

REGULAR SESSION

Salary Commission
Hilo Council Chambers
Hawai'i County Building
25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401
Hilo, Hawai'i
December 22, 2025 (Monday)

Call to Order (Item 1)

The regular meeting of the Salary Commission, County of Hawai'i, was called to order at 10:00 a.m., by Chair Steven Pavao, at the Hilo Council Chambers, Hawai'i County Building, 25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401, Hilo, Hawai'i, on Monday, December 22, 2025.

Roll Call – Present

Mr. Steven Pavao, Chair
Ms. Donala Kawa'auhau, Vice-Chair
Mr. Jules Dudoit, Member
Ms. Luahiwa Namahoe, Member
Mr. Sam Nelson, Member
Mr. Dennis Riordan, Member
Ms. Sommer J. Tokihiro, Ex-Officio Member

Also Present

Ms. Dakota "Cody" Frenz, Deputy Corporation Counsel, Office of the Corporation Counsel
Ms. Jamie Martines, Human Resources Manager II, Human Resources Department
Ms. Michele Lamkin, Human Resources Program Specialist, Human Resources Department
Mr. Daniel Volpe, Acting Chief, Fire Department
Ms. Glynis Yamada, Secretary-Reporter, Human Resources Department

Call to Order (Item 1)

CHR. PAVAO: Good morning, we'll call our meeting to order. We can start by doing rollcall—we'll start at that end.

MR. DUDOIT: Commissioner Dudoit here.

MR. RIORDAN: Commissioner Riordan.

MS. NAMAHOE: Commissioner Namahoe.

CHR. PAVAO: Commissioner Steve Pavao.

MS. KAWA'AUHAU: Commissioner Kawa'auhau.

MR. NELSON: Commissioner Nelson.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Director of Human Resources, Sommer Tokihiro.

MS. FRENZ: Also present, Deputy Corporation Counsel Cody Frenz, on behalf of the Salary Commission; and Glynis Yamada, our Secretary. Thank you, Chair.

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you.

Statements from the Public (Item 2)

CHR. PAVAO: "Statements from the Public" on agenda items. Oral testimony may be presented to the Commission either at the outset of the meeting or immediately prior to the applicable agenda. I guess, Ms. Otsuka, you wanted to make comments.

(At this time, Ms. Dell Otsuka came forward.)

MS. OTSUKA: (Inaudible.)

CHR. PAVAO: In the interest of time, I think we're going to stick with the rules—the rules are for three-minutes—yeah, three minutes.

MS. OTSUKA: (Inaudible.)

MS. FRENZ: Turn on your microphone and state your name, please.

MS. OTSUKA: Sorry. The only reason I ask is because this is the last meeting, and there doesn't seem to be anyone here, and I'm not going to take a lot of the time—just enough to, sort of, go over the two testimonies I submitted (SEE ATT. A). Hopefully, you got it. I mean, it was

late but—‘cause it’s really important. Three-minutes is not enough for anyone to put any compelling justifications to topics that come up that we need (inaudible). So—

CHR. PAVAO: We have your written testimony, so try to summarize it as best as you can in three-minutes.

MS. OTSUKA: Okay.

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you.

MS. OTSUKA: Thank you. Dell Otsuka—I live in District 3. Okay. Since you do have it—and I did submit two testimonies—one is a supplemental that covers more specific—the Findings of Fact.

But I also wanted to touch on the Charter process and the voting thresholds. And, as you know, the Charter—both Sections 13-4 and 13-28, both require majority of the entire membership. So, with that being said, I hope you take it to heart.

But I do want to talk about the workforce pipeline and recruitment realities because last month’s meeting, HR said that they were—well, she didn’t say it, but the report showed 693 vacancies—of which 472 belong to the emergency service departments. So, it’s just hard to understand that at this time when all these realities are happening, we’re looking to give raises—right across-the-board. No justification.

So—and I come from public sector—in the federal public sector, and there was no time where people expected raises just to get it. It was based on performance. And so, when I see or have seen these last two months is, there is—I don’t know, there’s no comparisons of verifiable information that I can see that substantiates this proposal for the raise.

Did you get to read my testimony?

CHR. PAVAO: Yes.

MS. OTSUKA: Okay. And the reason I want to say that, too, is because I know a lot of County workers and they are struggling, but they love their jobs because it provides them stability—and a lot of people want that—and they can’t get it because getting into the County is very difficult.

And as a Commissioner for the Department of the Environmental Management for three years, that was a topic I brought every month because I saw no reason that they couldn’t fill any of the level-entry positions. I visited all the transfer stations on this island. I visited at least three of the wastewater facilities—and it’s bad.

So, to just across-the-board give raises when there’s no measure of performance or success in the departments is—I can’t fathom that. So, like I said, if you saw the picture—I mean, the (inaudible) I said about the park caretaker—I think, in part—it just jumped out at me because so

many of them—and not only them, people who work in all the departments that are entry-level or out in the field, are the ones that making the operations work—and it's thankless.

And so, it's kind of an insult or actually it is an insult—to just hear that raises are just—it's freely given almost, because even if you look at the departments individually—a lot of them are not doing well. They're—they have internal problems. Workforce—there's turnovers, there's workers' comp. claims, there's sick leave—that's something deeper that we need to look at because I don't know where the verification comes from or the data comes from.

But if you know what I know, and see what I've seen, heard what I've heard—it is not something that you can easily do to provide or give raises. And with the inversion, which is your Findings—of the 13 Findings, there are four that stand out; two of them regard inversions. And according to the report that was given last month by HR on inversions, there doesn't appear to be any systemic pay failures. There's only two positions—and this is a snapshot of just that one month.

So, is it fair to say that given just this information is enough to justify raises across-the-board? I can't see that. And the total of this one month is \$1,300.00 compare to what will happen if all the raises are—if the raises are approved.

So—and there are reasons why there's this problem. It's the vacancies. You've got to fill the vacancies. The inversion part is not inversion so much—as maybe salary compression or not even that.

So, all I'm saying is the argument on the Findings of Fact is not enough—I feel—to justify the raise. I guess that's my time.

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you.

