

Testimony of  
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Before the  
**U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs**

At  
**Hale'ōlelo, University of Hawai'i at Hilo**

On  
**June 2, 2022**

Regarding  
**“Upholding the Federal Trust Responsibility:  
Funding & Program Access for Innovation in the Native Hawaiian Community”**

E ka Luna Ho'omalū 'o Schatz, ka Hope Luna Ho'omalū 'o Murkowski a me nā lālā a pau o kēia komike, aloha nui kākou and mahalo for this opportunity to speak with you regarding funding and program access for innovation in the Native Hawaiian Community, particularly as it relates to the renormalization of our Hawaiian language in its homeland.

My name is Amy Kalili. While my 'ohana Hawai'i hails from Pa'ala'a, more commonly known today as Hale'iwa on the north shore of the island of O'ahu, I grew up right here in Hilo Hawai'i. I have had the privilege of being involved in the Hawaiian Language movement since the 1990s. My mentors and the programs that nurtured and cultivated my fluency now occupy this very building we are meeting in today and they continue to be at the tip of the spear, leading a movement that has become a national and international model of indigenous language revitalization.

Although the Hawaiian language medium schools - that my colleague Nāmaka Rawlins will speak to at length in this hearing - were established well after my formative years, I did “grow up” in and around these efforts starting early on in my college years. From the undergraduate (BA Business Administration, BA Hawaiian Studies) and graduate (JD/MBA) degrees I have completed, to the positions I have held and businesses I have built and run in my professional

career, all were motivated by an aloha and commitment to uplifting our ‘ōlelo makuahine. The goal of E Ola ka ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i - the Hawaiian Language Shall Live - is an audacious one, but one that changed my life and thousands of others who are a part of our aukahi ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, our Hawaiian language movement.

### **Success of Native Language Schools and Programs Dependent on Broader Reach and Awareness**

My testimony is an extension of Nāmaka Rawlins’ testimony - highlighting the P-12 segment of our Hawaiian language medium schools - as well Keiki Kawai‘ae‘a’s - which focuses on higher education and its crucial role in resourcing the P-12 programming. While I have worked alongside both Nāmaka and Keiki at the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo and Ka Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani Hawaiian Language College, as well as Ke Kula ‘o Nāwahīokalani‘ōpu‘u, my more recent endeavors have taken me a step away from this core Hawaiian Language Consortium<sup>1</sup> out into the broader community, advocating for and supporting language efforts there.

While the P-12 schools are the driving force of the Hawaiian language movement, the movement is more than a collective of children in schools. It is a collective of people, young and old, many with keiki, mo‘opuna, and nieces and nephews in these schools. Many are parents who have gone back to school themselves to become teachers and administrators. There are ‘ohana who have learned alongside each other to engage civically in order to change and promote policy in support of the movement. And we also have our graduates who are well into their careers using and applying ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i in those settings and many now raising their own children, completing and continuing the cycle.

At the core of this movement are the ‘ohana whose keiki are in our schools and they are pursuing ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i as the primary language for their homes. As that core continues to grow, the concentric rings that ripple out from that core are growing as well. Those rings include individuals and ‘ohana who know some Hawaiian words and phrases or are even

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<sup>1</sup> The Hawaiian Language Consortium partners include the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, Ka Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani Hawaiian Language College, Ke Kula ‘o Nāwahīokalani‘ōpu‘u, and the ‘Imiloa Center.

learning ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i but will never reach a high level of fluency. They run businesses and organizations that use ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i in some capacity. There are thousands more who support the movement in other ways. They give financially. They support and pass policy measures necessary to ensure equity and parity for these language programs. They lend their celebrity and influence to elevate the perceived status of the language. They provide platforms and dissemination mechanisms to extend the capacity, reach and impact of our ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. Whatever their specific contribution, these outer rings of engagement and support are fundamental to the movement overall and to the ultimate success of that core group of students, ‘ohana, teachers, professors, curriculum developers, and administrators in the Hawaiian language medium schools.

