

Written Testimony
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Consortium 'Aha Pūnana Leo, Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani, Ke Kula 'o Nāwahīokalani'ōpu'u
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Oversight Hearing: In Our Way: Expanding the Success of Native Language & Culture-Based
Education
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'Auhea 'oukou e ka Lunaho'omalū Kenekoa Akaka a me nā lālā o ke Kōmike 'Ilikini o ka 'Aha Kenekoa o 'Amelika Hui Pū 'Ia, aloha mai kākou, lā 'oe e Kenekoa Akaka ke aloha pumehana a pēlā pū iā 'oe e Kenekoa Inouye, aloha mai Hawai'i mai.

GREETING

Chairman Akaka, Vice Chairman Barrasso, Senator Inouye and Members of the Committee on Indian Affairs, my name is Nāmaka Rawlins, Outreach specialist for the 'Aha Pūnana Leo, Inc. and the Liaison of the state of Hawai'i Hawaiian language college. These entities work together and represent Hawai'i's P-20 vertical alignment of Hawaiian language medium education system. P-20 refers to an education pipeline from early childhood through to the doctorate. We are the most developed program in a Native American language, with special strengths in early childhood, secondary programming, teacher training, testing, and graduate education.

I am past Executive Director of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo, served as chairperson of the Native Hawaiian Education Council and just recently completed my term as board member of the National Indian Education Association.

Today, I come before you as the Outreach Specialist of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo, Inc., and the Liaison of Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani, Hawaiian language college established by the Hawai'i State Legislature in 1997 at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. These two entities lead a consortium of programs in Hawai'i and also in the national Native American language immersion effort.

It is an honor to testify before you on Native American education with a particular emphasis on the crucial role of our Native American languages and cultures in the education of Native Hawaiians, American Indians, and Alaska Natives.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF OUR WORK

In the 1970's, there were less than 50 children below the age of 18 fluent in Hawaiian. The Hawaiian language was near extinction. In response, advocacy for language study grew. As an example, Native Hawaiian elders in my community organized themselves and pushed for our language to be taught in the public schools and the local University of Hawai'i at Hilo. They have since passed but there has been an explosion in the growth of children highly fluent in Hawaiian. This occurred through developing resources and teaching methods for college and high school Hawaiian language classes and language appreciation in elementary school but most notably through preschool through grade 12 immersion schools. Our programming is built upon the Kumu Honua Mauli Ola – a unified Native Hawaiian educational philosophy, and the Pepeke, a Hawaiian culture-based paradigm for teaching Hawaiian which is built on solid linguistic research.

The 'Aha Pūnana Leo, Inc. is the oldest Native American language immersion focused non-profit in the United States. Nearly 30 years ago, the 'Aha Pūnana Leo established its language nests, preschools modeled on the Maori Kohanga Reo. Hawaiian is used exclusively and is the medium of education. This is the model proven successful in reversing language loss. It is through this system that we are improving our teaching and learning in public education to ensure the success of our children and families in an education that makes sense and that

comes from communities committed to building a future for their children based on the language and knowledge of the ancestors.

‘Aha Pūnana Leo currently administers 11 statewide early childhood education center based language nests. Through our language and culture, we remain competitive in a global economy with an educated citizenry whose ideas and dreams contribute to a better world.

We serve the entire State of Hawai‘i through Hawaiian language teaching, curriculum development, teacher training, media development, and technology development. Working together the Hawaiian language college and ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, Inc. serve Native Hawaiian communities outside the state as well, especially through on-line language learning. Nationally, ‘Aha Pūnana Leo’s preschool programming is the only language nest system of schools rather than a single school.

WORLD REKNOWN HAWAIIAN P-20 NATIVE LANGUAGE IMMERSION

Ka Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikōlani college is the University of Hawai‘i’s Hawaiian language college and provides B.A. M.A. & Doctoral degrees, an indigenous teacher education certification, a laboratory school program including the k-12 Ke Kula ‘O Nāwahīokalani‘ōpu‘u and houses the State’s Hawaiian language curriculum and testing center, Hale Kuamo‘o. All of these programs are taught and administered through the Hawaiian language. Our college is world renown for its work in indigenous language and culture-based education. In addition to mainstream accreditation through the Western Association of Schools & Colleges (WASC), we also received the first P-20 accreditation in the world from WINHEC – the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium whose representation members are from the US, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Norway, and other countries with significant indigenous populations.