MS. OTSUKA: So, yeah, I just—I know you folks are going to do what you do. I don't envy you. I've been on a commission. I've gotten dismissed because this issue with staffing is bigger than I think, but working in the public sector and the government, I've had to deal with hiring.

So, it's not something that we just meet once-a-year or a few times a year and automatically say that, “Well, I think they're deserving”—and I'm sure a lot of them don't really want the raises at this time because it doesn't look good—and they got paid—and they get paid very well. They've come from jobs that probably didn't pay as well and didn't get automatic raises—but when you came to the County, a lot of people want to come here because why? Stability. So, their pay, I'm sure they're happy with. So, I don't think it would be such a big deal to pause.

CHR. PAVAO: Okay, thank you very much.

MS. OTSUKA: Okay.

CHR. PAVAO: Good morning, *aloha*. You can turn the mic. on.

(At this time, Ms. Millicent Cummings came forward.)

MS. CUMMINGS: This green button, right?

CHR. PAVAO: Okay, thank you. State your name for the record.

MS. CUMMINGS: I'm Millicent Cummings—Hilo.

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you.

MS. CUMMINGS: I really appreciated that last testimony, I have to say—very, very clear. I don't think I'm going to make it any clearer.

There are many in this community who are more than dismayed to learn that the Hawai'i County Salary Commission has proposed, yet another raise for our representatives. We are rightfully concerned that proper notice for this meeting was not provided—falling just into the six-day notice required—and are curious why a timely agenda was not forthcoming.

As you have been consistently late in providing agendas since the date of this meeting was established almost six months ago, it begs the question why? Also in question is in regards to possible conflicts of interest in the fact that the Human Resource Department Director and Deputy Director stand to gain financial, biased decision.

This lack of transparency is in breach of HRS 92-7, the Sunshine Law that assures us our integrity among our representatives. In so doing, you have rendered this meeting all in void and must reschedule so that more than just two of us can be informed and included in this matter.

The first raise in 2023, of a staggering 27.44%—where not even one person was present, when approved, was questionable. To so soon seek, yet another of 16.1% when salaries for representatives are already notably higher than the rest of the country is alarming.

This constitutes a total of 43.54% of a raise and is simply unacceptable, while sending a very clear message to those you serve in such times of need, almost \$1.25 million is a lot of hard earned and badly needed money—when there are so many pressing issues of obvious note, to even propose a raise at this time, after such a historic raise last—less than two years ago—is insulting.

A raise of even \$1.00 when such breaches have occurred will not be considered. Thank you for alerting the community. The integrity is rightfully in question. This will be the case until these breaches are corrected. Only then will any other raises be considered.

Thank you for doing what you're paid to do in accordance with the HRS 92-7—and Merry Christmas! Have a wonderful, wonderful holiday season. Thank you. *Aloha*.

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you.

MS. FRENZ: Chair, if I may? This is Deputy Corporation Counsel Cody Frenz. I just want to address one thing for the Commission's information—an insight on the notice of today's hearing was, in fact, posted as required by Sunshine Law.

So, it may be that somebody missed when it was actually posted but, we did, Chair—and I'm looking at the Laserfiche stamped copy that we did, in fact, comply with Sunshine Law in providing the notice—the six days prior.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

MS. FRENZ: The law only requires six days. It doesn't have a—

SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

MS. FRENZ: It doesn't. It's six days prior to the hearing. Thank you. Go ahead, Chair.

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you. Okay. Any other public testimony?

Approval of Minutes (Item 3)

December 22, 2023 (Regular Session); December 19, 2024 (Regular Session); September 24, 2025 (Regular Session); November 17, 2025 (Public Hearing); and November 17, 2025 (Regular Session)

CHR. PAVAO: If not, we'll move on to the "Approval of Minutes." So, we haven't approved minutes for December 22nd, December 19, September 24th, and November 17th for the public hearing and the regular session.

Okay, is there a motion to accept the minutes?

MR. NELSON: So, this is Commissioner Nelson. So, I just have one thing that—and I read through all the minutes. It all looked okay, except on the December 19th, 2024—at the end it says that Commissioner Namahoe said she was leaving at the end of 2024. So, I think there's something that got a little mixed-up on that one, possibly.

MS. NAMAHOE: No, that's true. I recall saying that because—this is Commissioner Namahoe—and I thought that my tenure ended at the end of calendar year 2024. So, I said my goodbyes and then, come to find out, I'm actually here all the way through 2025.

So, the minutes are not being approved today—but I said "hello," again, at the beginning of 2025, but I would like the record to reflect that I didn't go anywhere for the following 12

months—but, Mr. Nelson, were you saying that you were passing—you are making a motion to approve the minutes?

MR. NELSON: I will make—on that clarification, I will make a motion to approve all the minutes.

MS. NAMAHOE: Well, then, I surely shall second that.

CHR. PAVAO: I think that that was a typo., but it's not—it just incorrectly—that her term was going to end at that point, yeah.

MS. NAMAHOE: No, I was wrong.

CHR. PAVAO: Yeah, thank you. So, there's a motion and a second to accept the minutes. Any discussion? If not we'll go ahead and vote.

All those in favor of accepting the minutes, please—approving the minutes, please signify by saying aye. Any opposed?

The voice vote was as follows:

AYES: Commissioners Dudoit, Kawa'auhau, Namahoe, Nelson, Riordan,
and Chair Pavao – 6.

OPPOSED: None.

ABSENT & EXCUSED: None.

CHR. PAVAO: The motion carried.

Communication(s) (Item 4)

CHR. PAVAO: “Communications”—none.

New Business (Item 5)

CHR. PAVAO: “New Business” for discussion and appropriate action—none.

