

REGULAR SESSION

Merit Appeals Board
Hilo Council Chambers
Hawai'i County Building
25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401
Hilo, Hawai'i
December 18, 2025 (Thursday)

Call to Order (Item 1)

The regular meeting of the Merit Appeals Board, County of Hawai'i, was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chair Gabriella M. Cabanas, at the Hilo Council Chambers, Hawai'i County Building, 25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401, Hilo, Hawai'i, on Thursday, December 18, 2025.

Roll Call – Present

Ms. Gabriella M. Cabanas, Chair
Ms. Suzi Bond, Vice-Chair
Mr. Daniel “Niel” Thomas, Member

Absent and Excused

Mr. Gilbert J. Aguinaldo, Member

Also Present

Mr. J Yoshimoto, Assistant Corporation Counsel, Office of the Corporation Counsel
Ms. Sommer J. Tokihiro, Director, Human Resources Department
Ms. Michelle Simmons, Human Resources Manager II, Human Resources Department
Ms. Stacie Iwasaki, Human Resources Program Specialist, Human Resources Department
Ms. Trisha C. Gibo, Deputy Attorney General, Department of the Attorney General (via Zoom)
Mr. Ryan Thomas, Deputy Corporation Counsel, Office of the Corporation Counsel
Mr. Joshua-Joel Ravey, Pipefitter, Department of Water Supply
Mr. Ted H. S. Hong, Esquire, Attorney at Law
Ms. Glynis Yamada, Secretary-Reporter, Human Resources Department

Call to Order (Item 1)

CHR. CABANAS: The Merit Appeals Board meeting is called to order, on this day, December 18th, 2025. We are at the Hilo Council Chambers, at the Hawai‘i County Building, at 25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401, in Hilo.

We have quorum today with three Board members present. I’m Gabriella Cabanas, Chair of the Merit Appeals Board—and with me are Suzi Bond, our Vice-Chair.

MS. BOND: Good morning.

CHR. CABANAS: And to my far right, Mr. Daniel “Niel” Thomas.

MR. THOMAS: Good morning.

CHR. CABANAS: And to my immediate right, we have our Assistant Corporation Counsel, J Yoshimoto.

MR. YOSHIMOTO: Good morning, everyone.

CHR. CABANAS: Seated in the back of us is Glynis Yamada, our Secretary-Reporter.

MS. YAMADA: Good morning.

CHR. CABANAS: Good morning, everyone. And appearing via Zoom on O‘ahu, is our Deputy Attorney General Trisha Gibo. Good morning, Trisha.

MS. GIBO: Good morning, Chair, and members of the Board.

CHR. CABANAS: And sitting in the gallery are the following individuals—Mr. Ryan Thomas of the Office of the Corporation Counsel. We also have a County of Hawai‘i employee, Mr. Joshua-Joel Ravey; and from the Department of Human Resources our Director, Sommer Tokihiro; our Recruitment and Examination Manager Michelle Simmons; and our HR Program Specialist Stacie Iwasaki—and I don’t see anyone else.

Addendum to Agenda (Item 2)

CHR. CABANAS: Are there—there’s no addendum to the agenda.

Statements from the Public (Item 3)

CHR. CABANAS: Any “Statements from the Public?”

Approval of Minutes (Item 4)

September 26, 2025; and October 30, 2025

September 26, 2025

CHR. CABANAS: If not, we will move on to our approval of the meeting minutes for September 26, 2025. Board members, have you had the opportunity to read the meeting minutes?

MR. THOMAS: I have.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay—and I have, too. Is there a motion to accept and file?

MR. THOMAS: So moved.

MS. BOND: And I'll second.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay, any discussion? If not, I'll start a rollcall vote to accept and file for September 26, 2025. Ms. Suzi Bond.

MS. BOND: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Mr. Thomas.

MR. THOMAS: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Ms. Cabanas—aye.

Three ayes. Motion carried.

October 30, 2025

CHR. CABANAS: The second meeting is October 30th, 2025. Have you had the opportunity to review those meeting minutes?

MR. THOMAS: I have.

MS. BOND: Yeah.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay, great. Is there a motion to accept and file?

MS. BOND: So moved.

MR. THOMAS: Second.