The Hawaiian language college is the only entity of higher education in the United States that is operated internally through a Native American language. We offer 57 standard content courses from the B.A. level to the doctorate through Hawaiian and an additional 13 special topics and directed studies courses through Hawaiian. In addition, students focusing on other indigenous languages may take directed studies through those languages at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

In many universities in the United States, when Native American languages are offered at all, they are offered under the linguistics department rather than under the Native Studies program. Our Hawaiian language college is unique in that linguistics is taught under the college and the linguists must speak Hawaiian to be tenured and to participate in college governance.

Besides having the only Ph.D. in the world specifically focusing on Indigenous language and culture revitalization, the Hawaiian language college also has the only total immersion indigenous teacher education program and the only Native American language immersion laboratory school program preschool to high school in existence in the United States. Our holistic unified programming is in line with the holistic nature of many Native American cultures and approach to education.

The P-20 Hawaiian Medium education continuum is a promising model of Native American language revitalization, reversing language loss while exceeding the nation’s Native student high school graduation rate and college admission rate. It is no longer a secret that the highest academically performing Native American students relative to their peers are typically those who are well grounded in their traditional languages and cultures. Language and culture matter, and the strong language and culture programming of immersion has proven the strongest both in terms of language revitalization and positive educational outcomes. Within our college’s preschool to grade 12 Hawaiian immersion laboratory school, we have a 100% high school graduation rate and an 80% college entrance rate. We have maintained

these rates since 1999 with our first high school graduation. There is no academic selection of entering students to our very modest campus. Nearly 70% of students qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. Over 96% are Native children and 100% graduate fully fluent in both Hawaiian and English.

While we have made great progress over the last nearly 30 years, we still have a lot of work to do. What we have learned is shared through technical assistance to many Native American tribes wanting to learn how they can replicate the model. Some are not in a position to do full immersion right now, but are learning the small steps that can be taken to reclaim their languages. Others are following the model and implementing as their resources permit. The challenge we all have is developing the capacity within our communities so that we can continue to grow our programs. Nationally, Native American immersion is a model of education that many communities wish to implement, but which have faced numerous barriers. Being the most developed P-20 immersion programming in the country with much experience providing outreach to other Native American communities, our Hawaiian language medium consortium has some suggestions that will help to ensure federal educational policies do not hinder the growth and development of Native American languages and cultures in the education of Native American students.

The consortium between the Hawaiian Language College and 'Aha Pūnana Leo attracts some 350 indigenous educator visitors a year and numerous inquiries and requests for assistance in developing Native American language and culture training programs, language nests, and Native American language survival schools.

For the past twenty years we have been recognized as “the go-to source of support” for Native American immersion and teaching methodology for endangered indigenous languages. We have sought out private support from such entities as the Lannan Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation to assist our many visitors, and also stretched our state support to help other Native American groups who are struggling to begin and sustain a highly successful means of educating Native American children.

In 2002 under the leadership of the late Dr. William Demmert, Jr., the 'Aha Pūnana Leo, began the work of developing assessment instruments and methodologies with a consortium of immersion and culture-based programs in the United States for the individual languages and cultures as an internal alternative to NCLB testing. With assistance from Dr. John Towner a reading expert and colleague of Dr. Demmert we piloted assessments in Navajo, Hawaiian, Blackfeet, Central Alaskan Yup'ik, Ojibwe, and English (Tulalip Washington tribe.) The coalition on indigenous language and culture-based education includes researchers and practitioners some of whom are here today to testify. I will let them provide testimony to this effort.

The Hawaiian language college has also consulted in the development of the B.A. program in Cherokee at Northeastern University in Oklahoma. Cherokee is only the fourth Native American language for which it is possible to obtain a B.A. The others are Hawaiian, Eskimo, and Lakota. Hawaiian is the only one for which it is possible to obtain an M.A., or Ph.D.

