

REGULAR SESSION

Merit Appeals Board
Hilo Council Chambers
Hawai'i County Building
25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401
Hilo, Hawai'i
January 16, 2026 (Friday)

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 Friday, January 16, 2026.

Roll Call – Present

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

Absent and Excused

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. Glynis Yamada, Secretary-Reporter, Human Resources Department

Call to Order (Item 1)

CHR. CABANAS: Good morning, everyone. Today is January 16, 2026, and the regular meeting of the Merit Appeals Board is called to order at 9 a.m.

We have quorum with three Board members. I'm Gabriella Cabanas, Chair of the Merit Appeals Board. Seated with me at the Hilo Council Chambers, of the Hawai'i County Building, at 25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401, in Hilo—are Assistant Vice-Chair—not Assistant—but Vice-Chair, Suzi Bond.

MS. BOND: Good morning.

CHR. CABANAS: And Mr. Daniel "Niel" Thomas.

MR. THOMAS: Good morning.

CHR. CABANAS: Mr. Aguinaldo is absent today, he is excused—but we do have quorum. Also present with us is Assistant Corporation Counsel, Mr. J Yoshimoto.

MR. YOSHIMOTO: Good morning, everyone.

CHR. CABANAS: Ms. Glynis Yamada, Secretary-Reporter.

MS. YAMADA: Good morning.

CHR. CABANAS: And Ms. Sommer Tokihiro, the Director of Human Resources.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Good morning.

CHR. CABANAS: Good morning, everyone.

Addendum to Agenda (Item 2)

CHR. CABANAS: There's no addendum to the agenda.

Statements from the Public (Item 3)

CHR. CABANAS: And no "Statements from the Public."

Approval of Minutes (Item 4)

November 21, 2025

CHR. CABANAS: So, we are now on approval of the meeting minutes for November 21, 2025. Has everyone reviewed the meeting minutes?

MR. THOMAS: Yes, I have.

CHR. CABANAS: Thank you. May I have a motion to approve the meeting minutes?

MR. THOMAS: So moved.

MS. BOND: I'll second.

CHR. CABANAS: Thank you. I'll start a rollcall vote with Ms. Bond.

MS. BOND: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Mr. Thomas.

MR. THOMAS: Aye.

CHR. CABANAS: Ms. Cabanas—aye.

Motion carried to approve the meeting minutes of November 21, 2025.

Review of Executive Session Minutes

November 21, 2025 (Executive Session: The Merit Appeals Board Anticipates Convening One Or More Executive Meetings Regarding The Above Matters, Pursuant To HRS Sections 92-4 And 92-5(a)(4), For The Purpose Of Consulting With The Board's Attorney On Questions And Issues Pertaining To The Board's Powers, Duties, Privileges, Immunities, And Liabilities. A 2/3 Vote Pursuant To HRS Section 92-4 Is Necessary To Hold An Executive Meeting)

CHR. CABANAS: We are now on the executive session meeting minutes for November 21, 2025. Have you all reviewed those meeting minutes?

MR. THOMAS: Yes, I have.

CHR. CABANAS: So, I have, too. Okay. So, may I have a motion to approve those meeting minutes?

MR. THOMAS: So moved.

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.

Motion carried to approve the executive session meeting minutes for November 21, 2025.

Director's Report (Item 5)

A. MAB Quarterly Reports: October - December 2025 (Administrative Services Division, Classification & Pay Division, Equal Opportunity/Ada Division, Health & Safety Division, Personnel & Organizational Development Division, Recruitment & Examination Division, Workers' Compensation Division)

CHR. CABANAS: We are now on the "Director's Report"—specifically, MAB Quarterly Reports for October to December 2025.

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

CHR. CABANAS: Have you all had the chance to review those?

MR. THOMAS: Yes.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay. Any questions or comments for the Director—or, Ms. Tokihiro, do you have any comments to make about the Quarterly MAB Report?

MS. TOKIHIRO: No additional comments. I'm happy to entertain any questions.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay. So may I have a motion to accept and file the Quarterly MAB Report?

MR. THOMAS: Your turn, Suzi.

MS. BOND: So move.

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 to accept and file the MAB Quarterly Report.

