



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **NA'I AUPUNI DECIDES NOT TO PURSUE RATIFICATION VOTE**

#### ***Education and Ratification of Native Hawaiian Constitution Best Pursued by Broad-based Group***

**HONOLULU** – Na'i Aupuni said today it would not be conducting a ratification vote on the proposed constitution produced by the recently completed 'aha. It believes that the 'aha participants, who represent a diverse and multigenerational cross section of the Native Hawaiian leaders from Hawaii, the North American Continent, Asia and Europe, or a similarly broad-based group, would be the entity to best advance the ratification vote and conduct the important process of educating our communities about the constitution.

“Na'i Aupuni is appreciative of the participants who utilized the strength of our rich culture, the knowledge from our kupuna and the collective wisdom of the 'aha to significantly advance Native Hawaiian unity. Na'i Aupuni believes that it is the participants, those who prepared and voted on the document, that are best able to lead efforts in effectively sharing the proposed constitution with the community and ultimately arranging for a ratification process. The participants have evidenced a remarkable willingness and ability to identify leadership, build critical teams, and respectfully support the voices of many divergent opinions. It is for these reasons that we are deferring to the 'aha participants to further advance their work,” said Kuhio Asam, president of Na'i Aupuni.

(more)

Asam said that although the stated objectives of Na'i Aupuni were to conduct an election, an 'aha, and a ratification vote, the overarching goals were to provide an opportunity for Native Hawaiian leaders to exercise their inherent right to self-determination, to discuss self-governance options and, if they so decided, to develop a constitution that would unify and best serve the current and anticipated needs of Native Hawaiians.

Asam also said that although there were many hurdles along the path to the 'aha, it produced more than a constitution. "The 'aha generated a long overdue and significant dialogue among the participants and within the larger community. It is crucial that this conversation continues. The 'aha also allowed leaders from the community to emerge, and created momentum for further educating the public about self-governance, the proposed constitution and nation building."

Bill Meheula, legal counsel for Na'i Aupuni, reviewed the actions taken along the way due to legal challenges. "From the beginning, we anticipated potential legal challenges and we currently continue to defend against the Grassroot lawsuit that is now before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals," he added. "In addition, now that we cancelled the election and will not be conducting any ratification vote, Na'i Aupuni contends that the appeal is moot and we are hopeful that the case will be eventually dismissed."

Meheula also said that the estimated remaining grant funds of a little over \$100,000, allocated to cover the cost of the ratification vote, would be returned to OHA. Na'i Aupuni also plans to publicly publish an accounting of how the funds were spent.

Information on Na'i Aupuni can be found on the website: [naiaupuni.org](http://naiaupuni.org).

### **About Na'i Aupuni**

Na'i Aupuni is an independent organization made up of a volunteer board of directors from the Hawaiian community. It exists solely to help establish a path to an 'aha, where Hawaiians can discuss and explore various options of self-determination. Na'i Aupuni was formed in December 2014 and is separate and independent from the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the State of Hawaii. Further information about Na'i Aupuni and the 'aha can be found at <http://www.naiaupuni.org/>.

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