Unfinished Business (Item 6)

Communication No. 25-05.01: Proposed Findings Of Fact By The 2025 County Of Hawai'i Salary Commission, Dated August 28, 2025. Pursuant To Section 13-28 Of The Hawai'i County Charter (2024), As Amended, The County Of Hawai'i Salary Commission Makes Its Findings In Support Of Its Decision To Adjust The Salaries And Salary Schedule Of Elected And Appointed Officials Of The County Of Hawai'i, To Be Effective January 1, 2026. (A Table Of The Proposed Salary Increases Are Set Forth And Attached As Exhibit “A.” (Note: The Above Matter Was Discussed At The Salary Commission's

Meeting Held On September 24, 2025. On November 17, 2025, A Public Hearing Was Held In Hilo Where Members Of The Public Were Given The Opportunity To Participate In-Person Or By Videoconference Or Via Zoom. The Commission May Adopt Its Salary Adjustment Proposal At Its Meeting Scheduled For December 22, 2025)

CHR. PAVAO: “Unfinished Business” for discussion and appropriate action is Communication number 25-05.01, proposed Findings of Fact of the 2025 County of Hawai‘i Salary Commission, dated August 28, 2025. And you all have copies of that, right? You need for me to read all (inaudible)?

MS. FRENZ: (Inaudible.)

CHR. PAVAO: Okay.

(At this time, Chair Pavao proceeded to read into the record, Communication number 25-05.01 listed above.)

CHR. PAVAO: Okay—any “Announcements?” Okay, so we need a motion to approve—

MS. FRENZ: Well, let me—I’ll jump in—this is DCC Cody Frenz. So, we are currently on your “Unfinished Business,” which is the Communication 25-05.01, the Proposed Findings of Fact, by the—by this very body, right—for the raises that are listed in “Exhibit A.”

So, right now, what you would do is determine whether or not you want to make a motion to adopt those Findings and approve those raises or not. It’s really—whatever you guys—you have listened to public testimony at multiple hearings, you have received written input by way of written testimony, and/or actual communications.

So, whether or not—it really comes down to what position, if any, you guys want to take in that regard because right now what would be left is a—the motion to either adopt or not adopt the proposed Findings—and either, depending on whether or not you’re going to approve or not approve those Findings—either you would adopt or not adopt a motion to implement raises or not implement raises. That’s what left for this “Unfinished Business” (inaudible)—

CHR. PAVAO: “Unfinished Business”—okay.

MR. NELSON: So, if there was any change to the salary schedule, at this point in time, we have to go restart the process all over again. So it’s, pretty much, all or nothing, okay—at this point.

CHR. PAVAO: Yeah. Is there a motion?

MS. NAMAHOE: Yeah, this is Commissioner Namahoe, I want to put a motion on the table because I also want to be able to discuss it—

CHR. PAVAO: Okay, is there a second?

MS. NAMAHOE: —to approve both the Facts and Finding and the salary raises, as proposed.

MR. NELSON: This is Commissioner Nelson, I'll second.

CHR. PAVAO: Okay. So, there's a motion to approve the Findings of Fact and the attached salary schedule—the proposed salary schedule—and a second. Discussion?

MS. NAMAHOE: Okay, thank you. So, last month on the 17th was an excellent meeting. We didn't have a lot of testimony, but all of the testimony was stellar. We had representation—you, Ms. Otsuka—but we also had two others. One who was the very first person whoever testified in front of us in the Summer of 2023.

This Board did not come together until the Summer of 2023. It sat dormant—it fell off of—what's that word—it fell out of “quorum” since 2017. So, in the last ten years, we've had ten mayors. We've had—the last ten years we've had four mayors. They each had four-year terms. It was the final term for Billy Kenoi; we had four years under Harry Kim; we had four years under Mitch Roth; and now we're in the first term of Kimo Alameda.

Billy Kenoi was the last one to bring together the Salary Commission. We are volunteers and what is tasked in front of us is to be able to provide the salaries—the equity that they had not seen since 2017. Their last raise was Jan—was effective January 2018. The math that we were then tasked to do—because all of us come here with math backgrounds. If they were hired, at a theoretical, \$100,000.00 for effective January 1st, 2018—it was \$77,000.00 back where inflation was in 2023.

So, we had to do a few unpopular things. One of it was we had to figure out what “equity” was; two, we had to keep it within the parameters of the County Charter. That means we cannot make merit-based decisions, and I think, for me, as I've heard it repeatedly—there is this assumption of “merit” as applied or relative to salary. That merit is done at the ballot both. That is what you, me, and all of us get to do.

So, as volunteers we, kind of, got thrown under the bus because we had to come to this Board after it was dormant for several years. Today is the last day that both Chair and I sit on this Commission. The one interesting thing that I will say about this body is from 2023 until now, we've had to build all the areas of the entire gamut of expertise of what a “Salary Commission” should bring because we've also had to come up with and correct, when we goofed it—the salary for a whole new board—or a new department, which was OSCER.

There is no other area of expertise that a salary commission needs to have, and where I get a little bit animated about this is, we've now had in the past year—we haven't had any new nominations. This Board is going to go dormant, again. If in the next 90 days nobody is brought on—that means all this expertise that remains, they're going to lose it until the next forensic opportunity, which is what we were faced with in 2023.

We didn't just, "Oh, my goodness, these people need a raise"—we had to do what was right because people were not coming to fill the *pukas*. If you think they don't want to come in for the early (inaudible) what are we seeing for the department heads? There are no—and I'm going to quote Nelson on this—there are no analogs for the ability to run the Fire Department or the Police Department for our County as well as HRD with 3,000 employees on this island.

So, we're proud of the work we did. I am proud that I was able to make this motion. And the coulda, whata, should have—we would have the other people here, the ones that fell off the books last year—those *pukas* would have been filled, we'd be turning it over, we wouldn't be forced to trying to come up with some reasonable facsimile in order to have those positions well-supplied, competitive, and filled—because we're still going to need somebody that brings the math to do some of the jobs that are required to do.

And we're not training them—we're not working together. They're going to have to forensically learn it. And there's nothing we can do except go upstairs and go, "C'mon you guys, come up with some nominees for this Board." We don't have it. We're not paid to do it. We're volunteers to do it. You're welcome to talk to your councilperson to nominate you and come on this.

