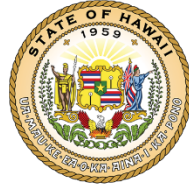


Kaiali'i Kahele
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OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

560 N. Nimitz Hwy., Suite 200
Honolulu, HI 96817

February 26, 2026

The Honorable Daniel P. Driscoll
Secretary of the Army
U.S. Department of the Army
Washington DC 20510

Dear Secretary Driscoll,

Established by the people of Hawai'i in 1978 and independent of the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of state government, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) is constitutionally charged with protecting Native Hawaiian rights and ensuring the responsible stewardship of the public land trust on behalf of its Native Hawaiian beneficiaries. Public Land Trust (PLT) lands were originally part of the crown and government lands of the Hawaiian Kingdom, illegally confiscated in the 1893 overthrow of the Kingdom, subsequently ceded to the United States in 1898, and today held in trust for Native Hawaiians and the people of Hawai'i under U.S. Public Law 86-3, the Hawai'i Admissions Act.

As the United States Army's 1964 leases of PLT lands approach expiration on August 16, 2029, alongside additional Navy and Air Force leases expiring between 2028 and 2031, Hawai'i faces a significant federal-state decision point. These lands, including major Army installations at Pōhakuoa Training Area, Mākua Military Reservation, Kahuku Training Area, and Kawaihoa-Poamoho, are held in trust for five purposes under §5(f) of the Admissions Act, including the betterment of conditions of native Hawaiians. Their future disposition necessarily implicates national security, fiscal stewardship, cultural protection, and constitutional trust obligations.

Under Article XII, Sections 5 and 6 of the Hawai'i Constitution, and pursuant to Hawai'i Revised Statutes Chapter 10, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) serves as the principal public agency of the State of Hawai'i responsible for the performance, development, and coordination of programs and activities relating to Native Hawaiians and Hawaiians. OHA is further charged with administering a pro rata share of the Public Land Trust revenues and carrying out its constitutional and statutory responsibilities to advocate for, and protect, the rights and interests of Native Hawaiians. In fulfilling these duties, OHA exercises an independent fiduciary obligation with respect to Native Hawaiian interests in the Public Land Trust lands and related trust resources. Consistent with HRS §10-1, all state departments and instrumentalities, including executive branch agencies, shall actively work toward the purpose of Chapter 10 and cooperate and assist OHA in matters affecting Native Hawaiians.

Accordingly, state decision-making concerning PLT lands cannot be undertaken solely within the executive branch absent OHA's involvement. Because negotiations regarding military-leased PLT lands necessarily implicate these constitutional and statutory obligations, engagement with OHA is not discretionary but integral to the State's lawful decision-making framework. OHA therefore must ensure that ongoing negotiations and future decisions involving these lands are conducted transparently, in compliance with governing law, and in a manner consistent with Native Hawaiian rights, cultural protections, and the State's public trust responsibilities.

Recent federal legislative developments further reinforce that coordination with OHA is essential to ensuring resulting decisions are legally durable, procedurally sound, and consistent with the State's fiduciary and constitutional duties. The FY26 National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 119-60) expressly recognizes the Office of Hawaiian Affairs as a Native Hawaiian organization for purposes of federal consultation, building upon existing Department of Defense Instruction 4710.03, which requires early, meaningful, and good-faith consultation where actions may affect culturally significant sites, religious exercise, subsistence practices, or access to sacred places. Together, these authorities establish that engagement with OHA is a required component of lawful defense planning and decision-making, not discretionary outreach.

OHA recognizes and respects the longstanding relationship between the Armed Forces and the people of Hawai'i, including the many Native Hawaiians who have served, and continue to serve, with honor and distinction, reflecting a deep tradition of patriotism and sacrifice. As the Army evaluates its evolving Indo-Pacific posture, OHA sees a genuine opportunity to advance durable solutions that sustain national defense readiness while fulfilling federal and state constitutional trust obligations.

Early, structured dialogue can align mission requirements with lawful stewardship of PLT lands, reduce the risk of future conflict or litigation, and strengthen stable federal-state-community partnerships. In this spirit, OHA respectfully requests the opportunity to meet with you—or alternatively, Lieutenant General Joel B. Vowell, Deputy Commanding General, United States Army Pacific—in Hawai'i at your earliest convenience to begin this important dialogue.

OHA stands ready to engage constructively to ensure decisions on expiring military leases uphold federal and state law, respect Native Hawaiian rights, and support national security objectives.

Mahalo for your consideration. We look forward to connecting soon.

Respectfully,



Kaiali'i Kahele
Chairperson, Board of Trustees
Office of Hawaiian Affairs

cc:

The Honorable Josh Green, M.D., Governor, State of Hawai'i
The Honorable Brian Schatz, United States Senate
The Honorable Mazie K. Hirono, United States Senate
The Honorable Ed Case, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Jill N. Tokuda, United States House of Representatives
Lieutenant General Joel B. Vowell, Deputy Commanding General, United States Army Pacific