I provide the above information to you as context for my testimony, which will focus on Native American language and culture education, especially what is called “immersion” or Native American language nests and Native American language survival schools. These are areas where the 'Aha Pūnana Leo and Hawaiian language college are not only national, but international leaders.

NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES WANT TO RESTORE ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

A traditional Hawaiian saying is: “ I ka 'ōlelo nō ke ola; I ka 'ōlelo nō ka make.” In our language rests life; In our language rests death.” There is overwhelming support, not only in my community, but also in Native American communities throughout the country, to revive

and restore long suppressed Native American languages to the children of those communities. Of the some 300 languages indigenous to the present United States at first contact with Europeans, only some 175 survived suppressive school policies to the end of the twentieth century and of those, only 20 survived with children speakers. These languages are crucial to Native American literature, ceremonial life, spirituality, kinship practices, and overall indigenous identity. It is possible to restore these languages to communities to assure the continuity of Native American identity and to bolster the academic achievement of Native students.

THE NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGE IMMERSION MOVEMENT

Native American language immersion, or what are also called Native American language nests for preschoolers and Native American language survival schools for kindergarten through high school are the most effective means for fully restoring Native American languages. These are schools where the language of instruction of all subjects is a Native American language rather than English. Immersion as a language teaching methodology initially developed in Canada for the teaching of French and foreign languages to English speaking children. The methodology then spread to the United States and internationally for the teaching of other languages. There is much research on the effectiveness of immersion throughout the world with indigenous immersion seen as a distinct form of immersion. Hawaiian is the second largest indigenous language taught through immersion in the world, after New Zealand Māori.

Native American language immersion is not only the most effective method of restoring Native American languages, it is also a most effective program academically for Native American children with excellent English language literacy outcomes. Well established immersion programs currently exist for languages such as Mohawk in New York, Cherokee in Oklahoma and North Carolina, Ojibwe in Wisconsin and Minnesota, Arapaho in Wyoming, three languages in Montana namely Blackfeet, Salish, and Atsina/Gros Ventre, Navajo in Arizona, Chinuk Wawa in Oregon, two languages in Alaska, namely Central Alaskan Yup'ik and Inupiaq, and also Hawaiian. Many other tribes have projects starting immersion or are working to do so, including Lakota speaking tribes in North and South Dakota, the Sauk and Choctaw tribes in Oklahoma, and various tribes in other parts of the country.

Approximately half of all children enrolled in Native American immersion are in schools in Hawai'i. Hawai'i is also the only state that extends full Native American language immersion into high school programs. The Hawaiian language college was developed from a Hawaiian Studies Department at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo to extend Hawaiian immersion into the B.A. and graduate levels, with the laboratory school program and teacher education program to develop best practices, testing, curriculum, and other services for immersion schools and other schools teaching Hawaiian. Approximately 5,000 students in English language public and private high schools are studying Hawaiian in standard high school language courses. My position within the college is to work with the many tribal groups who visit us to learn how to do immersion and who contact us by e-mail or telephone for information on immersion.

LEGISLATION NOT ALIGNED TO SUPPORT NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE-BASED PROGRAMS

It is well known throughout the United States among educators that past US policies regarding Native American education were extremely harsh and included physical punishment of children caught speaking those languages. Less well known is the fact that current federal educational legislation includes many barriers to the inclusion of Native American languages in schooling. These barriers are due to oversight and lack of attention to the unique circumstances of Native American languages. Nevertheless, these barriers are the reason that so few immersion programs or even standard second language programs exist for teaching Native American languages to Native American children. Rules that bar testing in the language of instruction and that judge the qualifications of teachers of Native American languages based on foreign language and mainstream English models has also slowed the

growth of immersion programs.

