

**HCR161/HR137**  
**SUPPORTING AND ADOPTING THE GOALS SET FORTH IN THE DIGITAL EQUITY  
DECLARATION FOR HAWAII ADOPTED BY THE BROADBAND HUI.**

Ke Kōmike Hale o ka Ho‘omohala Waiwai  
House Committee on Economic Development

Malaki 23, 2021

10:15 a.m.

Lumi 312

The Administration of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) will recommend that the OHA Board of Trustees **SUPPORT** HCR161/HR137, which would urge the adoption of the goals set forth in the Equity Declaration put forth by the Broadband Hui. The Equity Declaration’s vision of **access**, **literacy** and **livelihood** for all communities through digital equity will be of particular benefit to many Native Hawaiian communities who may face significant disparities in access to broadband service.

**OHA recognizes that many Native Hawaiians and Native Hawaiian communities may struggle with a lack of access to reliable and affordable broadband service, which may place them at a significant socioeconomic disadvantage, and perpetuate barriers to critical programs and services** including in the areas of healthcare, education, and emergency response. For example, OHA notes that Native Hawaiians are highly represented in our rural communities: based on 2010 Census data, Native Hawaiians comprised the overwhelming majority of those living in Waimānalo, O‘ahu (81.3%); Kualapu‘u, Moloka‘i (71.9%); Nānākuli, O‘ahu (71.5%); ‘Ualapu‘e, Moloka‘i (70.6%); Maunaloa, Moloka‘i (67.3%) and Hāna, Maui (65.9%).<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the Federal Communications Commission’s 2018 Broadband Deployment Report indicated significant gaps in broadband access between Hawai‘i’s urban and rural areas, with only 63.1% of our rural population having access to the standard 25 Mbps download/3Mbps upload for fixed broadband access, compared to 98.5% of our urban population.<sup>2</sup> This disparity in broadband access between rural and urban areas has left our majority Native Hawaiian rural communities technologically and economically isolated and competitively disadvantaged.

In addition, digital inequities for Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders may be particularly concerning in the education context. For example, only 51% of Hawai‘i

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Native Hawaiian Data Book, <http://www.ohadatabook.com/> (last accessed March 15, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> FCC, 2018 BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT REPORT, APPENDIX F2, available at <https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/2018-broadband-deployment-report>.

residents have access to affordable broadband plans;<sup>3</sup> meanwhile, Native Hawaiian students may be disproportionately represented among the 49% of residents who do not have access to affordable broadband, given the high representation of Native Hawaiians in rural communities, and the lower median household income for Native Hawaiians (\$75,708) compared to the total state population (\$80,212).<sup>4</sup> The shift of our public education system to virtual learning suggests that this lack of access to affordable broadband may particularly impact the education of Native Hawaiian students. Moreover, a survey from the Department of Education (DOE) has further indicated that “[s]tudents identifying as Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders are far less likely to have sufficient devices for distance learning,”<sup>5</sup> again suggesting that a disproportionate number of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders may have been left behind in the DOE’s transition to virtual learning.

**The Declaration for Digital Equity reflects and aligns with OHA’s concerns regarding the need for greater digital equity for the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.** Indeed, as the COVID-19 pandemic has further heightened the demand for reliable, affordable internet connectivity with work, education, civic engagement, and healthcare services being shifted online, the need to address the inequality in broadband access has become even more urgent. Addressing current and future inequality in internet and digital devices, as envisioned in the Declaration, will mitigate the disproportionate impacts of digital inequities on Native Hawaiians.

Accordingly, OHA respectfully urges this Committee to **PASS** HCR161/HR137. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.

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<sup>3</sup> Broadband Now, *The State of Broadband in Hawaii*, <https://broadbandnow.com/Hawaii> (last accessed Mar. 20, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS, ISSUE BRIEF: COVID-19 AND NATIVE HAWAIIAN COMMUNITIES 3 available at [https://19of32x2yl33s8o4xza0gf14-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Issue-Brief.-Covid-19\\_corrected.pdf](https://19of32x2yl33s8o4xza0gf14-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Issue-Brief.-Covid-19_corrected.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, TEACHER AND STUDENT DISTANCE-LEARNING SURVEY (2020), available at <https://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/DOE%20Forms/Preliminary%20Summary%20of%20Findings%20for%20Teacher%20and%20Student%20Distance%20Learning%20Survey.pdf>.