CHR. CABANAS: Thank you. Any discussion? If not, I'll start a rollcall vote with Ms. Bond.

MS. BOND: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Mr. Thomas.

MR. THOMAS: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Ms. Cabanas—aye.

Three ayes. Motion carried.

There's a request to take Communication number 25-09 out of order. So, may I have a motion— if it's okay with my fellow Board members to take this first before the "Director's Report."

MR. THOMAS: Move to take—what was the number?

CHR. CABANAS: Twenty-five, dash, 09.

MR. THOMAS: Twenty-five, dash 09, out of order.

CHR. CABANAS: Thank you.

MS. BOND: Second.

CHR. CABANAS: Thank you. Any discussion? If not, I'll start a rollcall vote with Ms. Bond.

MS. BOND: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Mr. Thomas.

MR. THOMAS: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Ms. Cabanas—aye.

Three ayes. Motion carried.

Communication No. 25-09, Received On November 14, 2025, From Appellant, Appealing A Recruitment And Examination Action By The Hawai'i County Human Resources Department (Board Action Required: Setting A Hearing Date And Deadlines For Submittal Of Documents)

CHR. CABANAS: So we will take up Communication number 25-09 and Mr. Ryan Thomas and Mr. Ravey—am I pronouncing your name correct?

(At this time, Mr. Ryan Thomas, Deputy Corporation Counsel, Office of the Corporation Counsel; and Mr. Joshua-Joel Ravey, Pipefitter (Appellant), Department of Water Supply, came forward.)

MR. RAVEY: Yes, ma'am.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay, great. They're sitting up at the dais—let me look at your appeal, Mr. Ravey. So, you've requested that your appeal be heard in a meeting closed to the public. Is that correct?

MR. RAVEY: Yes, ma'am.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay. And so, with the great help from our Secretary-Reporter, Glynis Yamada—I'm going to need—do I have to go into—Trisha, do we have to go into a closed meeting, since Mr. Ravey has asked for a closed hearing?

MS. GIBO: Yes, Chair.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay. So, may I have a motion for the Board to enter into a closed meeting.

MR. THOMAS: Move for executive (closed) session on this matter.

CHR. CABANAS: Thank you.

MS. BOND: Second.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay, any discussion? If not, I'll start a rollcall vote with Ms. Bond.

MS. BOND: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Mr. Thomas.

MR. THOMAS: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Ms. Cabanas—aye.

Three ayes. Motion carried.

So, we're going to go into executive (closed) session to discuss the proposed hearing date and deadlines for Mr. Ravey. So, for Mr. Thomas—Ryan Thomas and Mr. Ravey, you can remain—but others, if you could wait outside of our Council Chambers, just for a few minutes. It shouldn't take us too long. Thank you very much. And Glynis will secure the room.

RECESS: The Chair called for a recess at 9:06 a.m.

RECONVENE: The meeting reconvened at 9:15 a.m. in open session.

CHR. CABANAS: And now we are back in open session.

Director's Report (Item 5)

MAB Monthly Divisional Activity Report: December 2025 (Administrative Services Division, Classification & Pay Division, Equal Opportunity/ADA Division, Health & Safety Division, Labor Relations Division, Personnel & Organizational Development Division, Recruitment & Examination Division, Workers' Compensation Division)

CHR. CABANAS: So, next on the agenda is our "Director's Report"—so, Sommer, you can come forward.

(At this time, Ms. Sommer J. Tokihiro, Director, Human Resources Department, came forward.)

MS. GIBO: Chair, I believe that's it for me as well, so I can exit from—

CHR. CABANAS: That's it for you—yeah, so, Trisha, have a very happy holiday season.

MS. GIBO: Same to you folks.

CHR. CABANAS: Take care.

MS. BOND: Stay dry.

CHR. CABANAS: Stay safe.

MS. GIBO: Thank you.

CHR. CABANAS: See you next year.

MS. GIBO: See you next year.

CHR. CABANAS: Thanks, Trisha. Is it still raining on O'ahu?

MS. BOND: They're back in a flood advisory.

CHR. CABANAS: Wow.

MS. BOND: (Inaudible.)

CHR. CABANAS: Oh, well, when it rains there, it rains. They don't have good drainage.