There are other barriers as well. Some federally funded colleges and universities do not accept high school study of Native American languages as meeting second language study requirements for entry into, or graduation from, their institutions. Teacher accrediting agencies are also placing barriers on the accreditation of university teacher education programs for the teaching of languages that do not have B.A. programs in those universities, including the vast majority of Native American languages. Some states have placed barriers on children who speak Native American languages in the home from enrolling in Native American immersion schools, resulting in those children losing their fluency in the language when they attend schools that do not continue their learning and use of their traditional language. In many cases Native American children in immersion are classified with immigrant children in bilingual programs that must move to primarily English medium education within three years. This immigrant focused assimilation model, of course, is not suitable for the revitalization of Native American languages, and ignores the unique rights of Native Americans to continue our languages in our homelands.

Again, these barriers, to my knowledge, are not based on a desire to discriminate against Native American students. The discrimination is due to federal educational legislation failing to take into account the unique needs of Native American languages and the crisis of extinction facing Native American languages. In developing educational legislation for expanding the success of Native Language & Culture-Based Education the federal government must depend on information on best practices occurring on the ground. It must come from the knowledge base of those teaching Native American languages and their use as the languages of instruction in P-12 education. In absence of this attention to unique circumstances, educational legislation may result in continued suppression of Native American languages in American education.

NEED FOR ALIGNMENT IN ALL AREAS OF FEDERAL EDUCATIONAL LEGISLATION AND A SOURCE FOR SPECIAL SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY

Throughout the current No Child Left Behind Act in every one of the ten titles, there are provisions to deal with the unique needs of immigrant children in the schools, both legal and illegal immigrant children, who speak languages other than English. Title III focuses primarily on these children. Parallel alignment of every title of the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act needs to be made relative to Native American language and culture-based education. Many of these provisions will not involve any additional funds, but simply allow best practices as developed at the Hawaiian language college and among our national immersion and other partners to participate on a level playing field with other schools. Without them, our programs will continue to be disadvantaged in federal educational legislation. Without them our precious languages will continue to move on a pathway to extinction.

There should also be special designated funding for Native American language teaching, be it through courses in high schools, or through immersion in preschool Native American language nests and K-12 Native American language survival schools. For the past thirty years since this movement began from Hawai'i and spread through the nation, there have been no dedicated resources to support these highly successful schools.

NEED FOR IMMEDIATE MITIGATING ACTION

Senators, the Native American Languages Act (NALA) was passed in 1990, over twenty years ago with policies and provisions that assure Native American language speaking children the right to use their languages in federally funded public education. These provisions were generally ignored when No Child Left Behind was passed in 2001. It is crucial that the most egregious conflicts between NALA and NCLB relative to our highly endangered Native American

languages be eliminated now. Furthermore, as you consider reauthorization of ESEA over the next year or two, these conflicts need to be given additional attention.

I ask that you consider allowing our consortium in Hilo to serve as a federally mandated Center for Excellence for any school that meets the definition of a Native American Language Nest or Native American Language Survival School to serve the USDE and to assist these schools in mitigating their issues while meeting the requirements for establishing and monitoring adequate yearly progress for students and setting standards for AYP. This would include providing technical support in formulating standards connected to curriculum, testing academic skills of students through Native American languages and determination of highly qualified status for teachers using Native American languages. It would be an option for these schools. It would build on our existing national coalition of indigenous language and culture based education network of research and practitioners in Native American language immersion and culture based schools. This Center of Excellence would also provide support for outreach and partnerships with other Native American language efforts that need to expand in terms of direct input to the USDE relative to removing discriminatory barriers to Native American language education.

In our experience of working with Native American groups throughout the United States, with indigenous groups in the Pacific and East Asia, and with the distinct Native Hawaiian communities in our state, it is clear that you cannot use a “one-size-fits-all” approach with indigenous language and culture-based education. In providing direction to the USDOE, we seek to assure that alternative pathways to academic rigor and teacher preparation are based on the unique circumstances of each particular Native American language. The current pathways established for accountability in mainstream higher education to address the needs of disadvantaged students falls short on delivery under the circumstances of Native American languages and cultures. This center is able to meet the challenge of ensuring rigorous alternative pathways based in best practices that address broad academic needs in order to participate in the globalized world that has entered all Native American communities.