I'm coming off. You and I live in the same district. Sit on this Board. Get on this Board—no, I looking at you. I looking at you.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

MS. NAMAHOE: Number 3—well, I'm almost *pau*. So—

SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

MS. NAMAHOE: Yeah, then you can have it. In other words, I want to see the expertise continue. In a perfect world, salary commission would never be allowed to go dormant. They'd be able to hug tightly to all of those salaries that they're in charge of to make sure, if there's increases and decreases—as close as possible to merit as allowed, but we're not allowed to do merit-based pay because the County Charter doesn't allow for that.

And if we want to see that, our law makers, our County Council—get them to pass something and let's vote on that in the General Election. I've learned a lot sitting on this Board. I'm proud of the work we're doing. It's unpopular, it's never perfect—but I'll tell you, I'm a little bit more than annoyed that in a whole year we've lost some expertise because nobody's had to do this in decades that we've had to do.

So, with that, *Ha'ina 'ia mai*—that's my motion.

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you. I just wanted to add some comments to Commissioner Namahoe, it's—the Charter is real specific about what the Charter Commission can and cannot do.

And when some of us came on initially, we had the same kind of notion that maybe we should be bringing the department heads in here and interviewing them and checking their performance—but the Charter's very specific.

The appointing authority has the responsibility of measuring performance. So, the Mayor would be the appointing authority of all the department heads and deputy directors—and it's his responsibility. The same thing would be true of the Fire Commission and the Police Commission—they are the appointing authorities. It's their role to measure performance—not our role—the Charter does not give us that power authority.

Exactly what Commissioner Namahoe said is that for many years—seven or eight years—none of the appointed and elected officials had raises because this Commission was dormant. In the meantime, all the collective bargaining units—HGEA, UPW, SHOPO, and the fire fighters—all got raises, so there was an imbalance where deputy directors—I mean, section heads, supervisors, even in the Police Department—the assistant chiefs and even the majors and captains were making more than the deputy chief. In some areas, in some positions, were making more than the head of the department.

So, what we did—that big raise that people would look at, was to get parity so that you could fill positions, so the Police Department is a good example. No one would take the deputy chief's job because the assistant chiefs and the majors were making more than the deputy chief—only when this body approved those pay raises, they finally filled the deputy chief's position.

So, it's a major issue the County has had with filling vacant positions—Public Works and other departments where engineering degrees are required—they've really struggled to fill positions because subordinates in that—in those departments, were making more than the deputy director.

So, I think that the Commission are proud of the work that we've done. We've done the best job. We put a lot of research in working through it. We've looked at cost of living, we looked at the salaries—increases that the collective bargaining units were making—and I think we've made an informed and educated decision. Thank you.

Any further discussion?

MR. RIORDAN: This is Commissioner Riordan. And I'd like to speak to the appointing authority and say that we're meeting our burden of keeping up with wages for the people that we're in charge of, and the Unions are taking care of their folks.

But there's a group of County employees out there that no one's representing. And it's up to the mayor to make sure that those folks get the salary increases that they should get because they're falling behind, which is what we don't want happening. And, if at some point in time later on, we—the County has to ask everyone to take a pay cut for a period of time, they're going to fall even further behind because they never got an increase when everyone else has been increasing during this time.

Now, I feel it's important that, in the future, if those other folks aren't getting pay raises, then we need to look at their director and say, "No more for this department because you're getting way too ahead of the folks that you're supervising."

And I just wanted to go on record to say that that needs to be looked at. And I realize it's not our—they're not people that report to us, but we need to go on record saying that those folks need to be looked out for.

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you. Any further discussion? If not, we can take a vote. All those in—what's that?

MS. FRENZ: (Inaudible.)

CHR. PAVAO: Let's do a rollcall vote, yeah—for the record.

MR. DUDOIT: Commissioner Dudoit—

CHR. PAVAO: How do you vote?

MS. FRENZ: I'll clarify for the record what the current ask is—

MR. DUDOIT: Okay, go ahead.

MS. FRENZ: —just to refresh for everyone. I believe we had Commissioner Namahoe making a motion to adopt the current proposed Findings of Fact by the 2025 County of Hawai'i Salary Commission that are dated August 28, 2025; and to then implement the raises as proposed in "Exhibit A"—and I believe Commissioner Nelson then seconding that motion. So, that's the current motion on the table.

MR. DUDOIT: I'll vote with aye to that.

MR. RIORDAN: Commissioner Riordan—yes.

MS. NAMAHOE: Commissioner Namahoe—aye.

CHR. PAVAO: Commissioner Pavao—yes.

MS. KAWA'AUHAU: Commissioner Kawa'auhau—aye.

MR. NELSON: Commissioner Nelson—yes.

CHR. PAVAO: Okay, then the motion is carried.

Announcements (Item 7)

CHR. PAVAO: Any “Announcements?” No?

Schedule Next Meeting Date (Item 8)

The Salary Commission May Convene Its Next Meeting On Tuesday, January 27, 2025, At 10:00 A.M., At The Hilo Council Chambers, Hawai‘i County Building, 25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401, Hilo, HI 96720

CHR. PAVAO: “Schedule Next Meeting”—is for Tuesday, January 27.

Adjournment (Item 9)

CHR. PAVAO: Yeah. Anything else? If not we’ll be adjourned. Thank you very much. Everybody have a good holiday—

MR. DUDOIT: And that’s 10:00 on January 27th—

(Note: At this time, a member of the public seated in the gallery, addressed the Commission.)

CHR. PAVAO: Oh, okay. She (inaudible).

SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

CHR. PAVAO: Oh, okay.

MS. OTSUKA: Dell Otsuka, District 3. I appreciate all that you’ve done. I do. And I—it’s also a thankless job.

But as I sit here and only after these two months I’ve been reading a lot of the information, granted that the information that was submitted last month, this—County officials make very good money comparably just under Honolulu, and the population and the tourism that affects all of that—economy isn’t taken into effect that—yes, they are paid well and in spite of not having raises all these months, and the fact that the inversion really doesn’t exist means that they get paid very well—well above their subordinates.

So, yes, there are two positions—the deputy’s hard to fill, but all I’m saying is sometimes we get caught up. The merit—and I understand that, but I don’t know of any other business or public sector that doesn’t base their raises on merit or performance. I don’t.