MS. BOND: Yeah, they don't.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

CHR. CABANAS: Yes.

MS. BOND: I know, seriously.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible.)

CHR. CABANAS: Yes, a little bit at least, yeah. The plants are very dry.

MS. BOND: (Inaudible.)

CHR. CABANAS: So, just FYI, Sommer, before you give your director's report—Mr. Ravey's hearing was scheduled for February 26th, 2026, that's a Thursday, 9 a.m., here in the Council Chambers. Okay—so you can work with the attorney.

Okay, "Director's Report"—oh, were your staff coming in?

MS. TOKIHIRO: No, I actually just had them here for the hearing.

CHR. CABANAS: Oh, okay. You may begin when you're ready.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Okay. Good morning. I'm happy to answer any questions that you folks have about the report.

I will note that we went live with the next part of our CoHnect system, so that happened on December 16th. So, all of our employees are getting adjusted to entering their time online in the new system. And so, that's been a challenge, but we're excited about it and continuous work-in-progress. So, we started that his week—that's the HR—the full HR component will go live January 1st. So, right now, everybody's learning how to enter their time online, enter leave request online, get used to looking at what their leave balances are online, et cetera.

Beginning January 1, they will be able to see information about employment history, they'll be able to update emergency contacts, and do those things online—which to this point, we've not been able to do. So, it's exciting—just, kind of, going in phases.

CHR. CABANAS: So, you know when they do that—do their leave of absence forms online, do they get verbal approval from the supervisor first or is that the mechanism for the approval?

MS. TOKIHIRO: That's the mechanism for the approval.

CHR. CABANAS: Oh.

MS. TOKIHIRO: So when you submit a request, then your supervisor receives a notification that there is a request that—for approval. And so, then, as the supervisor, I would look at the employees' request—it shows the dates, it shows the number of hours, and it also shows the employees' available leave balance, which is helpful for me as a supervisor to be able to see—“Do they have enough leave?”

CHR. CABANAS: Right.

MS. TOKIHIRO: And so, then, if I accept, I can make—or if I approve it, I can make comments and say—I can add comments that the employee would then see when they get a notification that their request is approved. And the same thing—if the request for it to be denied, you can document the reasons for that ;and then a notification is sent to the employee, so they know what the status of their leave request is.

And then, once that leave request is approved, that information will just auto-populate into the timecard—so, for that period of their absence.

CHR. CABANAS: Oh, wow.

MS. TOKIHIRO: So, you don't have to, like, remember and add it to your timecard later—say, you request vacation—you have a scheduled vacation coming up in June. You would make that request for the time off now and then, during that timecard period when your vacation occurs, that leave will auto-populate into the timecard.

CHR. CABANAS: Oh, that's terrific.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. So—

CHR. CABANAS: It saves time there. The reason why I asked if there was a discussion—I'm just thinking of operations—if, Employee A is going to be out for one week, are they taking it—well, I guess the supervisor would have to take into account—is there going to be a backup, are three employees going to be out that same week—that sort of thing—that's why I asked.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Right. And so, I think departments may handle that differently. I can say for HR when someone requests leave or has approved leave, we put it—we document it on the shared DHR calendar in Outlook—so that makes it easy for a supervisor to be able to see—or who is going to be out on any given day to make those decisions.

So, we use a shared calendar in HR to document that, so that I can make sure that there's adequate coverage—but, yes, different—departments may continue to have those discussions prior to actually requesting (inaudible).

CHR. CABANAS: Okay, anyone who has questions? Suzi, do you have any questions? Niel, any questions?

MR. THOMAS: No, I'm good. I like what I see here.

CHR. CABANAS: Yeah, I do, too. The report has been very good. This month—and even the last few months, it's—addresses, I think, everything.

MS. TOKIHIRO: I will share with you folks it has been—I received a resignation from Michelle Simmons in our Recruitment and Examination Division. So, that will be a position that we will be recruiting to fill.

CHR. CABANAS: Oh, wow, okay. When is she resigning?

MS. TOKIHIRO: As of December 31st.

CHR. CABANAS: Oh, okay. Well, that's—yeah. And your recruitment will open up soon?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yes.

