

University of Hawai'i

LEeward COMMUNITY COLLEGE WAI'ANAe MOKU

Danny Wyatt,
Leeward CC, Wai'anae Moku Extension Campus

The Honorable Ronald Kouchi, President, And Members of the Senate
Thirtieth State Legislature
Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

June 20, 2020

RE: Recommendation for Rick Kang, Commission on Fatherhood

Dear Senate President Kouchi and Members of the Senate,

Rick Kang has been nominated for a position on the Commission for Fatherhood; it is my humble opinion that no one is better qualified to provide invaluable assistance to this potentially community altering working group.

I have worked as Mr. Kang's supervisor since he transferred to the Wai'anae campus in 2015 I believe the year was. Initially he was employed at the Native Hawai'ian Center as the Men's Group and Native Hawai'ian Counselor; he then applied for and was hired to serve the largely Native Hawai'ian student population that attends the Wai'anae campus. His initial position was as a federally funded counselor serving our G2FO (Going to Finish On-Time) program. This program recruits between 25 to 40 students each summer, provides specialized orientation for that population, and also makes program specific support services available to those students. His original tenure as the counselor was particularly successful as he was the first counselor the program had and it was his work that set the standard that the program follows even now.

Of further note and importance is the Access to Education (ATE) program started under his initiative. Originally, Mr. Kang approached me about recruiting students in drug treatment programs, formerly incarcerated and those who were aging out of the foster care program as a community service activity as part of his contract. Each faculty member, teaching or non-teaching, is encouraged to engage in community activities and this sounded like an excellent endeavor. Not only does it serve the community, but it is also a recruitment tool we can utilize at the Wai'anae campus as there are more drug treatment facilities per capita on the Leeward Coast than anywhere else in the state. So with my approval, Mr. Kang then started work recruiting ATE students. In addition, he secured extra funding through a UH Foundation account to help support that program. The success of that program is best demonstrated through our continuing that program some five years after its initiation. This program generally recruits about two dozen students each year. While we lose about half those students due to the usual variety of reasons, that loss is no different than our usual retention rate. A more effective approach to measuring success is what it saves the state of Hawai'i. If incarcerating an individual costs the state about \$60,000 a year, his program's retaining merely a dozen ATE students and keeping them from reverting back to incarceration saves the state \$720,000 annually. And this was started as his community project. Suffice it to say it is this level of commitment to the Wai'anae community which makes him such a valuable UH employee.

87-380 Kulaupuni Street Wai'anae, Hawai'i 96792
Telephone: (808) 454-4702; Facsimile: (808) 696-4024, <http://www.leeward.hawaii.edu/WaianaeMoku>

An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution

With the impending end of the Title III grant, Mr. Kang elected to move to working with an NGO focused on assisting the children of incarcerated parents; a position he held for two plus years and which provided him with an even stronger background on the issues related to incarceration both for the incarcerated and their families. Mr. Kang elected to return to the Wai'anae Moku campus this past year when the Coordinator position opened up due to resignations. In addition, the Student Support Specialist last summer dedicated several weeks and write another Title III grant to supplement our current endeavors. We were quite fortunate that the grant is funded, and Mr. Kang, hired under the former grant has now been approved to continue his work under the newer grant which continues and expands the work he established earlier. So now we can benefit from his work for up to another four and half years.

With his return, both the G2FO and ATE programs are set to flourish despite the impediments of the COVID Pandemic. He's hired several Peer Mentors whom he works with to help orient those programs' students. Of particular note is that nearly than half the students in the G2FO program recruited end up being non-traditional students, students who are over age 24. In addition, the ATE students also tend to be non-traditional students. Both programs are inherently addressing a very underserved population. Too often those students who are returning to college after having spent several years or longer out of an educational setting need additional assistance. They often have low self-esteem and feel that college may be too difficult. In addition, they often have to balance employment, home-life and economic hardships that most have difficulty finding empathy for. It is Mr. Kang's background, both personal and employment, that make him particularly effective at meeting those students' needs. For this reason, and inherent in the discussion above, I feel the Commission for Fatherhood could not benefit more than in their choice of Mr. Kang as part of that working group.

As I attempt to show above, Mr. Kang is a results-oriented individual, both personally and professionally. If the Commission on Fatherhood is seeking to make change possible for the Native Hawai'ian community, their choice of Mr. Kang is a wise decision.

If there is any other information I could provide, or if there are any questions on my recommendation, please do not hesitate in contacting me.



Danny Wyatt
dwyatt@hawaii.edu