So—and if you talk to each department, the people in the department, they can help you better see what the climate is in those departments. And so, for them to see that certain directors are

getting raises when they cannot even maintain their offices, is something we need to consider. So, that's where your retention comes in. They're not going to stay. The turnover is high.

They've got qualified engineers in the Department of Environmental Management—they've left, and it's not because they're not qualified to fill in for—or promotion. So, it's the climate that no one is looking at because it is a problem. And if we could fulfill the obligation of the Charter to fill all these necessary positions, we may not have this problem. And maybe raises are good for certain departments when it's—you can see the tangible results—yeah. But to do it across-the-board when some are not—is a disservice and an injustice to not only the County but to everybody who works in it.

And I—this is my last opportunity. I've lost it because it's already done. But I'm just saying a lot of the commissions are not filled and it's not because they're not—people are not applying—just like jobs—people are applying. They're not being called.

And so, this is why it's, like—I go out and I look at stuff and I ask questions because I need to know more than I'm being told. So, transparency is a big issue. We're only told what we—they want you to know. And so, if you didn't have any questions, you accept it “as is”—and that's where it lands.

And so, with HR, I know you're doing a lot of work—but for three years I was on the department—with the DEM on the EMC—and it's always been an issue. And HR isn't full—your (inaudible) is not there.

So, I'm just saying, it is a done deal but maybe consideration can be given more deeply into actually looking at each department instead of just blanketing the raises for everyone.

CHR. PAVAO: I think your suggestions are good, but as has Commissioner Namahoe was saying earlier, that testimony you're giving should be given to the County Council, so they can create a Charter amendment. They have to amend the Charter. We don't have that kind of power.

MS. OTSUKA: So, your authority on the Salary Commission, you can change the Rules—can you not?

CHR. PAVAO: No. The Charter is very specific what we can and cannot do. We cannot do that. We cannot do performance-based raises. It's not—it's in the Charter.

MS. OTSUKA: But I thought I read that the Salary Commission has the authority to change your Rules?

CHR. PAVAO: We can't change the Charter. We can change our Rules but not the Charter.

MS. OTSUKA: No, but you can change your Rules to maybe reflect.

MS. FRENZ: No.

MS. OTSUKA: No?

MS. FRENZ: The Rules can be changed by the Salary Commission, just to clarify. But the County Charter is what provides—creates this very Salary Commission and the—it provides parameters for which the authority that has been bestowed to the Salary Commission actually has, and that does not include—it just includes increase or decrease of salary. It does not include a merit-based approach. That is something that was brought up back in 2023. If you look at the minutes, it was actually raised quite often—and I had to remind those prior members to dial it in and ensure that we comply with the Charter.

So, in order to get Charter—a Charter amendment, you would have to work through Council, get an approval. There is a Charter Commission—but a County Council can, and they have taken action, such as changing the number of people on the Board of Ethics that was on the—

MS. OTSUKA: Right—13 or something.

MS. FRENZ: —ballot recently, right. So, you have to go to Council, have that passed, and it has to be approved to then end up on the ballot to amend what the Charter says. So, that's—Charter amendments are significant and, currently as drafted, this Commission does not have the ability to evaluate, depending on who's in the position. And that's tricky, right—and that's something that was discussed here because that changes—it can ebb and flow, depending on who's in the position, which is all controlled by the mayor. So—

MS. OTSUKA: Thank you for that. And I do appreciate all of you, 'cause I know what it's like to volunteer and put your heart and soul in it. And this isn't an easy commission—I understand. But even with the Charter—and it's Sections 13—it specifically states having the entire membership make votes on certain things to make it valid.

So, I'm just saying, like, the County needs to fill positions, the commissions need to be filled because other than that, we're not honoring the Charter, as it was intended. So, I just had to say that. I do.

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you.

MS. NAMAHOE: Ms. Otsuka, it's Commissioner Namahoe. I want to thank you for coming. I want to thank you for your testimony on the 17th as well as today.

You speak to a lot of things that we have been battling—I mean, myself, I can point to one of my fellow Commissioners here because we probably battled the most of it in terms of how do we stay in the lane as defined by the County Charter.

And I recognize what you're talking about, which is the constitutional crisis, which is the Charter crisis—which that and my coffee—has me animated up here because I don't—we came into

having a long, dormant Board or a long, dormant Commission—puts us in a—it's a tough task, but then it's also not a welcomed task, and then there's a lot of additional math to it.

In a perfect world, this Board will stay. This Commission will stay. It will require conversations like the one you're having, take it upstairs to the ears who need to hear it because it needs to be nominated by the Executive Office, and then passed by the Legislative Branch. We need to keep the Commission going. So three—is going to be dormant. Mr. Pavao—

CHR. PAVAO: Two.

MS. NAMAHOE: Two is going to be dormant. If it's filled, then it can continue to hug closer to the year over year, and we are not looking for an elegant solutions—like following BU13, which none of us wanted to do.

But in order to do that, don't take the teeth away from what we need to do. So, we have to show up as voters. We also have to show up and testify, but we also have to read the law as it's written and then figure out what's the right way to push it forward.

I want to thank you again.

MS. OTSUKA: Thank you, I appreciate that. It's just hard. I mean, you talk about cost—and I mentioned in my testimony—\$337 million for a five-year project is only one of many. And this raises, if they were done year-after-year, maybe—yeah, one year at a time. But four years in advance—that kind of makes it harder to swallow, if you're looking at the cost. And if you looked at the condition of the Kulaimano and Papaikou wastewater—you would be shocked. I mean, with the amount of money they spend on commissions—I mean, consultants—they could have fixed both of those wastewater stations—really.

Each department spends so much in consultant fees that—so, this is why when you talk of cost and raises, they all—in math, they all fall in. And so, I can't fathom how the County's going to sustain all of that. I can't.

So, maybe with the Commission because you're approving for all departments—maybe look at each department and see what they're not doing that should have been done, so that you don't have to do across-the-board raises. Is that ever possible?

CHR. PAVAO: No. Again, you're going into performance, and the Charter is very specific that we don't—

MS. OTSUKA: I better see the County Council then—

CHR. PAVAO: —(inaudible) pay raises is very specific (inaudible)—

MS. OTSUKA: I'm going to see the County Council, okay.