In addition to giving attention to the unique needs of distinct languages and communities, this center can consult the USDOE of the various needs at grade levels taught through Native American languages and cultures. As stated earlier, immersion programs outside Hawai'i have had great difficulty in expanding programming into high school. Progressing past third grade is difficult for most, because as mentioned earlier students are frequently classified along with non-English speaking students, who are required to move out of use of their languages within three years of entering an American school. Our over fifteen years experience with high school immersion programming can provide this support.

There may be an opportunity as well to support the expanded interest in language teaching occurring at Tribal Colleges to develop successful methods of teaching their specific languages to their students and in building their capacity to support Native American language immersion implementation. Our own early efforts to teach Hawaiian in the University of Hawai'i system were largely unsuccessful in producing fluent second language learners, a situation which I understand currently exists for some tribal college Native American language teaching programs. Professor Larry Kimura is widely recognized as the individual who finally in the early 1970s was successful in developing strong college level speakers of Hawaiian. Since that time we have greatly increased our efficiency and system of teaching the endangered Hawaiian language. A successful effort to take our model to serve another endangered Native American language was the establishment of the B.A. in Cherokee Education at Northeastern State University in Oklahoma, with its affiliated Cherokee immersion school. This program was established with support from the Cherokee Tribe that sent administrators and faculty to Hilo to work with us on different strategies to adapt our programming to their circumstances.

ALIGNMENT OF ACTION WITH POLICIES

What I am calling for in terms of alignment of federal educational legislation to support immersion and Native American language and culture education is something that is supported already by the United States government, at least in theory and policy statements. In 1990 President Bush signed the Native American Languages Act (NALA) that established United States policy relative to the unique status of Native American languages and the right of Native Americans to use Native American languages in education, including immersion, and the use of Native American languages to substitute for foreign languages in fulfilling college requirements. This twenty-year-old policy statement has been largely ignored and overlooked in the creation of federal educational legislation. Again, I believe that NALA has been overlooked because of a lack of advocacy and input relative to federal educational legislation and where a recognized center such as the Center of Excellence that we are proposing to be officially recognized in Hilo can serve this role.

Other policy statements beyond NALA also exist. More recently, in response to overwhelming support from Native American organizations including the National Indian Education Association, the National Congress of American Indians, and tribal and state organizations, President Obama and Education Secretary Duncan have included statements of support for Native American language education. President Obama's support stretches back to the 2008 presidential campaign singling out Native American language education as an area he promised to support. Secretary Duncan's support is clear in the 2010 USDE "Blueprint for Reform" that states under Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education that the focus will be on "unique needs" ... "including Native language immersion and Native language restoration programs, and develop tribal specific standards and assessments."

INTERNATIONAL BEST PRACTICES

The 2010 "Blueprint for Reform" gives much attention to bringing the United States up to "world standards" in education, and to the fact that "10 countries have passed us." Among those countries are New Zealand, Finland, and even nearby Canada. Distinctive of all three are long standing experience in multilingual education, including immersion, for indigenous populations. Our consortium of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo and Hawaiian Language College have an especially strong relationship with Māori language and culture-based education in New Zealand and also contacts with Canadian and Finnish indigenous language programs as well. Indeed, internationally, the Hawaiian language immersion effort is the second largest after New Zealand Māori immersion education.

Last fall President Obama endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That document includes numerous references to the right of indigenous peoples such as Native Americans to continue their languages, cultures and traditions. Article 14 in particular is highly relevant to this hearing as it relates to the right to education through indigenous languages. While this is already United States policy through the Native American Languages Act and already supported in the 2010 Educational Blueprint, the President's endorsement of this UN Declaration is further support for changing federal educational legislation to make access to quality education through Native American languages a reality as an educational option for all Native Americans throughout the United States.

Mahalo nui loa no kēia kono 'ana mai ia'u e kū hō'ike no ka 'ōlelo a ko'u mau kūpuna a me nā kūpuna o nā 'ōiwi a pau o 'Amelika Hui Pū 'Ia.

Mahalo nui, thank you.