CHR. CABANAS: I have heard the radio ads—the last—the most recent one was the Laborer, Groundskeeper, and Park Caretaker ads—and DC was doing it. He does a great job.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. And the radio stations all do them a little bit differently but, for example, I heard the radio ad that was on KWXX and I thought that it was great how it talked about that—providing that community service by serving in a capacity with the County—whether it's taking care of parks, these are very valuable community service opportunities. And so, I liked that they, kind of, took that perspective with advertising the position—people making a difference in their community through this service, so—

CHR. CABANAS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Very good. I liked it. But those are paid ads, right?

MS. TOKIHIRO: They are.

CHR. CABANAS: Yeah.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah.

CHR. CABANAS: Yeah.

MS. TOKIHIRO: So, we're trying to highlight different positions and we want to, kind of, group them together in a way that makes sense. So, we did those because those are all registration recruitments—to qualify for those positions, you only need to have a driver's license—and those established lists that are used by multiple departments that have openings. So, we kind of grouped those together because those registration recruitments usually open about twice a year. And then, the emphasis on the public safety positions in the radio ads prior, coincided with opening of recruitment for the fire recruits.

So, going forward, we'll figure out the next group that we want to target and try and change it up.

CHR. CABANAS: Good. And they do run the ads very frequent because I've heard it different times of the day into the evening—yeah.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. So, I think both of the campaigns—the recent ones—were for a two-week period. And so, they—yeah, do run the ads at different times—so, I've been trying to get maximum exposure out there.

CHR. CABANAS: Very good.

MS. TOKIHIRO: We are also continuing to investigate the TV ads, but those are going to be for some different positions, 'cause we'll have a different target audience with that.

CHR. CABANAS: It sounds good. Yes, Niel, you have a question?

MR. THOMAS: Well, speaking of recruitment and exams, I see two higher level positions closed out from continuous recruitment, which I would imagine you're pretty pleased with—an architect position and civil engineer positions. Aren't—haven't they, historically, been pretty hard to find?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yes. So, anytime we can close those higher-level positions, it is—we're very happy to see qualified applicants coming through for those positions and to see our departments be able to get those filled.

MR. THOMAS: Where are those folks coming from?

MS. TOKIHIRO: A variety of places, but I—our staff—it's not a formal system but they've been, kind of, informally tracking where displaced federal workers—

MR. THOMAS: (Inaudible.)

MS. TOKIHIRO: —and so, some of the recent selections have been people that have come from federal positions. They were either displaced or just looking to make the transition from a federal position to county.

Every time someone is hired within the County, they fill out this—a card, that documents their work history. And so, I read all of those cards because I do want to see where people are coming from and what is the reason that they've decided to come to work for the County. And I've seen it changed over the last few months that people are documenting that they're looking for more stability or a different opportunity.

And so, we still do have a lot of continuous recruitments open, but I am pleased with the fact that we've been able to fill some of these higher-level, more challenging positions. And I'm—we're hoping that that trend will continue with all of our openings, so—

MR. THOMAS: Is there any shift vis-à-vis—people who are currently based in Hawai'i as opposed to people on the mainland?

MS. TOKIHIRO: As far as—

MR. THOMAS: Federal workers.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yes. So, for example, there was one individual that was on the mainland that moved here for an opportunity in our Property Management Division, I believe—in the PONC area.

So, it's a variety of different reasons that is bringing people to the County, but I'm hopeful that we're going to be able to turn a corner.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay, thank you, Sommer.

So, do I have a motion to accept and file the “Director’s Report”—

MS. BOND: So moved.

CHR. CABANAS: —for the month of Dec—was it December—

MR. THOMAS: Second.

MS. BOND: December.

CHR. CABANAS: Yeah. Thank you for the motion and the second. Any discussion? If not, I'll start a rollcall vote to accept and file. Ms. Suzi Bond.

MS. BOND: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Thank you. Niel—

MR. THOMAS: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Thank you. Ms. Cabanas—aye.

Three ayes. Motion carried to accept and file the “Director’s Report” for December 2025.

Communications (Item 6)

Communication No. 25-09, Received On November 14, 2025, From Appellant, Appealing A Recruitment And Examination Action By The Hawai‘i County Human Resources Department (Board Action Required: Setting A Hearing Date And Deadlines For Submittal Of Documents)

(Previously taken out of order.)