CHR. PAVAO: —based on performance.

MS. OTSUKA: Thank you.

CHR. PAVAO: That's the way to effectuate change is to move the Charter amendment process, yeah.

MS. OTSUKA: And if there's anything else that any of us can do, please let us know because we don't know—I don't know what you go through. I don't know what you really can and cannot do or shouldn't do.

So, yeah, it would be good to know if I have something to take to the Charter—I mean, the County Council.

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you very much.

MS. NAMAHOE: Thank you. This is civic training for all of us.

MS. OTSUKA: Me, too.

MS. NAMAHOE: For us sitting here on this Commission, interfacing with the public, and making sure that we're doing the right thing—and that's all we're trying to do.

Again, we're working with an elegant solution and I coulda, woulda, should've—but it's not in our purview to make decisions going forward. All we can do is come up with solutions that seem as reasonable as possible and then hold them all accountable.

MS. OTSUKA: So, would it have been prudent to even—rather than four years, just to give one year at a time?

CHR. PAVAO: The justification for four years is because the collective bargaining units—the Unions—have recently agreed and signed a four-year contract. So, we kind of maintained parity within those four years, so that there wouldn't be that—

MS. OTSUKA: Right.

CHR. PAVAO: —same situation we had before where union members are making more than the deputy directors in their department.

MS. OTSUKA: So, are the four-year contracts for the union people the same as an administration? Is that the same four years we're talking about?

CHR. PAVAO: Basically, what we did was, we used the same percentages that the HGEA Bargaining Unit 13 had. So, to, again, maintain parity so there wouldn't be that inversions.

MS. FRENZ: But just to provide a little bit of additional information, since the Chair has given that grace. The—after this body did its draft proposed Findings, did the public notice, and the public hearing—SHOPO arbitration concluded, and it was much higher. So, there is the potential, yet again, and I—for inversion.

But I also wanted to clarify one other point that I think you've brought up, 'cause there might be a misunderstanding. The reference to the salary inversion table that you were talking about earlier today, that's base pay. So, what you need to remember is that for Police and Fire—

MS. OTSUKA: Right.

MS. FRENZ: —where there was the potential for possible inversion. Everybody that's not a chief or an assis—the deputy chief—we have our interim chief here today for Fire—they don't get overtime. So, everybody below—assistant chiefs and below—they all get overtime.

So, if you have an assistant chief, right—I think with the example with Police was like \$100.00 and somewhat dollars between the deputy chief and the next assistant chief—that's base pay, but the assistant chiefs are still able to bill overtime. So there will always be inversion because they're provided that opportunity, whereas the others cannot. So, I wanted to just clarify that, since you referenced it.

MS. OTSUKA: Thank you. And—

CHR. PAVAO: Deputy (inaudible)—hazardous pay is something that we didn't deal with because the Charter doesn't give us that power. But all the collective bargaining agen—the Unions negotiated for hazardous pay during COVID. So, they all got hazardous pay—none of the appointed and elected officials got hazardous pay.

MS. OTSUKA: Thank you. So, on the inversion, though, on the chart—on the report that was provided last month—I understand it's a snapshot and just for the month, and it changes every month. But the total amount of the 33 positions, there were only two positions that were affected, and it was \$1,300.00 that month—only .06%. So, all I'm saying is the inversion—that there is no, as far as I see—that there is no crisis. It's a payroll dynamic sort of thing.

MS. FRENZ: So, again, that's base pay.

MS. OTSUKA: Right.

MS. FRENZ: So, every—if everyone is allowed to also—with the exception of the top two—bill overtime when they work overtime, which happens a lot, there will automatically always be—there's always going to be problems.

So, that was just showing you, again, base pay. So, I think that that's a misunder—misconception or the way you're reviewing it is confusing because it may appear that there's

only a handful of potential close situations for inversion but, again, there's no overtime being built into that.

Police and Fire have a lot of overtime because the nature—they're first responders.

MS. OTSUKA: Thank you. That was a deputy police chief and the Planning Department—were the two departments that showed that—that month.

So, if we're basing everything on a comparative, wouldn't you take several months or even a year to see how bad inversion is before we just—I only saw that one, and I couldn't clearly see an inversion in that. So, this is the reason I question that.

MS. FRENZ: That's, again, 'cause it was base pay.

MS. OTSUKA: Right.

MS. FRENZ: That was not including the overtime. I just wanted to share that.

MS. OTSUKA: But it shouldn't, right? The inversion shouldn't take into account overtime or longevity or step increases—from my understanding.

So, again, this is a frustrating thing because we only see what we're shown. And we're only told what we're—they want us to know. So, I appreciate what you do. I thank you very much for your time and—

CHR. PAVAO: Thank you—

MS. OTSUKA: —Merry Christmas.

CHR. PAVAO: —thank you for your concern (inaudible) information—and thank you.

MS. OTSUKA: Thank you.

CHR. PAVAO: Okay. Anything else, if not, we'll—

MS. FRENZ: I will just clarify, Chair, for the January meeting—in order for this Commission to still hold a meeting in January, we'll need at least quorum, which would be five. We currently have only six of nine positions filled. So, if all six of you are still able to be present, I know that Chair Pavao and Commissioner Namahoe terms end at the end of this month, but you can, by Charter, holdover for 90 days if your positions have not been filled.

So, you can come through March of 2026, in the event you still want to hold meetings to approve minutes, for example, such as the January meeting to approve minutes from today's hearing, I think would be very important, so the public is able to see those minutes get posted online and see what happened—and the important conversation that occurred here, today.

So, I think January is an important one and then I'll defer to you guys as to whether or not you continue to holdover and can, I guess, work with Mayor's Office and/or others contact the Mayor's Office to urge the filling of positions—that would be great. Yeah.

CHR. PAVAO: Okay, thank you. Any other comments? If not, we'll adjourn. Thank you very much. Motion to adjourn.

MR. RIORDAN: Commissioner Riordan, I make a motion to adjourn.

CHR. PAVAO: Is there a second?

MR. DUDOIT: Second.

