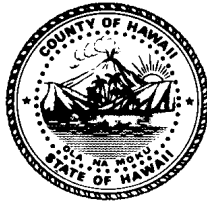


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December 13, 2022

State of Hawaii Department of Education
Superintendent Keith Hayashi
1390 Miller St.
Honolulu, HI 96813

CC: Councilmember Heather Kimball, Chairperson DLNR Suzanne Case

Dear Superintendent Hayashi,

The Hāmākua Community Development Plan (HCDP) Action Committee (AC) is writing to request your support and action in turning over the abandoned Hakalau School for revitalization and long-term community use. The community's vision is to utilize Hakalau School as a community hub and learning center where classes relevant to community residents are provided; community gatherings and events are held.

Hakalau School served as not only the area's school but as the district's social and athletic center until its closing in 1972. Hilo High School ran the Lanakila Learning Center, a successful alternative program at the school for several years until 2013. (Contact Wendy Hamane) Since then the facility which consists of a classroom building and a woodworking shop and grounds have deteriorated. Incidentally, the Department of Education (DOE) installed a new EPA compliant septic sewer system in the early 2000s at a cost of \$450K+. Hakalau School, a unique and beloved part of the community could continue to deteriorate and become overgrown without the monthly 2nd Sunday community volunteer maintenance effort. Instead, the school could and should once again become a valued community asset. Its future has and is currently still mired in an internal stalemate between the DOE and Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). DOE currently holds the lease under Executive Order No. 257 and desires to return it to DLNR. DLNR requires the DOE to mitigate hazardous material (i.e. lead paint) before turning the school back to DLNR. Understandably, this mitigation work (an assessment report has been completed) is low on DOE's priority compared to active schools.

Meanwhile, since April of 2015 until now. seven plus years, a committed group of volunteers under the direction of Wailea Village Historic Preservation Community (WVHPC), a well-established locally based community 501c-3 non-profit organization has steadily cleared and maintained the grounds around the school buildings monthly, as previously mentioned. These volunteers have contributed a total of 3312 hours (at \$10/hr. = \$33,120 in volunteer labor). On top of that which does not include advocacy, volunteer coordination, meeting, and negotiations,

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WVHPC has invested \$23,520 on liability insurance with the DOE named as additional insured; restored electrical service and improved security, equipment and food for volunteer work sessions. For several years DOE provided WVHPC limited use permits for access to the classroom building and grounds. Since 2020 the use permit has not been renewed. WVHPC has demonstrated its commitment to Hakalau School's revitalization and rebirth.

The HCDP adopted by Ordinance No. 2018-78 specifically calls for 5.13.3 Kokua Action 63 from State of Hawaii (page 92): *"Coordinate with the Hakalau community to pursue the redevelopment and community management options for the old Hakalau School property."* Hawaii DOE Administrative Rules 8-39-1 General Rule states: *"All public school buildings, facilities, and grounds shall be available for general recreational purposes and for public and community use whenever these activities do not interfere with the normal and usual activities of the school and its pupils as provided by law. This general rule shall be carried out within the policy of the department of education that no available public school building, facility, or grounds shall be denied for use by the public and community on the grounds of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, or disability."*

Historic Hawaii Foundation (HHF) Executive Kiersten Faulkner in a February 18, 2021 letter to the State Legislature offered that organization's support and cited other successful examples of historic preservation and government/community non-profit partnerships. An excerpt from that letter states: *"Historic Hawaii Foundation strongly supports the preservation and contemporary use of historic properties in a way that honors their historic significance and engages community members... We note that similar community partnerships were used to save the Waimea Elementary School N (now the Isaacs Art Center in Kamuela on Hawai'i Island), the Hanalei Elementary School (now a retail and restaurant hub on Kauai) and the Kaupō School (being repurposed as a community center and emergency shelter on Maui). Each of these projects took an abandoned facility no longer needed or wanted by the Departments of Education or Land & Natural Resources and converted them to special places of community significance. We recommend that Hakalau be given the same opportunity."*

The recent Covid pandemic and ongoing situations like hurricane and other natural disaster potential underscore the need for community-based resilience and preparedness. Hakalau School could serve as a community response site for these situations. Creative partnerships between government and community can be a source for inspired community wellbeing. It is in this light that the HCDP AC respectfully request that you assist our community by working to find an effective and timely way to provide full- and long-term use of Hakalau School for community use.

Sincerely,

Hāmākua Community Development Action Committee
Tawn Keeney, HCDP AC Chairperson
Nicolette Hubbard, HCDP AC Vice Chairperson
Carol Ignacio
Desiree Moana Cruz

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Crystal Kua
Rhonda Pollard
Robert Nishimoto
Brad Kurokawa