**Testimony to the House Committee on Economic Development  
Tuesday, March 23, 2021; 10:15 a.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 312  
Via Videoconference**

**RE: HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 161/HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 137,  
SUPPORTING AND ADOPTING THE GOALS SET FORTH IN THE DIGITAL EQUITY  
DECLARATION FOR HAWAII ADOPTED BY THE BROADBAND HUI.**

Chair Quinlan, Vice Chair Holt, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization established to advocate for, expand access to, and sustain high quality care through the statewide network of Community Health Centers throughout the State of Hawaii. The HPCA **SUPPORTS** House Concurrent Resolution No. 161 and House Resolution No. 137.

The resolutions, as received by your Committee, would support and adopt the goals set forth in the Digital Equity Declaration that was adopted by the Broadband Hui.

By way of background, the HPCA represents Hawaii Federally-Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). FQHCs provide desperately needed medical services at the frontlines in rural and underserved communities. Long considered champions for creating a more sustainable, integrated, and wellness-oriented system of health, FQHCs provide a more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive system of healthcare.

Hawaii has long been at the forefront of integrating newer technologies into daily life. One example of this is Hawaii's Telehealth Law which has served as a model across the United States. Yet, it was only after COVID struck our islands that this law became fully integrated into daily life.

Today, it is common practice to ZOOM or SKYPE with your health practitioner instead of physically going to the provider's office for a visit. When COVID first hit our islands, many health providers had to limit the number of patients that could be serviced in-person because of a scarcity of Personal Protective Equipment, restrictions in the gatherings of groups, and the need for changes to the physical arrangement of examination rooms and other diagnostic facilities.

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For people with adequate broadband access, telehealth was a lifeline for the provision of essential primary health care services. Yet, health care facilities in rural areas experienced the same problems when COVID hit. They too had to limit the number of patients they could see. But because these communities lacked adequate broadband access, they were effectively cut off from primary care. Many were forced to bear their maladies until it became necessary to go to the emergency room.

The Governor's suspension of a statute that prohibits the use of standard telephonic service in telehealth has temporarily eased this inequity. For those without adequate broadband, at least for now, they are able to obtain basic primary care services over landline telephones. But that is neither adequate, tenable, nor fair to the thousands of citizens who lack broadband access.

Because of this, the HPCA views the lack of broadband access in rural areas as an issue of social equity. In this day and age, everyone should have equal access to health care. Telehealth was envisioned as the means of leveling the field between urban and rural areas. The lack of broadband ensures that urban and rural communities remain unequal.

As a member of the Broadband Hui, the HPCA urges your favorable consideration of these resolutions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Public Affairs and Policy Director Erik K. Abe at 536-8442, or [eabe@hawaiiipca.net](mailto:eabe@hawaiiipca.net).

**HR-137**

Submitted on: 3/22/2021 8:56:06 AM

Testimony for ECD on 3/23/2021 10:15:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Lynn Otaguro	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

March 22, 2021

**Testimony in support of HR 137, Supporting and Adopting the Goals Set Forth in the Digital Equity Declaration for Hawaii Adopted by the Broadband Hui**

Honorable Chair Quinlan and members of the Committee:

In the past year, we have seen the importance of digital access and literacy, as COVID-19 shut down many in person services and it became critical to be able to use the internet. We also have seen the large gaps in access, raising concerns that some in our state are unable to receive essential services and fully participate in our communities.

The Digital Equity Declaration adopted by the Broadband Hui sets forth a vision for addressing that gap and goals for digital access, literacy, and livelihood, to enable our communities to grow and thrive. Please support this vision and goals and vote to adopt this resolution.

Sincerely,

Lynn Otaguro

Oahu, Hawaii