New Business (Item 7)

CHR. CABANAS: We do not have any “New Business”—but we do have “Unfinished Business.”

Unfinished Business (Item 8)

Informational Update By Merit Appeals Board Chair, Gabriella M. Cabanas, Concerning Her Attendance At The Salary Commission’s Public Hearing Held On November 17, 2025, Regarding Proposed Salary Adjustments For Fiscal Year 2025-2026 For The Director And Deputy Director Of The Department Of Human Resources (Note: The Above Matter Was Discussed At Its Meeting Held On October 30, 2025 (Reference Communication Numbers 25-07 – 25-07.02). The Board Members Approved Her Attendance And Representation At The Salary Commission’s Public Hearing Scheduled On November 17, 2025)

CHR. CABANAS: I did attend the Salary Commission’s public hearing in two roles—one, was as a citizen—and the other role, as the Chair of the Merit Appeals Board.

And, as the Chair, I just explained very briefly why we went with the 20% recommendation for the proposed increases for the executives. And, basically, when the Commission meets in such a manner, they’re just taking testimony, so there’s no question/answer kind of period. So, basically, that was it.

And I explained that we went with the 20% recommendation so that it would provide more leeway and that the managers would not encroach upon the executive salary because we really don’t know—at that point—we didn’t know what the salaries for Fire and Police, their—it was still in arbitration. So, we went with just a safe measure—and, basically, that was it. They took

my testimony, so, yeah—but it’s never a question/answer—you just—they just hear your testimony for three-minutes.

MS. BOND: (Inaudible) three-minutes (inaudible).

CHR. CABANAS: Yes.

MR. THOMAS: What’s next from them—after this now?

CHR. CABANAS: I’m not sure. I guess, that question—can, maybe, the Director can answer it. So, did they meet after?

MS. TOKIHIRO: So, the Salary Commission convenes again on Monday.

CHR. CABANAS: Oh, okay.

MS. TOKIHIRO: The twenty—December 22nd for their next meeting. So, at that point, I believe there’s the opportunity for more public testimony but, at that point, I think they’ll take the vote regarding whether or not the Commission is going to approve the Findings of Fact.

CHR. CABANAS: ‘Cause they were going with 15—was it 15.29% or—that’s what they were using—

MS. TOKIHIRO: That’s what in the Findings of Fact.

CHR. CABANAS: Right.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah.

CHR. CABANAS: Yeah.

MR. THOMAS: So, what’s their schedule to complete this iteration of where they’re leading to?

MS. TOKIHIRO: If the Commission votes to approve the Findings of Fact on December 22nd, then those—the proposed increases that they outlined would go into effect January 1.

MR. THOMAS: So, at what point do they finish up with what they’re doing and go dormant, so to speak?

MS. TOKIHIRO: That’s at the discretion of the Commission because they can—if they don’t feel the need to make any additional adjustments, they wouldn’t necessarily need to continue to convene and meet.

But there were still outstanding arbitrations—there are—there currently are still outstanding arbitrations for other bargaining units. And so, the Commission may want to reconvene and

evaluate those arbitration awards and look at salaries for those bargaining units and then the executives in those departments.

So, I'm not sure. It's really at the Commission's discretion if they feel that additional adjustments are necessary.

MR. THOMAS: So, they would have another round of hearings, I guess, if they want to make changes in what they're currently working from?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Correct. Yeah. It needs to follow the same public notification process and provide the public the opportunity to attend hearings and provide their feedback.

MR. THOMAS: But even if it drags on, final decisions will retroactively compensate any affected positions, right?

MS. TOKIHIRO: That would depend on how the Commission elects to write their Findings of Fact. So, it's all based on how the Commission puts forth their Findings of Fact and when they want those increases to take place.

So, for example, in this current one—it was not retroactive. It begins January 1st—but I know—I believe the prior adjustment was also prospective—it didn't go retroactive, but they could identify a retroactive date if they so chose.

MR. THOMAS: I ask because we were, in this body, looking at their Findings of Fact and how they arrived at it—and it was a bit of a muddle, I think, because of the pandemic and because of wages that were either not ever approved or were some were approved retroactively—and the way it came out and seemed to have go down in the press was that the total increase that was recommended was really back-dated, but it looked like a one big shot increase for everybody—and I imagine that triggered a bunch of public push back, didn't it?

