

Aloha Hawaii State Senate,

My name is Leona Sa McDermott of Anahola Kauai. The following is the requested Information for the nomination to the State Council on Developmental Disabilities confirmation process.

1. Why do you wish to be a member of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities? **As a parent of an Autistic son, I have struggled through many loopholes of ensuring the services my son needs were met through schools and communities. Serving as his advocate throughout his life not only gave me the tools and resources to ensure he's getting what he needs, but also made me realize that other families are struggling as well. Without advocacy, some give up and their children become a failing statistic. My voice and advocacy helps strengthen these families to never give up.**
2. What do you perceive are the roles and responsibilities of a member of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities? **Key role is to keep our policymakers, our local government informed about the ongoing disability issues that our individuals throughout the State encounter daily. It's not only my responsibility to provide outreach and advocacy, but for all who are involved with our individuals with developmental disabilities to ensure their quality of life.**
5. Name three qualities that best describe you and how these qualities will benefit the State Council on Developmental Disabilities? **Well for one I am a Head Coach with Special Olympics Hawaii - Kauai Area for over 15 years, providing year round sports for our Individuals with Developmental disabilities.**  
**I was a former Director of Operations with Outrigger Hotels and Resorts where I served in the Management Department overseeing over 200 employees for the 20 years I've worked there, ensuring guidance and leadership in the hospitality industry. I have also served as a Board President for Kauai Habitat for Humanity for 5 years and handed 55 keys out to local families building affordable homes here on Kauai. Steering this organization to prosper, educate and promote family values. I am currently serving and helping a family member of mine who became permanently disabled and will never walk again to understand the disabilities laws and dealing with the current issues with Access in our community. Some of these qualities I believe will benefit the State Council on Developmental Disabilities.**
6. Name a previous experience you've had that will be beneficial as a member?  
**Many experiences, I was given the opportunity to host the legislative forum's here on Kauai in the past 5 years. I have listened and taken these concerns and issues that our individuals are faced with and presented to our lawmakers on the floor at these forums hoping to hear some kind of resolution and/ or give them hope that their voices were heard.**
7. Can you foresee any possible conflicts of interest that could arise during your service on the State Council on Developmental Disabilities. **I don't see any possible conflict of interest and if there's one forthcoming that I didn't see coming, then the only way to overcome them is to remove myself from the Council.**
3. Given your understanding of the roles and responsibilities as a member of the State Council on Developmental Disabilities, why do you believe that you are qualified for the position? **For one I am mom of an Autistic son. I've advocated for him from day one. I have conducted his IEP's in all his DOE SPED classes from Elementary to High School and Post to ensure he's receiving a Free and Appropriate Education which wasn't smooth sailing. I've educated myself over the years of the Laws that protect my son and what rights he has and a time where he couldn't speak for himself I served as his voice. Many of these encounters nearly resulted in a Due Process. Because of the many occurrences, it has given me the knowledge and expertise on how to resolve and work with educators (at that time) to find a solution that would benefit him in learning any skills with the daily challenges and helping him fine tune them into a routine. Once that was mastered, I used those techniques to help other families with their children as well in whatever challenges they had with their children.**
4. What do you hope to accomplish during your term of service?  
**I hope to accomplish outreach to families, provide them the tools and resources they need to remove their barriers so their voices can be heard but most importantly that our lawmakers, our people in public office hear their concerns, address the ongoing issues and make it sustainable for them to live by.**



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
STATE COUNCIL  
ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
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April 7, 2025

The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Senator San Buenaventura, and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: GM 760 - State Council on Developmental Disabilities Gubernatorial Nominee  
Leona Sa McDermott

The Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities **STRONGLY SUPPORTS GM 760 to confirm the nomination of Ms. Leona Sa McDermott for a term to expire 06-30-2029.**

The Council's Federal mandate (P.L.106-402) is clear in determining the composition of this body to ensure that all the players involved in the development, implementation, and use of DD supports are represented. The law specifically requires that 60 percent of the membership of the Council be comprised of individuals with DD, their parents, or family members.

This Governor's nominee is a parent of a son with autism, meeting the Federal requirement for the Council to be represented by a parent of an individual with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Ms. McDermott brings over two decades of committed advocacy and service to the disability community on Kaua'i. As a long-time coach, parent, and volunteer with Special Olympics Kaua'i, and a dedicated member of the Kaua'i Self-Advocacy Advisory Council, Ms. McDermott has elevated the voices of individuals with disabilities by hosting legislative forums and actively engaging with local decision-makers. Her leadership experience with Habitat for Humanity further demonstrates her ability to represent community needs, making her a strong and compassionate advocate for inclusive policy and systemic change.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our **strong support for GM 760** to confirm Ms. Leona Sa McDermott to the State Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Sincerely,

Daintry Bartoldus  
Executive Administrator





The Honorable Joy San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Thirty third Legislature  
State Capitol, State of Hawaii  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Senator San Buenaventura and Members of the Committee:

SUBJECT: GM 760 - Gubernatorial Nominee, Leona Sa McDermott

The Hawaii Self-Advocacy Advisory Council (SAAC) **STRONGLY SUPPORTS GM 760**, the confirmation of Leona Sa McDermott to the State Council on Developmental Disabilities for a term to expire 06-30-2029.

Leona Sa McDermott is a strong advocate for people with disabilities. As a parent of a child with a disability, she brings a much-needed perspective to the State Council on Developmental Disabilities. She has lived experiences that are beneficial to the council and can also share the victories and barriers that a family faces when raising a child with a disability. She is a great example to other families on the island of Kauai. She participates in her community. She is a team member in supporting her child for Special Olympics. She is an example to others to speak up for themselves about their disabilities. She is committed to working for people with disabilities and is easily likable, while making people feel good about themselves. She is serious about her commitment to the disability community. She is also a volunteer advocate for the Kauai Self Advocacy Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support of GM 760**.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy Renken".

Sincerely,

Timothy Renken

President of the Hawaii Self Advocacy Council

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**GM-760**

Submitted on: 4/2/2025 10:46:32 PM

Testimony for HHS on 4/7/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leona McDermott	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha,

I am in strong support to serve on the State Council on Developmental Disabilities so that we all can continue to empower, advocate and support our individuals with Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities in the Aloha State to live a quality life they truly deserve.

Mahalo

Leona Sa McDermott

The Honorable San Buenaventura, Chair  
Committee on Health and Human Services  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Aloha Chair Senator San Buenaventura, Vice Chair and Committee Members.  
GM 760 Testimony in support for Leona Sa McDermott.

I am in strong support of GM 760, which would allow Leona Sa McDermott to be part of the Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities.

My name is Deziree Tacub, and I have a developmental disability. I have known Aunty Leona for many years. I support Leona Sa McDermott in being part of the Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities because she is a parent of an adult with a developmental disability, and she is a Special Olympics Coach and involved with the disability community. She always helps and participates in events that support the disability community on Kauai.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of GM 760.