CHR. PAVAO: Okay, moved and second. Any comments? If not, we'll vote to adjourn. All those in favor signify by saying aye. Any opposed?

The voice vote was as follows:

AYES: Commissioners Dudoit, Kawa'auhau, Namahoe, Nelson, Riordan,
and Chair Pavao – 6.

OPPOSED: None.

ABSENT & EXCUSED: None.

CHR. PAVAO: None opposed. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned. Thank you very much.
(The meeting adjourned at 10:44 a.m.)

Respectfully submitted,

Glynis Yamada, Secretary-Reporter

APPROVED:

Steven Pavao, Chair
Salary Commission

PUBLIC STATEMENT REGISTRATION FORM
SALARY COMMISSION
COUNTY OF HAWAI'I
HILO, HAWAI'I

Date: 12.22.2025

(Please print clearly)

Support
 Oppose
 Comment

Please list the item(s) you will be speaking on:

Communication No. 25-05.01 OR

Subject/Topic: Salary raises / findings of fact

Name: Jell ofuku

Representing: _____

(Please indicate whether Self or Organization)

***For official use only: Speaker No. 1

PUBLIC STATEMENT REGISTRATION FORM
SALARY COMMISSION
COUNTY OF HAWAI'I
HILO, HAWAI'I

Date: 12.22.25

(Please print clearly)

Support
 Oppose
 Comment

Please list the item(s) you will be speaking on:

Communication No. _____ OR

Subject/Topic: Salary Commission / Salary increases

Name: William Cummings

Representing: _____

(Please indicate whether Self or Organization)

***For official use only: Speaker No. 2

Glynis Yamada, Secretary
Hawai'i County Salary Commission
101 Pauahi Street Suite 2
Hilo, HI 96720

December 21, 2025

Dear Glynis,

Please find attached two written testimonies for the upcoming Salary Commission meeting:

1. Primary Written Testimony
2. Supplemental Written Testimony -
Findings of Fact Clarification

The supplemental testimony is submitted to assist the record and clarify specific Findings of Fact referenced in the Commission's packet.

Thank you so much for your assistance.

Sincerely,



Dell H. Otsuka
Keaukaha, Hawai'i

ATT. A

Dell Otsuka
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720-4833

December 20, 2025

Steven Pavao, Chair
Hawai'i County Salary Commission
101 Pauahi Street, Suite 2
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

Testimony to the Hawai'i County Salary Commission

Subject: Proposed Salary Increases for Elected and Appointed
Officials-**OPPOSED**

Agenda item 6 **Unfinished Business (for discussion and appropriate action)**
Communication No. 25-05.01: Proposed Findings Of Fact By The 2025
County of Hawai'i Salary Commission, Dated August 28, 2025

Good Morning Chair, Commissioners, Counsel and Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony for the record.

Again and still, I offer these comments in the spirit of transparency, prudence, and continued public confidence in the Commission's work, particularly as this Commission considers proposed salary adjustments for its highest-level elected and appointed officials.

Charter Process and Voting Thresholds

I respectfully wish to note Section 13-28(f) of the Hawai'i County Charter, *which provides that any salary adjustment exceeding ten percent requires an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the **entire membership** of the Salary Commission.* As the Charter does not distinguish between single-year and cumulative multi-year adjustments, I encourage clarity on how this provision is being interpreted and documented in the Commission's findings, *particularly where adjustments may accrue over multiple years.*

Clear documentation of this interpretation is essential to transparency and public trust, *especially* given the magnitude and timing of the proposed increases.

In that regard, I respectfully request clarity as to whether any approved salary adjustments are intended to apply prospectively only, or whether retroactive application has been considered.

Section 13-4(h) of the Hawai'i County Charter, "*the affirmative vote of a majority of the **entire membership** to which a board or commission is entitled shall be necessary to make any action valid...*"

Workforce Pipeline and Recruitment Realities

Last month's report submitted by Human Resources reflected **693** vacancies among the 23 Departments listed. Of those 23 departments listed, two operate **24/7/365; Police and Fire**. Together they have **267** vacancies. Parks & Recreation, Public Works and Environmental Management departments together have **191**, (*although not staffed 24/7, they do have on-call staff*). *Just these five departments account for **472** of the 693 vacancies; **66% of essential public safety and emergency services**.*

Rather than focusing on raises for ALL department heads across the board, the absence of efficiency and performance metrics **MUST** be an important criteria. Granted, the police and fire have their own recruitment efforts, but what of the other departments? What has and is being done to address these shortages in their departments less than a year in?

I would also like to respectfully address the frequently cited assertion that "no one is applying" for County positions.

Through conversations with local workforce development organizations that assist residents—including Native Hawaiian individuals—in preparing for and entering the workforce, I have learned of circumstances that suggest the challenge may lie less with applicant availability and more with the structure of **recruitment**, placement, and **retention** practices in the County structure.

From discussions with Alu Like, I was made aware of two individuals (although there are more) who applied for County employment for eight and ten years. One individual applied 21 times! Was hired only for a short-term (five months) or provisional basis.

Another individual commutes over 200 miles a day for work in Kona if doing a round trip. If not round trip, then having to sleep in their car, resulting in extreme commuting burdens and personal hardship; and has been doing this for over two years! These experiences underscore the absence of geographic and housing considerations within current hiring frameworks.

Such patterns raise many questions about whether existing hiring structures unintentionally discourage long-term retention, or maybe arbitrarily conducted.

I have also spoken with representatives of ALTRES, a local staffing and workforce solutions firm, and was informed that the County previously had a contractual relationship with that organization to support recruitment efforts. To my knowledge, that relationship is no longer in place. I have raised this in discussions with the Department of Environmental Management (as a commissioner), as it appears to be an example of an established **recruitment** pipeline that could be revisited.

Why County Employment Still Matters to Our People

It is also important to acknowledge why County employment continues to be sought after by many local residents, even when wages may fall below a true living wage for Hawai'i County. For many families, a County job represents stability and security—access to medical care, basic benefits, and a measure of predictability that is increasingly rare these days.