B. MAB Monthly Divisional Activity Report: January 2026 (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: We are now on the “MAB Monthly Divisional Activity Report” for January 2026. Have you all had a chance to review the Divisional Activity Report for January 2026—if not, we can pause a little bit.

MR. THOMAS: That's the blue tab, right?

MS. BOND: Yeah.

CHR. CABANAS: Yes, the last tab in the folder.

MS. BOND: How's the switch-over going?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. So, the implementation of the HCM Module for CoHnect, our new software, went live January 1st—and so it's going well. There's still some things to be ironed out as occurs with all new systems.

But our employees are able to go in and enter their timecards, update their personal information—contact information—and so, we're still working on some user roles and clarifying that in some cases it would be “view only access” and then other cases its—people would have the ability to edit information. So, we're just continuing to test before we roll out those roles to make sure that only people who should be able to edit have that ability and things like that.

So, a continued work-in-progress—but we're pleased, so far, with how it's going. Everybody got their first paycheck in the new system yesterday. So everybody received a copy of the new pay stub and we're all, kind of, getting used to how that looks; and also requesting leave online—that's a new process for all of our employees as well.

So, I think it's going well, and we're looking forward to continuing to work on it, and continue to build in functionality as we, kind of, get through this initial rollout.

MS. BOND: Are the paystubs electronic or are they—they, actually, have physical paystubs?

MS. TOKIHIRO: So, we have the option for both. Apparently, Hawai'i is a State where you would have to opt out of getting a printed paystub. So, we have to provide printed paystubs to all of our employees, unless they choose to opt out and only receive the electronic version.

So, people had the option to opt out, in which case, they would only see it electronically—otherwise, they did receive a paper copy and can access it electronically as well.

MS. BOND: Wonderful. Awesome. I'm glad it's—I'm not going to say, "going smoothly," but you know.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. It is progressing.

MS. BOND: Moving forward.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yes.

MR. THOMAS: What's happening in Animal Control—looks like it closed out all the recruitment, except for a Senior Technician, or Assistant, or something.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. So, we recognized on the class specification, when employees are required to perform stand-by duties, we document it as a special working condition on the class spec.—that responsibility for being on scheduled stand-by was always a part of those Animal Control and Protection Officer positions, but it was not documented in the class spec.

So, we closed the recruitments so that the class spec. could be amended and there's also—because it had been left off of the class spec. for current employees, we're in the process of—our Animal Control is in the process of consulting with the Union as well. And so, now that the change is being made, then the recruitments will be re-opened.

MR. THOMAS: So, the Animal Control has, kind of, been back and forth in terms of who's in charge, right?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yes. So, currently, the Administrator for Animal Control—that position is vacant. So, the recruitment was conducted and, I believe, interviews occurred earlier this week. So, I haven't been notified that a new Administrator has been selected, but they are in that process.

MR. THOMAS: It used to be in the Police Department, right? And now, it's a separate agency—

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yes, so—

MR. THOMAS: —according to what entity?

MS. TOKIHIRO: So, now it's its own agency. So, when it fell under the Police Department, it wasn't an agency per se. It was just a role of the Police Department to take care of animal control—and so, the positions that the Animal Control positions, at that time, were all contracts.

So, then, as the agency was established—then the positions were converted from contracts to civil service positions.

MR. THOMAS: So, can we say, yet, that there are enough positions to cover the workload or is that going to have to be tested in real life?

MS. TOKIHIRO: So, I believe when all the positions are full, it would be—they're filled—it would be a sufficient number of positions based on an analysis of the operation. They have had vacancies that we're working to fill, so they continue to be—they have less staff than they would like, but we're moving forward with trying to assist them to fill all those vacancies.

MR. THOMAS: So, is the new Director—the hiring authority—the one who's going to make the decisions on staffing?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. So, in combination, any department or agency head would have those kinds of discussions and make recommendations to the Mayor and the Managing Director, as far as adding additional positions, et cetera. If they wanted to do some kind of reorganization or add additional positions, that would have to be something that they would work on with the Department of Finance and also with the Mayor's Office.

MR. THOMAS: But that involves changing positions and so forth that—but actually hiring decisions of particular individuals—that's the purview of the director, right?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Correct. The appointing authority is the department or agency head, right.