MS. TOKIHIRO: It can. At times there were also—in the timeframe that the Commission took that action, other similar bodies throughout the State were also making some pretty significant adjustments.

So, the adjustments that were made by our Salary Commission were not as significant as some of the other adjustments that were occurring, so there was already a lot of public push back for those others. And so, yeah—it can.

And the difficulty is because it's a nine-member Commission, if the Commission doesn't have quorum, they're not able to continuously evaluate and convene and make those adjustments in real time. And so, for this Commission, these Commission members—they are very much vocal on wanting to make sure that something is in place so that there aren't these big gaps—that would then necessitate large one-time adjustments as opposed to consistently evaluating and making adjustments accordingly.

MR. THOMAS: Hopefully, they have a way to manage the messaging to counter that tendency of the public to say, “Well, I didn’t get a raise of such and such last year”—and if that’s not what it is—it’s averaged over however many years—nobody got anything.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. And that’s really where that—the Findings of Fact can help explain that, but, again, that’s—people would need to read that and understand that this is the basis for it. So, yeah—sometimes we just jump to big numbers, then some of that other messaging does get lost, so.

MR. THOMAS: And you, who are personally affected by this, can hardly speak to it, can you?

MS. TOKIHIRO: I am an Ex-Officio member of—for the Commission and I’m only there to provide information about general other employees’ salaries, and then the collective bargaining process, so—and I don’t vote. I’m not a voting member.

MR. THOMAS: No, of course not.

CHR. CABANAS: So, what were the percentages—just ballpark—that the other jurisdictions went. Was it more than 15%?

MS. TOKIHIRO: In 2023, I believe that there was—there were some adjustments because I believe our adjustment was 20%/23% something of that nature—and I wouldn’t want to mis-speak, but I believe in, like, City and County of Honolulu, there were adjustments of upwards of almost 60% for some positions. I think I recall hearing that, like some positions were 60%—so, yeah.

CHR. CABANAS: One testifier mentioned having job performance reviews and that the increases be based on merit, but that’s not the role of the Salary Commission—

MS. TOKIHIRO: Right.

CHR. CABANAS: —yeah, for job performance reviews. And then another testifier said that people were suffering in the community, and it didn’t seem right that certain individuals would receive these pay increases; and then some were, like, the smaller agencies and you have the larger departments—so, they didn’t feel that was right.

MR. THOMAS: I would imagine what’s hard to document in these cases is the effect of not implementing reasonable pay increases over a period of time because you can hardly say that we lost a certain percentage of the workforce because those incumbents left for better paying positions with other agencies or other—or in the private sector, right? They hardly—the Salary Commission really doesn’t compare with the private sector, does it? Or—what do—how do they make that work?

MS. TOKIHIRO: So, in evaluating salaries, they used information from a salary study, I believe—City and County of Honolulu did one that was utilized for the increases that took effect in 2023. Maui County did a salary study earlier this year.

So, the Commission was provided with a copy of that study, which does compare private sector to public employers. So, the Commission has that information available. And they elected to review the information from Maui because those studies can be quite costly. I believe it was about \$43,000.00 that they paid to have that study completed.

So, it was nice that they allowed our Commission to review that information rather than doing our own study since it was still timely. They felt it was current enough. So, that'll be information that they can utilize should they continue to meet and move forward with looking at other adjustments.

MR. THOMAS: Do these salary studies take into account the entire range of benefits that's part of the employment in the private sector or the public sector? And I'm not just talking fringe benefits and mandatory taxes and such, but are there less tangible benefits that accrue to either the private sector or the public sector?

MS. TOKIHIRO: I couldn't speak to that specifically in regard to the recent study that was done for Maui County. I'm not sure. I have a copy of the study, I could review that and see—but, certainly, would hope that some of that would be addressed, right—the other benefits, I mean, to the best of their ability when you're comparing total compensation, that would be good to be included as a factor.

MR. THOMAS: For instance, in the private sector—in the public sector, you don't get the ability to purchase stock in your company at favorable—on favorable terms, but also if you're in the private sector there's things that you get as a public employee that private employees don't enjoy and sometimes the fringe benefits or insurance is different.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay.