I have had the honor and privilege of being a part of that core group, as a student and lecturer at this Hawaiian Language College, a student-teacher at Nāwahīokalani‘ōpu‘u, and in multiple capacities at the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo including Executive Director. However, my work outside of that core group - currently in media and communications alongside partners and clients who see and embrace the value of a living language here in Hawai‘i - has been just as critical as my time spent in the core of the movement.

The perceived relevance and capacity of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i as a living language to be used in all sectors of Hawai‘i is fundamental to the long-term success of our language schools and programs. This relevance will either be cultivated or diminished in the larger context of the movement and Hawai‘i overall. Next year, 2023, will mark the 40th anniversary of the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo. We have educated thousands of kamali‘i and ‘ōpio entirely through Hawaiian. Many of them are now well into their careers, some gaining high-paying positions not *in spite of*, but *because of*, their fluency in Hawaiian and the perspective and worldview that comes with that. Yet, it was just a few months ago in casual conversation about the schools and programs that one of our policymakers here in Hawai‘i asked what the real value of having these children educated in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i was. That is an awareness, perception, and status

issue; an issue that has unfortunate implications for the long-term support for the language schools and programs regardless of the amazing work being done therein.

Whether for the benefit of our political and community leaders or our own 'ohana, and especially our 'ōpio and keiki, it is imperative that we support the use of our native languages in the domains that affirm that it is a language of capacity.

### **Supporting Use of Language in Media**

One of the most important domains for language presence is media, both broadcast media but also new media. The ubiquitous nature of media makes it such that if we do not embrace and harness its power to our benefit, it will become an immense barrier to the normalization of our native languages. Media has a significant potential to contribute to language revitalization. It can help address the issue of prestige and status, but can also help expand the use of the language into other domains including government and business, and can also support language learning itself.

'Aha Pūnana Leo's long-standing partnership with 'Ōiwi Television Network - and its key partners including Palikū Documentary Films, Makauila Inc., and Pilina First - blazed a trail in this area back in 2008 with our 'Āha'i 'Ōlelo Ola news programming on Hawai'i's CBS-affiliate, Hawai'i News Now. It was an honor to anchor, produce and write for that programming as I got to amplify the stories - to multiple thousands of Hawaiian speakers and non-speakers each morning and on the weekends - about the amazing work being done in our communities. This platform also gave us an opportunity to bring a different perspective to issues impacting not only the Native Hawaiian community, but Hawai'i overall. It was even more rewarding because I got to make the connection, firsthand, to how this work in media, in the broader landscape of the language movement, had a direct impact on the work being done in our language schools and programs. We still to this day have students and parents approach us to say how seeing Hawaiians on TV, more so speaking Hawaiian and using Hawaiian in that way, was a game-changer. It broadened the imagination of our community in

terms of what is possible and how our language can and should be used. Even more satisfying is watching programmings like the Merrie Monarch broadcast, the largest locally produced show, where the talent is not only able to speak about this traditional practice of hula in both languages but each and every commercial break includes spots done in Hawaiian; commercials by businesses who understand the added economic value of connecting with our community and our culture.

Unlike many of our indigenous cousins around the world, however, our native language broadcast programming does not receive stable government funding, state nor federal. This is in stark contrast for example to the Māori broadcast efforts in Aotearoa that receive upwards of \$40 million annually and the Welsh initiatives that receive well over £80 million annually.

### **Ongoing Support for Bilingual Science and Technology Programming**

The ‘Imiloa Bilingual Science Center - located just across the road from where we are gathered here at Hale‘ōlelo - is another key partner in the Hawaiian language consortium working to uplift and normalize the use and relevance of Hawaiian language in areas of cutting-edge technology. ‘Imiloa is an informal science center; the only Hawaiian-English bilingual center of its kind. It was envisioned by the late Senator Daniel Inouye to bring Hawaiian culture and science together.