MR. THOMAS: How long do you think it's going to take to get them staffed up? It's been an issue for quite a while hasn't it? How do we manage an effective animal control program—

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. So, when we try and assist them with those vacancies, that's where we're recruiting for the positions at multiple levels. And so, that allows us to get qualified applicants that, maybe, don't have the amount of experience needed for the highest level positions—and then, to train them up internally, and then as they gain that experience we allocate them to the next class in the career ladder.

So, I think, right now, when an agency doesn't have an Administrator—it becomes a little bit challenging to move forward in all of those aspects. So, we're really looking forward to getting

the new Administrator in place—and working with the new Administrator, helping them to get familiar with all of our processes, and then helping them to really put forth that effort to fill.

MR. THOMAS: So, I think I heard you say that someone has been selected but the positions not been announced of who it is and so forth?

MS. TOKIHIRO: I have not been notified of a selection. I just know that the interviews occurred, I believe, earlier this week—and I believe that there were several qualified candidates, and so I'm hopeful that they were able to make a selection.

MR. THOMAS: Who makes that decision?

MS. TOKIHIRO: So, in the absence of an agency head, it would be the Managing Director—

MR. THOMAS: Uh-huh.

MS. TOKIHIRO: —that would make the—is the appointing authority for the agency.

MR. THOMAS: The Police Department have a role in that decision?

MS. TOKIHIRO: I—it will depend on who was on the interview panel. And so, the Managing Director—the Mayor's Office—selected the interview panel for that position. I'm not aware of anyone from the Police Department being on the panel.

MR. THOMAS: It's such a sensitive position, right. I hope that whoever is the director has a good working relationship in terms of, not only the Administration, but the public, too.

And I'm speaking from the perspective of a mediator with West Hawai'i Mediation where animal control cases come up all the time because, I guess, the DA's Office really has a problem with the existing legal structure of how to handle bad dogs and that sort of thing.

So, this new animal control operation is going to have to really work with the DA's Office and with the public to build support for an agency that's a lot more than just caring for the abandoned animals.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah, there is, definitely, a lot of public interest in the agency, in the Administrator, and how those duties are carried out. So, yeah, I'm hopeful. I know that we're all hopeful that an Administrator that will be selected—that can really move the agency forward and bridge some of those gaps and those relationships, so that it can be a partnership with the public.

MR. THOMAS: Those are all union positions, right?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah.

MR. THOMAS: Except the Director, probably.

MS. TOKIHIRO: The Administrator—that position, I believe, is civil service—it's a civil service position.

MR. THOMAS: Yeah.

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yeah. So, Animal Control, Mass Transit, and OSCER—I believe are—the Aging Administrator—yes, that's correct. Yeah.

MR. THOMAS: Well, let's wish them well.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay. Any other questions or comments?

MS. BOND: Not on the report—no—but I have another question for you.

CHR. CABANAS: Oh, I have a question on your report, though.

MS. BOND: Then go—yeah, that's what I'm saying—not on the report

CHR. CABANAS: Can I go—yeah. So, Sommer, on—for the Personnel and Organizational Development Division, did someone leave the Employee Development Specialist position?

MS. TOKIHIRO: Yes. So, Junko was in the Trainee position, and she elected to return to her last held permanent position, which was in HR as the Account Clerk.

So, after being in the Personnel and Organizational Development Division for several months and getting used to the type of work that they do—she felt that that wasn't the best fit for her—and so, she exercised her ability to return to the Account Clerk position.

So, Jenny did have that vacancy, and she completed the recruitment, and actually made a selection. So, we'll have a new staff member in that division as of February 1st—so, we're looking forward to that.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay. And for the Recruitment and Examination Division, the radio ads continue, and they're very well done. I continue to hear the new one on the radio—so that's really good.

What happens now that Michelle is no longer there?

MS. TOKIHIRO: So, Stacie Iwasaki is the Program Specialist in the Recruitment and Examination Division, so she's on TA to the Manager position while we work on recruiting to fill.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay, thank you. Okay, anything else on the report? If not, may I have a motion to accept and file the Divisional Activity Report for January 2026.

MS. BOND: So moved.

MR. THOMAS: Second.

CHR. CABANAS: 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 to accept and file the Monthly Divisional Activity Report for January 2026.