MR. THOMAS: And I don't know if they include all of that in these studies. I have to confess that I never read one.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. And I would have to look at that specifically to see if it was included or what is the manner in which that would be addressed.

CHR. CABANAS: I guess we'll read about it in the newspaper, then—what the Commission decides on.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yes.

CHR. CABANAS: I believe they have two whose terms end, right, at the end of the month.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yes. So, there are two members that are terming out and they will be holdovers for the next three months. And I was just, actually—I was here for our Council meeting yesterday and happened to see Micah—and he was talking about finding another member for the Merit Appeals Board and he does now have—there’s going to be four—or five positions to fill on the Salary Commission. So, he’s got a lot of community volunteers to identify to help us fill these seats.

So, if they don’t have quorum, they won’t be able to meet after March. So unless new members are identified, the Salary Commission will, basically, go dormant.

MS. BOND: Which is what happened before, right?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Correct.

MS. BOND: Which is why the increases are so big this time.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Correct. So, it would—between 2018, I believe, up until 2023 there was a five-year period where they didn’t have quorum, so—yes.

MR. THOMAS: Why is that?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Not enough members on the Commission.

MR. THOMAS: Oh, I know that, but what keeps people from raising their hand?

MS. TOKIHIRO: That would be a question for the Mayor’s Office. I’m not sure what strategy they utilize to try and identify.

MR. THOMAS: For instance, you know the intricacies of all of this—is it just too complicated, people don’t want to participate?

CHR. CABANAS: I think it’s one of the more difficult commissions to be on because of the topic.

MR. THOMAS: Right.

CHR. CABANAS: And subject to a lot of public criticism, if they go one way—

MR. THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

CHR. CABANAS: They do have a mission to pursue whether there’s going to be pay raises or not, but if pay raises—just the words “pay raises” for executives—it doesn’t ring well for a lot of the public.

MR. THOMAS: It’s more sensitive than it is for the rank-and-file, isn’t it?

CHR. CABANAS: Well, that's where the education—to me—component comes in from an HR standpoint because it all begins with the collective bargaining for the rank-and-file, right?

MR. THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

CHR. CABANAS: And the Unions will push for their membership because they want to look good—Number one; and they want to take care of their members—Number two. I said that in that order for a reason. But the thing is, it begins there. And then once the rank-and-file get pay raises, it's the impetuous for—

MS. BOND: Everybody.

CHR. CABANAS: —yeah, it becomes a snowball. It's going to roll and roll—the ball gets bigger and bigger because if they get something, then what about the managers, which is through executive order from the Mayor.

MR. THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

CHR. CABANAS: The executives, which is the Salary Commission. So, it starts with the—very beginning with the rank-and-file. Yeah, that's how I see it.

MR. THOMAS: So you rather be Mayor?

CHR. CABANAS: No, I didn't say that. I didn't say that, but it's all relative because directors, our director, and the other directors—they have a very difficult job.

MR. THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

CHR. CABANAS: And they take the brunt of everything—whether it's positive or negative—they—people—it could be done very well, but the public—the public's perspective sometimes is way different. They don't understand—but, if they don't understand, then we need to educate them because all they see is the Salary Commission dolling out pay increases to the executives—but then, through collective bargaining, this is where it's starting.

MR. THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

MS. TOKIHIRO: But that's also not a public process, right.

CHR. CABANAS: No, it's not.

MS. TOKIHIRO: And so—and it doesn't call for public hearings and it doesn't—there isn't information, usually, published about those sorts of things. I mean, I have seen specific units that will publish information for their membership about what the outcome was of collective

bargaining or an arbitration award, but the public isn't as informed about those underlying factors that are happening at the same time as Gabe mentioned, so.

CHR. CABANAS: So, let me ask you this, since we're on this topic—but, so when—it's not putting it on you or Danny—but when you folks go to negotiations, does the Administration give you a guideline like, okay—no more—okay, “No pay raises” or if you're going to negotiate for a pay raise—do they give you a guideline?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. So, we maintain close communication with the Mayor and the Managing Director about what's happening in the collective bargaining process. And then, the Employer group as a whole—so all directors from all jurisdictions—we each have one vote, and then the State has four votes. And so, then there's a certain number of votes necessary to then take the information back to the Union.

