's president and CEO.

Ms. Belmonte, based on Maui, has a strong human resources background. She is adept at talent acquisition, training and development, resolving employee relations issues, and compliance with federal, state, and local labor laws. She has been a valuable addition to the HTA Advisory Board of Directors.

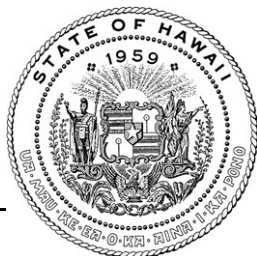
Most of Ms. Belmonte's human resources experience was acquired from positions at hotels, including the Grand Wailea, The Ritz-Carlton in Kapalua, and Diamond International Resort's Ka'anapali Beach Club in Lahaina. In her current role as Director of Human Resources at Mahi Pono in Kahului, Maui, Ms. Belmonte oversees all human resources functions, including legal compliance.

Ms. Belmonte also served as the Governor's Representative for the Office of the Governor. In that role, she was responsible for keeping the Governor's Office informed of the concerns and issues in Maui County, serving as the liaison with Maui's community leaders. As an HTA Advisory Board

member, Ms. Belmonte has also assisted HTA by providing on-island insights to inform decision-making and by implementing best practices to support visitor industry professionals and others on the Valley Isle.

We are thankful to have Ms. Belmonte on the HTA Advisory Board of Directors and appreciate her willingness to continue to serve. We support Ms. Belmonte's nomination and have no doubt that she will continue to be a valuable member of the HTA Advisory Board of Directors.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share our support.



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI
A HO'OMĀKA'IKĀ'I

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
DIRECTOR

DANE K. WICKER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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Testimony of
JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
Director
Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism
before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM
Tuesday, March 31, 2026
1:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Room 229

In consideration of
GM 602
**Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Advisory Board of Directors
of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority, Gubernatorial Nominee,
LEAH BELMONTE, for a term to expire 06-30-2029.**

Aloha Chair DeCoite, Vice Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Leah Belmonte's nomination to serve as a member of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) Advisory Board of Directors.

Based on Maui, Ms. Belmonte brings a strong background in human resources, including talent acquisition, training and development, employee relations and compliance with federal, state and local labor laws. Much of her human resources experience was developed in hotel leadership roles at the Grand Wailea, The Ritz-Carlton in Kapalua and Diamond Resorts International's Ka'anapali Beach Club in Lahaina. In her current role as director of human resources at Mahi Pono in Kahului, she oversees all human resources functions, including legal compliance.

Ms. Belmonte also served as the Governor's representative for Maui County, keeping the Governor's Office informed of local concerns and serving as a liaison with community leaders. Her on-island perspective and workforce expertise support informed decision-making and her experience has been valuable to the HTA Advisory Board.

As a member of HTA's Advisory Board, Ms. Belmonte serves on several committees. She is part of the Administrative Standing Committee, which oversees the contract

terms of the president and chief executive officer and makes recommendations regarding their performance evaluations. She also serves on the Ho'okahua Hawai'i Standing Committee, which provides strategic guidance on destination stewardship, Hawaiian culture, visitor experiences, workforce development, and the implementation of HTA's Strategic Plan, Destination Management Action Plans, and the state Tourism Functional Plan. Additionally, she is a member of the CEO Search Permitted Interaction Group, responsible for recruiting, hiring, and establishing the contract terms for HTA's president and CEO.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Ms. Belmonte.



March 11, 2026

Dear Chair Decoite and members of the committee,

I write in support of Leah Belmonte (GM- 602) for a position on the Hawaii Tourism Authority Board. Having known Leah for two decades, I can attest to her exceptional qualifications and unwavering commitment to Hawaii's tourism industry.

Throughout our 20-year relationship, I have witnessed Leah develop deep expertise in both tourism operations, government, and human resources management within Hawaii's unique market. Her comprehensive understanding of these 3 areas would bring valuable insight to the Board's deliberations.

Leah's human resources expertise is particularly relevant to Hawaii's tourism sector. She understands the challenges of recruiting, training, and retaining skilled workers in our competitive market. Her work has consistently demonstrated innovative approaches to workforce development while respecting the cultural values and community needs that make Hawaii distinctive. She recognizes that sustainable tourism depends not only on visitor satisfaction but also on creating meaningful employment opportunities for local residents.

What distinguishes Leah is her nuanced understanding of tourism's impact on our islands. She approaches industry challenges with both business acumen and genuine aloha, balancing economic objectives with environmental stewardship and cultural preservation. Her collaborative leadership style and ability to bridge diverse stakeholder interests would serve the Board well as it navigates complex policy decisions.

Leah's strategic thinking, combined with her hands on industry experience, positions her to make immediate and lasting contributions to the Hawaii Tourism Authority. She brings fresh perspectives grounded in practical realities—exactly what the Board needs as it shapes the future of tourism in Hawaii.

I am confident she would be an outstanding addition to your Board.

Sincerely,

Shan Tsutsui

COO-Mahi Pono & Former Lt. Governor

GM-602

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 5:00:39 AM

Testimony for EDT on 3/31/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Clifford Caesar	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I have known Leah Belmonte for many years. I have worked with her at the Wailea Renaissance Resort, the Wailea Marriott Resort, and the Grand Wailea Resort. She has always been very professional and very smart and articulate. She was born and raised on Maui and she has a very nice family so she is very much invested in the success of the Hawaii tourism authority. Through the years she has helped me tremendously and I know she will do the same for the Hawaii Tourism Authority. She's a great candidate and I highly recommend her.