Before we proceed, do you want to—

MS. BOND: I just have a—I don't know—have you seen the ads that they're running, it—for state positions, but it's the Union that's running it? And the implication is that the State is not paying well enough or good enough and everybody—that that's why they're—the employee—the recruitment is not going well and there's empty positions.

And as someone who knew nothing about all this stuff two years ago—all of a sudden, I'm watching this—these ads and the implication is that we need more money for our Union people and for the State to get paid—these people to get paid in order for us to recruit people.

And then, I find it to be the wrong way to go about it, to blame—my impression is that what they want to do is just up everybody else's salaries to whatever and just—I don't know. I don't know if you can talk to any of these union people, but I—really, it's very off-putting—the ad.

I understand what they were trying to do and they're trying to be very comical about, like the band. Have you seen these ads?

CHR. CABANAS: I've seen it numerous times with the band and other commercials—the teppanyaki one—

MS. BOND: Yeah, the shirt guy, yeah.

CHR. CABANAS: —but I guess the point is with the minimum pay rate increasing, how does that affect our collective bargaining contracts and negotiations—

MS. BOND: Yeah, it's just a very odd—

CHR. CABANAS: I mean, we don't have this listed on the agenda.

MS. BOND: Yeah.

CHR. CABANAS: So I think we need to put a pause on it—but something to consider down the road.

Communications (Item 6)

CHR. CABANAS: Okay, so let's move on to our—there's no “Communications.”

New Business (Item 7)

Election Of Merit Appeals Board Chair And Vice-Chair For Calendar Year 2026

CHR. CABANAS: We are now on “New Business”—election of Merit Appeals Board Chair and Vice-Chair for calendar year 2026.

So before we entertain any nominations, I'd like to just read the Chair responsibilities, which are—sets agenda for Board meetings with Secretary-Reporter and Attorney from Corporation Counsel and approves agenda; drafts correspondence for the Board; oversees matters concerning the Board; and discusses such matters with Corporation Counsel or the Deputy Attorney General as appropriate; signs Findings of Fact-Conclusions of Law, letters, documents, et cetera, for the Board; and facilitates Board meetings and appeal hearings.

So, with that information, I'd like to entertain a nomination or a motion for—we'll start with the Board Chair first. This is my last year, but it doesn't mean I need to continue—if you folks want another Board Chair, please.

MS. BOND: I nominate you.

CHR. CABANAS: Is that a motion?

MS. BOND: Yes.

MR. THOMAS: Second.

CHR. CABANAS: Okay, 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—guilty as charged.

MS. BOND: Yeah, really.

CHR. CABANAS: Ms. Cabanas—aye. I gladly accept. I'll be happy to accept.

And so, the motion is carried with three ayes. So, the Board Chair is Ms. Cabanas for the calendar year 2026.

And so, now, we are on the Vice-Chair position. So, may I have a motion to nominate a Board member for the Vice-Chair position.

MR. THOMAS: Move to nominate Suzi Bond.

CHR. CABANAS: I second. Any discussion?

MS. BOND: We're in big trouble now.

CHR. CABANAS: 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.

Motion carried. So we now have a Vice-Chair for the calendar year, Ms. Suzi Bond—and so, thank you, Board members, for your confidence for both—not only me, but for Suzi Bond.

Unfinished Business (Item 8)

CHR. CABANAS: Okay, there is no “Unfinished Business.”

Announcements (Item 9)

CHR. CABANAS: Any “Announcements?” No?

Schedule Next Meeting Date (Item 10)

The Merit Appeals Board Will Convene Its Next Meeting On Thursday, February 26, 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: And so, our next meeting date is—the Merit Appeals Board will convene its next meeting on Thursday, February 26, 2026, at 9 a.m., at the Hilo Council Chambers, Hawai‘i County Building, at 25 Aupuni Street, First Floor, Room 1401, in Hilo.

Adjournment (Item 11)

CHR. CABANAS: So I—so, may I now have a motion to adjourn today’s meeting.

MS. BOND: So moved.

MR. THOMAS: Second.

CHR. CABANAS: 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 9:23 a.m. Thank you, everyone.

Respectfully submitted,

Glynis Yamada, Secretary-Reporter

APPROVED:

Gabriella M. Cabanas, Chair
Merit Appeals Board