February 23, 2022

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 11 and Resolution 22-34, because together they represent a significant step towards furthering the normalization of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, the native language of these islands and a co-official language of the State of Hawai‘i.

The Hawaiian language community has long considered February “Hawaiian Language Month” and successfully advocated for gubernatorial proclamations designating February 1994, 1995 and 2013 as Hawaiian Language Month. In 2013, Act 28 permanently designated February as “Mahina ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i.” Since, then there has been an explosion of Mahina ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i events and activities
HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY

celebrating and promoting the use of the Hawaiian language. The City Council’s efforts with Bill 11 and Resolution 22-34 will build on this momentum and help to increase the use of and interest in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i.

Bill 11 and Resolution 22-34 also represent another critical contribution to the perpetuation of the Hawaiian language. For nearly a century beginning in 1846, laws in Hawai‘i were required to be published in both Hawaiian and English. In 1943, a law was enacted ending the dual language requirement, essentially serving as the death knell for the formal use of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i in government. Combined with the 1896 law that effectively banned the use of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i in schools, the erasure of the Hawaiian language from government and education would eventually push the language to near extinction. By 1980, fewer than 50 children under the age of 18 could speak Hawaiian.

The Hawaiian Language Revitalization Movement has saved the language largely through re-introducing ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i into schools, at the university level through Hawaiian language courses and degrees; in public schools through the Hawaiian Language Immersion Program; and in preschools through ‘Aha Pūnana Leo.

But the return of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i to government has been slower. In 1978, the Hawai‘i State Constitution was amended to name Hawaiian language a co-official language of the state with English. And State and City laws (Article 22, Chapter, ROH) have encouraged proper spelling of Hawaiian words through the use of kahakō and ‘okina. But Act 28 in 2013 may be the only state law written in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i since 1943. Therefore, Bill 11 and Resolution 22-34, which are both written in Hawaiian, are significant in that they further normalize ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i in government spaces and actions.

In closing, we urge the Honolulu City Council to approve these measures to perpetuate ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i.

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.