This is particularly true for working parents and multigenerational households who may accept wages at or only slightly above the federal poverty level because the alternative is no medical coverage at all. *The willingness of individuals to apply repeatedly, commute long distances, or endure provisional employment underscores not a lack of interest, but a deep commitment to public service and economic survival.*

As I was driving past Lincoln Park in Downtown Hilo, I saw a Park caretaker wearing gloves and using a rake to pick up trash and what looked like a piece of clothing...maybe from a homeless person. I couldn't help but think, *(especially because of this huge issue on raises)*, that this County employee shows up every day for work knowing exactly what the day will look like, yet shows up to this *"thankless job."* *How can we just disregard the hard work, dedication and commitment that so many of our people face, to give freely-raises for work that so many of us do not see, have not seen or may never see.*

So yes, it's been more reflective for me, having served as a commissioner (EMC) with the DEM to advocate for all of our county employees that are overworked *(within their own departments and in various other job positions)*, underappreciated, and experiencing health issues in the process of keeping our county operational.

There is no justification at this time or any reasonable explanation to support the raises. It's been less than a year into this new administration and what tangible results can we say have improved in any or all of the departments.

Connection to Proposed Salary Increases

These workforce realities are especially relevant when considered alongside the proposed salary increases for the County's highest-level positions.

While local applicants experience instability and hardship in securing permanent County employment where **693** vacancies exist; is unacceptable. *The County is simultaneously advancing salary adjustments for executive and appointed leadership based largely on **recruitment and retention justifications.***

Respectfully, it is difficult to reconcile these two realities. **Recruitment and retention** challenges do not exist in isolation at the executive level; they are experienced most acutely by those attempting to enter, remain in, and advance within the County workforce under existing structural constraints.

Before approving cumulative salary increases of this magnitude, it may be prudent to first evaluate whether recruitment pipelines, hiring practices,

geographic placement, and retention mechanisms are functioning equitably and effectively across the organization as a whole.

Timing, Transition, and Clarity

I would also respectfully note that the County is entering a period of significant operational transition with the implementation of a new county-wide computer system requiring training and adaptation across departments now. During periods of major system change, careful pacing and clear communication are especially important.

The County is undergoing a major \$337 million, 5-year renovation project with the Hilo Wastewater Treatment Facility and is facing multiple AOC's from the EPA, not to mention more costly projects already in the process.

Closing

My comments are offered in keeping with the Charter's expectation that commissions exercise independent judgment in the public interest and in a manner that maintains public confidence. I am in support of a careful, transparent, and balanced approach to compensation decisions—one that reflects not only leadership roles, but the lived realities of the County workforce and the communities they serve.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Dell H. Otsuka
Keaukaha, Hawai'i

Dell Otsuka
Keaukaha, Hawai'i 96720-4833

December 20, 2025

Steven Pavao, Chair
Hawai'i County Salary Commission
101 Pauahi Street, Suite 2
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

Supplemental Testimony to the Hawai'i County Salary Commission,

Agenda Item 6. Communication No. 25-05.01: **Proposed Findings Of Fact by The 2025 County of Hawai'i Salary Commission, Dated August 28, 2025**

Subjects: - Proposed Salary Adjustments for Covered Positions
- Clarification of Findings of Facts

Good Morning Chair and Members of the Commission,

Thank you for your service and for the opportunity to submit written testimony. I have carefully reviewed the proposed **Findings of Fact** and offer the following comments in the interest of clarity, transparency, and the Commission's responsibilities under the Hawai'i County Charter.

*The later **Findings (7, 8, 9, and 13)** are expressly classified **not** as factual determinations, but as conclusions, assumptions, statements of intent, or generalized justifications—particularly those addressing recruitment and retention, salary inversion, public concern, and private-sector comparison.*

While these considerations may inform policy decisions, they are distinct from verifiable findings of fact grounded in specific data or evidence in the record.

I respectfully ask the Commission to consider whether these sections would be more appropriately framed as rationale or discussion, so that the Findings of Fact themselves remain clearly tied to demonstrable evidence and fully transparent to the public.

Proposed Salary Adjustments for Covered Positions

Several **Findings** *establish authority, procedure, and historical context.* However, the **findings** that **substantively** justify the proposed salary adjustments—specifically **Findings 7, 8, 9, and 13**—rely largely on **generalized conclusions and prospective concerns rather than position-specific, Hawai'i County-based data.**

The record does not include vacancy, turnover, or failed recruitment data demonstrating that current compensation for **Covered Positions** is the primary driver of recruitment or retention challenges. Salary **inversion** is raised as a **potential** concern based on base-salary comparisons that **exclude overtime and step increases, which reflect earned compensation rather than** documented, systemic inversion. Additionally, the proposed multi-year adjustments are **justified primarily as a preventive measure rather than** in response to an established, recurring condition.

Clarifications of Findings of Fact

Finding 1 - Authority of the Salary Commission
Classification: Procedural/legal authority

Finding 2 - Historical Practice
Classification: Contextual/precedent based

Finding 3 - Union negotiation timeline
Classification: **Factual background**

Finding 4 - Meeting notice and testimony
Classification: Procedural compliance

Finding 5 - Information considered
Classification: Process description (inputs listed)

Finding 6 - Bargaining status and timing
Classification: Status update/timing context

Finding 7 - **Recruitment and retention conclusion**
Classification: **Policy conclusion/judgment**

Finding 8 - Salary inversion concern

Classification: Conditional/assumption-based

Finding 9 - Preventing future inversion

Classification: Preventive rationale

Finding 10 - Annual review recommendation

Classification: Forward-looking recommendation/Charter

Finding 11 - Adoption, publication, and voting

Classification: Procedural/statutory compliance

Finding 12 - Balancing public concern

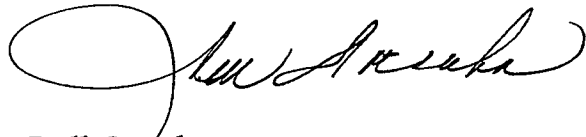
Classification: Statement of intent/characterization

Finding 13 - Private sector comparison

Classification: Generalized justification

Thank you for your patience, attention and service.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dell Otsuka". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning.

Dell Otsuka

Keaukaha, Hawai'i

District 3