One of ‘Imiloa’s recent initiatives that brought our language front and center in the world of astronomy and landmark discoveries being made therein is the A Hua He Inoa program. Meaning “to bring forth a name,” A Hua He Inoa is a collaborative effort led by ‘Imiloa that is shifting global paradigms, positioning Hawai‘i as the first place in the world to weave traditional indigenous practices into the process of officially naming astronomical discoveries. As we celebrate 40 years of revitalizing ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, this is yet another acknowledgment of the capacity and relevance of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i - and the world view that it informs - in modern contexts.

The program creates a context where Hawaiian-speaking students are immersed in knowledge from ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i experts, education leaders, and top research scientists from Hawai‘i’s astronomical observatories. They peer into the world of scientific research, learn about the recent discovery of celestial bodies, and expanded their understanding of the vital relationship, and role, of tradition and culture in modern-day science.

Building on the impact that this integrated programming has on our haumāna when they are given skills and platforms that reiterate the relevance and importance of their fluency, we will be combining the media efforts of ‘ŌiwiTV and ‘Imiloa’s work in science and technology this fall. We will be developing coursework in digital storytelling to be delivered at the Hawaiian Language College. These will be dual-credit courses whereby Nāwahīokalani‘ōpu‘u high school students can enroll in the courses and receive both high school and college credits. We will be teaching storytelling, news writing, dissemination and distribution strategies, along with components of production work, data visualization, animation, and exhibit development, all through the Hawaiian language.

While these and other Consortium initiatives are made possible by creative collaboration and funding, having stable streams of support for innovative program development like this is critical to the continued success of the Consortium’s work.

### **Support for Cross-community Collaboration**

From the early advocacy efforts to simply affirm the right to educate our children in their native language, to the ongoing development of educational programming, and then our delving into media and even these science and technology endeavors, collaborating with other indigenous language communities has also been fundamental to success.

Our Mokuola Honua: Global Center for Indigenous Language Excellence was developed as a gathering place – both physical and virtual – to foster collaborations on a wide range of indigenous issues and strategies, all of which are grounded in strong language fluency.

The Consortium had been organically developing strong relationships with other indigenous communities engaged in language revitalization efforts since the 1980s. These informal collaborative efforts were born out of necessity due to the limited resources that are typically available to indigenous language efforts as well as the small numbers of those actively pursuing such initiatives.

The Center's goal is to provide structure, purpose, and space to create a national and international network supporting indigenous language revitalization globally and it is housed here at Hale'ōlelo.

Mokuola Honua has hosted symposiums engaging representatives from indigenous communities around the world. The Center has also developed and delivered programming for high school and college students to broaden their understanding of international language efforts and what it is like to advocate at the United Nations for indigenous language rights; advocacy efforts that increase their own understanding and appreciation for what they are fortunate to be a part of here at home. Mokuola Honua has also supported candidates in the College's Masters and Ph.D. programs from other indigenous communities allowing them to earn these degrees in a program focused on the language work they do with their own people. The Center is also an extension of the work that 'Aha Pūnana Leo has done for decades in welcoming other peoples to visit and learn from our programs here in Hawai'i.

## **Conclusion**

Mahalo nui loa again to you all, e ka Luna Ho'omalua 'o Schatz, ka Hope Luna Ho'omalua 'o Murkowski a me nā lālā a pau o kēia komike, a pēia pū iā 'oukou e nā limahana kāko'o for this opportunity to share some of the work we are intimately involved in. I leave you with a few points to consider as it relates to areas of needed support for the broader context of the aukahi 'ōlelo Hawai'i that are vital to the success of our core language schools and programs.

1. Dedicated Hawaiian language media funding streams will allow us to harness the ubiquitous nature and power of this domain, affirming the status, relevance, and

capacity of our language. This will address the issue of prestige and status, but can also help expand the use of the language in other domains, and can also directly support language learning through the delivery of educational content and curriculum to even more learners.

2. Dedicated funding that supports continued innovations in the integration of language and culture in science and technology in meaningful, practical ways is another means to affirm the capacity of our language and the place of our worldview in modern contexts.
3. Dedicated resources for the ongoing collaboration on research, innovation, and program development across indigenous language communities will allow us to continue to visit, lean on, learn from and share with each other.