

April 12, 2026

To: Senator Chris Lee
Chair, Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture, and the Arts
Hawaii State Legislature

From: Jo-Ann Leong

Dear Senator Lee,

Please find below the answers to the questions you asked in your letter of April 10, 2026. If there are other issues that you might have, please do contact me. I would be happy to address them.

(1) Why do you wish to be a member of the Hawai'i Community Development Authority (Heeia District)?

I have served on the HCDA Board representing Heeia from 2017 to 2022. After a hiatus due to changes in the board makeup, I was recently reappointed as a temporary member for 2023. I am seeking reappointment as a representative for non-profit organizations in Heeia because Kako`o`Oiwī, the lessee for the Heeia project, has reached a stage of development that could secure its economic future. The HCDA Board needs a member who understands this project's history and challenges.

(2) What is your understanding of the role and responsibilities of a member of the Hawai'i Community Development Authority?

HCDA was created in 1976 by the State Legislature to serve as an agency that promotes and coordinates public and private sector investments for community development. HCDA's current portfolio consists of the Kaka`ako area of Honolulu, the 3,700-acre Kalaeloa District, the 437 acres of former taro lo'i and meadowlands of He`eia, and, more recently, the Pulehunui Community Development District in Maui. HCDA has also been charged with the responsibility of fostering community development through infrastructure improvements for Oahu's Transit-Oriented Development Infrastructure Improvement District. As part of the He`eia Authority of HCDA, my role would be to provide information on the development of the He`eia property and to serve as a link between HCDA and the community. I also believe the role of HCDA is to provide a forum for community participation in the HCDA's decision-making process.

(3) Based on your understanding of the role and responsibilities of this position, please explain why you believe you are qualified to serve. Include a brief statement of your skills, experience, expertise, or knowledge that would bring to the Authority and how they would inform your decision-making.

I grew up on Oahu with family that we visited every weekend in Kaneohe. My childhood was spent on Kaneohe Bay and in the pastures and streams on Heeia. I am fortunate to live there now.

I have a doctoral degree in Microbiology and expertise in aquatic diseases of marine organisms. I served on the executive committee of the National Climate Assessment 2014 and was the lead author of the chapter on Hawaii and the U.S. Affiliated Pacific Islands. As Director of the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology, I gained a working knowledge of the zoning process for conservation lands. I sit on the Board of Kako`o `Oiwi and have served on Paepae O He`eia's Board. Before my return to Hawaii, I was Chairman and Distinguished Professor of Microbiology at Oregon State University. My research program included the DNA vaccine development for fish and shellfish to promote sustainable, environmentally sound aquaculture.

I bring a unique expertise to HCDA, an understanding of contemporary scientific research, and an appreciation for the cultural heritage and significance of Kaneohe Bay and the He`eia Ahupua`a. This unique expertise can enhance my role on the HCDA to better equip HCDA in fulfilling its objective of "providing maximum opportunity for the restoration and implementation of sustainable, culturally appropriate, biologically responsible or agriculturally beneficial enterprises."

(4) If confirmed, what goals or priorities would you hope to accomplish during your term of service?

As Kako`o `Oiwi begins to enlarge its production of agricultural products and restore the land to its original state, when it provides sustainable agricultural products and clean waters for Kaneohe Bay, there will be a need for educational and farm/restaurant facilities. Investments in planning and infrastructure development in coordination with other community programs will be required. I also hope to provide a bridge between the community and HCDA to better understand the opportunities that collaboration, partnerships, and shared interests can provide in fulfilling its mission.

(5) Do you believe there is anything that could reasonably be perceived by the public as creating a conflict of interest or otherwise raise questions regarding your character, judgment, or ability to serve impartially on the Hawaii Community Development Authority? If so, please explain.

In the confirmation process for my first appointment to the HCDA Board, I told Governor David Ige that I served as Secretary/Treasurer of Kako`o `Oiwi. I was concerned that this might be viewed as a conflict. Governor Ige advised me to continue the process of confirmation. He thought I would provide the information needed for the Board. He advised that I should recuse myself from voting on any matters that would be beneficial to Kako`o `Oiwi. I have adhered to that advice during my term on the HCDA Board and will do so if confirmed during the current process.



**HAWAII COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

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JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

STERLING HIGA
CHAIRPERSON

CRAIG K. NAKAMOTO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Statement of
CRAIG K. NAKAMOTO
Executive Director
Hawai'i Community Development Authority
before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Wednesday, April 15, 2026
1:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

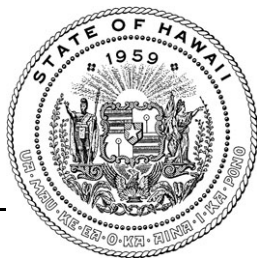
In consideration of
GM 727
**Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the
Hawai'i Community Development Authority (He'eia District),
Gubernatorial Nominee, JO-ANN LEONG, for a term to expire 06-30-2030.**

Chairperson Lee, Vice Chairperson Inouye and members of the Committee. The Hawai'i Community Development Authority (HCDA) **supports GM 727**, that considers confirmation for Ms. Jo-Ann Leong, on the HCDA Board, as a He'eia Community Development District representative, that is an officer of a nonprofit organization in the He'eia District.

As Director Emeritus of the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology at the University of Hawai'i, a board member of Kāko'o 'Ōiwi, the long-term lessee and steward of the lands in the He'eia community development district, and a member of the board for Paepae o He'eia, the Hawaiian fishpond makai of the HCDA He'eia Community Development District, Ms. Leong brings an unmatched expertise of the land, its flora and fauna, and the He'eia community.