So, there's communication between Danny and myself, and the Mayor and the Managing Director—but then there's also discussions that are happening amongst the Mayors and the Governor, so that we're all collectively on the same page, because we're negotiating as a unit statewide.

So, yeah, it's a—we, definitely, maintain communication with that and are always seeking authority from the Mayor because it's the Mayor's budget. So, he has to provide final approval for anything that I would be representing as something that Hawai'i County could support.

MR. THOMAS: Your history with this process and all of this goes way back, Gabrielle—when you think of people who have been on this public agency that has set these salaries, what are the characteristics of people who succeed and are effective there?

CHR. CABANAS: I don't know if I can answer that because—

MR. THOMAS: Can you think of any individuals who (inaudible)—

CHR. CABANAS: —no, because the Mayor is nominating individuals to—

MR. THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

CHR. CABANAS: —the Salary Commission. Pay increase—pay increases is a very complicated matter to begin with. But, yeah, I wouldn't be able to answer that—I mean, hopefully, there're people who will have some sort of finance background or number backgrounds, statistical background.

MR. THOMAS: Mm-hmm.

CHR. CABANAS: Because they're looking at a lot of numbers—but, yeah, it rests with whoever is in the Administration. But I don't want to—for us to go further because we have to stay with the agenda. So, thank you, Sommer, for answering our related questions.

MS. TOKIHIRO: You're welcome.

CHR. CABANAS: We'll see what the Salary Commission comes up with.

Announcements (Item 9)

CHR. CABANAS: Any "Announcements" anyone?

MS. BOND: I just want to put it out there—you've got a very hard position that's coming up to be filled by the loss of Fire Chief Kazuo Todd—that was so sad. And then, just want to put it out there that we all are affected by his passing.

CHR. CABANAS: We are, indeed. And that position, in due time, that will be something that the Fire Commission will be taking into account.

MS. BOND: Right. It's just so sad.

CHR. CABANAS: But, for now—yes, I think our thoughts and prayers are with his family and with the Fire Department *ohana* because they, too, are suffering. And so, were there—so, can I just ask a question about that? So, do the department, like, do they receive EAP—I guess we shouldn't go there. It's not on the agenda, yeah.

Okay, but for "Announcements" I did remind Micah and I did remind the Managing Director that we have our fifth Board member, Board position—still vacant. It's been vacant for a number of years already. So, to please expedite it.

MR. THOMAS: Is that position affiliated or identified as someone who comes from a particular assembly district?

CHR. CABANAS: I believe so, but not necessarily—J?

MR. YOSHIMOTO: Yeah, I can research that, but I don't recall any district requirement—it's islandwide representation. But, generally speaking, the philosophy has been to get a good representation of the island. Yeah.

CHR. CABANAS: Yeah, they kept on telling me—oh, Kona—someone from Kona. So—and I thought they had someone in mind but there's no nomination yet—but they said they would try to expedite it, 'cause it's been awhile.

MR. THOMAS: Good.

CHR. CABANAS: Yeah, so that's the only announcement that I have on that.

Schedule Next Meeting Date (Item 10)

The Merit Appeals Board Will Convene Its Next Meeting On Friday, January 16, 2026, At 9:00 A.M., At The Hilo Council Chambers, Hawai'i County Building, 25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401, Hilo, HI 96720

CHR. CABANAS: The next meeting is going to be Friday, January 16, 2026, at 9 a.m., at the Hilo Council Chambers of the Hawai'i County Building, at 25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401, in Hilo.

Today, is actually the last Board meeting for the year—wow, 2025.

Adjournment (Item 11)

CHR. CABANAS: So, may I have a motion to adjourn today's meeting?

MS. BOND: So moved.

MR. THOMAS: Second.

CHR. CABANAS: Thank you. Any discussion? If not, I'll start a rollcall vote with Ms. Bond.

MS. BOND: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Mr. Thomas.

MR. THOMAS: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Ms. Cabanas—aye.

Three ayes. Motion carried. Today's meeting is adjourned at 9:52 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Glynis Yamada, Secretary-Reporter

APPROVED:

Gabriella M. Cabanas, Chair
Merit Appeals Board