HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY

Bill 48/Resolution 21-276
Relating to the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility
Honolulu City Council Meeting

December 15, 2021  10:00 AM  Videoconference

We are a hui of organizations that provide direct-delivery and support services to the Native Hawaiian community across a variety of areas, including health, education, culture, ‘āina, and resource management. We STRONGLY SUPPORT Bill 48 and Resolution 21-276, both of which seek to resolve the crisis that currently threatens an aquifer that supplies fresh drinking water to nearly half of O‘ahu’s residents.

Issues and controversy surrounding the 187-million-gallon capacity Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility have been ongoing since its construction by the Navy in 1940. The fuel storage tanks sit just 100 feet above the water source that serves 400,000 O‘ahu residents, an area stretching from Moanalua to Hawai‘i Kai.

Over the years, the aging and now antiquated fuel tanks have leaked 180,000 gallons of fuel. Recent leaks are suspected of contaminating drinking water for some 93,000 people living in area military housing, leaving numerous individuals ill. Because the extent of the contamination is unknown, the Honolulu Board of Water Supply shut down three drinking water wells in the last few weeks.

Native Hawaiian traditions reflect the importance of fresh water for survival on an isolated archipelago in the middle of the vast Pacific. For example, the Hawaiian word for wealth is waiwai, which is the duplication of the word for water, wai. Numerous oli (chants), mele (song) and ‘ōlelo noe‘au describe the life-giving power of water. “Aia i hea ka wai a Kāne/Where are the waters of Kāne” is a famous chant about the search for the sacred waters of the Hawaiian god Kāne, illustrating that our water systems are interconnected and impact every community in our Pae‘āina.

Among other things, Resolution 21-276 calls for the permanent removal and relocation of the Red Hill fuel tanks. Meanwhile, Bill 48 would provide the City enhanced authority to regulate underground storage tanks through a proposed permitting process. While more
accurate information is necessary to fully assess the feasibility and effectiveness of these and other potential solutions, Hawai‘i’s local leaders must take immediate action to protect the water that supports our community.

In closing, we urge the Honolulu City Council to approve these measures to protect O‘ahu’s life-giving waters.

Mahalo nui loa for this opportunity to provide testimony.

Should you have any questions about our testimony, please contact Sterling Wong, Vice President of Advocacy at the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, at sterling@hawaiiancouncil.org.