March 31, 2020

The Honorable David Y. Ige  
Governor, State of Hawai‘i  
Executive Chambers  
State Capitol  
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96813

Superintendent Dr. Christina Kishimoto  
Hawai‘i State Department of Education  
1390 Miller Street #309  
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96813

RE: Appropriate Distribution of Coronavirus Relief Funds for Native Hawaiian Education Program (NHEP) Organizations

Dear Governor Ige and Superintendent Kishimoto:

Mahalo for your leadership and support during this challenging time for our children, families and community.

On March 27, 2020, the U.S. Congress passed H.R. 748, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. This third response package to the COVID-19 pandemic included approximately $30.75 billion for the Education Stabilization Fund. Approximately 9.8% is allocated for the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund and an additional 43.9% is allocated for an Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund.

We understand that the education relief funds for the state will be administered by the local educational agency, the Hawai‘i State Department of Education. The Department will have discretion of these funds as outlined in Use of Funds in the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, section 18003(d) where the Native Hawaiian Education Act (NHEA) is mentioned:

(d) Uses of Funds.--A local educational agency that receives funds under this title may use the funds for any of the following:

The Native Hawaiian Education Council ("council") urges you to apply for the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund and for the Department of Education to apply for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund in coordination and consultation with the Council.

Under the Native Hawaiian Education Act, the statutory responsibilities of the Council are to Coordinate, Assess and Report & Make Recommendations’ on the effectiveness of existing education programs for Native Hawaiians, the state of present Native Hawaiian education efforts, and improvements that may be made to existing programs, policies and procedures to improve the educational attainment of Native Hawaiians.

The composition of the council, as articulated in the Act includes: The Governor’s Office (Benjamin Naki, designated by your office), Hawai‘i Department of Education (Dawn Sang), University of Hawai‘i, Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Hawaii Charter School Network, Kamehameha Schools, Queen Liliuokalani Trust, Private Grant Making organizations, Each County Mayor’s office, Hawaiian Homes Commission, Hawaii Workforce Development Council and a representative from the islands of Molokai and Lanai.

Currently, Hawai‘i has 37 Native Hawaiian Education Programs funded by grants through NHEA. Approximately 75 percent of these programs are managed by community-based organizations with a focus on helping our keiki, families and communities. Critical services such as education for our homeless families, early literacy and digital media, and expanding Native Hawaiian students and teacher access to STEM workforce are provided and will continue to be critical now and for the long-term to support Hawai‘i’s recovery.

An additional 25 percent of funding go to groups within the University of Hawai‘i and HIDOE. However, through the CARES Act, these organizations will have access to needed resources, while our community-based organizations will not.

Our goal is to ensure programs and services to our communities can continue through this difficult time and can recover smoothly alongside our state. As a result, we are asking $10 million be allotted to current NHEP organizations to cover necessary expenditures for COVID-19 response that were not included in the NHEP current funding and are incurred between March 1 through December 30, 2020.

To administer these relief funds, we further request that the Governor designate the Office of Hawaiian Affairs to administer these relief funds as it has a community grant-making infrastructure in place and is not a current recipient of federal funds under NHEA. We will work with OHA to fulfill our responsibilities under the Act.

I’m available to answer any questions you may have and can be reached at (808) 429-4888. We hope you will consider this thoughtful approach in our proposal to ensure equitable distribution of relief funds to Native Hawaiian Education Program organizations serving our State’s most vulnerable population during this time.

Sincerely,

Elena Farden
Executive Director, Native Hawaiian Education Council