During her tenure on the HCDA board, Member Leong has demonstrated unwavering dedication and a deep commitment to supporting the He'eia District and the broader Kāne'ohe Bay community. Her service has been exemplary, and we look forward to continuing our productive collaboration with her.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support.



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

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

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Statement of
JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
Director

LATE

Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism
before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Wednesday, April 15, 2026
1:00 p.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

In consideration of
GM 727
Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the
Hawai'i Community Development Authority (He'eia District),
Gubernatorial Nominee, **JO-ANN LEONG**, for a term to expire **06-30-2030**.

Chair Lee, Vice Chair Inouye and Members of the Committee:

The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) respectfully submits testimony in **strong support** of GM 727, which seeks confirmation of Ms. Jo-Ann Leong, the Governor's nominee to serve on the Hawai'i Community Development Authority (HCDA) Board representing the He'eia District.

Ms. Leong's experience and commitment to the He'eia District and state overall strengthens the effectiveness of the HCDA board. Thoughtful, engaged board members are essential to ensuring balanced decision-making, community responsiveness, and the successful implementation of HCDA's mission to promote sustainable development and affordable housing in Hawai'i.

I believe Ms. Leong will continue to contribute positively to the HCDA's work and help advance projects that benefit the people of Hawai'i.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Ko`olau Foundation

P. O. Box 4749 / 46-005 Kawa St., #205
Kane`ohe, HI 96744

April 12, 2026

To: Sen. Chris Lee, Chair
Sen. Lorraine Inouye, Vice Chair
And Members, Committee on Water, Land, Culture & the Arts

From: Mahealani Cypher, President
Ko`olau Foundation

Re: GM727, Confirmation of Jo-Ann Leong to HCDA-Heeia Seat

Aloha Chair Lee, Vice Chair Leong and Committee Members:

The Ko`olau Foundation supports GM727, which involves the Governor's appointment of Jo-Ann Leong to the Heeia seat on the Hawaii Community Development Authority.

We have known Dr. Leong for many years, both in her former capacity as director of the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology and long after she retired. She has served as a dedicated community advisor on the marine resources of Kane`ohe Bay as well as provide wise advice and guidance to the Heeia NERR and many other community organizations. She has been an active member of the Ko`olaupoko Hawaiian Civic Club for many years.

We urge your support of her appointment and referral for the full Senate to consent to this appointment.

Mahalo nui for this opportunity to share our mana`o.



KO'OLAUPOKO HAWAIIAN CIVIC CLUB

April 13, 2026

To: Senator Chris Lee, Chair and Members
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, CULTURE AND THE
ARTS

Subject: Support for Jo-Ann Leong – Hawaii Community Development Authority-
He`eia GM 727

Aloha Senator Lee and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Ko`olaupoko Hawaiian Civic Club, I am very pleased to offer our full support for the appointment of Dr. Jo-Ann Leong to be reappointed to a He`eia seat on the Hawaii Community Development Authority for the term to expire on June 30, 2030.

Dr. Leong has been a highly valued representative for He`eia on the HCDA board for many reasons. She brings a unique understanding of the resources of the He`eia ahupa`a, developed in her years as a scientist and administrator for the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology. During that time and since her retirement she gives generously of her time and skills to a variety of community organizations including our Civic Club. She understands the workings of the academic, public and private sectors and is a highly effective advocate with all of them.

Ko`olaupoko Hawaiian Civic Club would be very grateful for your positive consideration of her reappointment to the Hawaii Community Development Authority.

Me ke aloha,

Charles K. Naumu, President
Ko`olaupoko Hawaiian Civic Club

The Ko`olaupoko Hawaiian Civic Club was established in 1937 and is one of the largest in the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs nationwide. Ko`olaupoko HCC is a not-for-profit community organization dedicated to preserving and perpetuating the history, heritage and culture of Native Hawaiians and providing leadership and scholarships. Its membership is open to people of Hawaiian ancestry and those who are "Hawaiian at heart."



HE'EIA
NATIONAL ESTUARINE
RESEARCH RESERVE

Testimony on behalf of He`eia National Estuarine Research Reserve
Strongly Supporting GM727
Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture, and Art

April 13, 2026

Aloha Chair Lee and members of the Senate Committee on Water, Land, Culture, and Arts,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support for the re-appointment of Jo-Ann Leong (GM727) as a Member of the HCDA Board. As the Director of the He`eia National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR), I strongly support this nomination.

I have known Jo-Ann for several years in a professional capacity. All of my experiences with her have been overwhelmingly positive. I can personally attest that I have seen that she is deeply committed to processes that elevate the community's voice in decision-making processes. She has been a strong supporter of the He`eia National Estuarine Research Reserve, which is a co-management agreement between NOAA (federal agency), the State, and the community of He`eia.

HCDA will be well served to have Jo-Ann Leong re-appointed to the HCDA Board. I strongly urge you to confirm her in the position as Chair.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Kawika Winter, Ph.D.

Director, He`eia National Estuarine Research Reserve

GM-727

Submitted on: 4/12/2026 9:03:24 AM

Testimony for WLA on 4/15/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amy Luersen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support Jo-ann Leong for the HCDA Board! She is deeply committed to the restoration of the Heeia district. Her relationships with both HIMB and the NERRs contribute to the efforts to restore these lands into productive agricultural and cultural resources building on both traditional and western knowledge.

When I served on the Heeia district Board with her, I found her to be thoughtful, diligent and innovative in seeking solutions that would move the work forward.

I urge you to approve her nomination.