

2026 Democratic Party of Hawai‘i Convention

Submitted by Leimomi Khan

May 29–30, 2026 | Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu

Aloha, Executive Committee, Hawaiian Affairs Caucus

The 2026 Democratic Party of Hawai‘i Convention concluded successfully following two days of meetings, workshops, elections, committee reports, policy discussions, and Party business involving Democrats from across the State.

Party Leadership Election

Convention delegates elected **Makai Freitas** as Chair of the Democratic Party of Hawai‘i.

Committee Reports and Convention Business

Summary of Action Taken on Standing Committee Reports

Affirmative Action Committee Report

The Convention took **no substantive action to amend or revise the current Affirmative Action Plan**, which was continued for another two years.

During Convention discussion, **Leimomi Khan urged Party leadership to direct the Standing State Central Committee Affirmative Action Committee to review the Plan** and submit a report with recommendations to the SCC by its January 2027 meeting, noting that a number of provisions appear outdated and should be modernized to reflect current legal, political, organizational, and social conditions affecting equity, inclusion, and representation.

Link to Report:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/17Maw9uwkPoYoajhPX1ejjvIcnYsiDiC2/view>

Platform Committee Report

The Platform Committee submitted **two motions** to the Convention.

The **first motion**, recommending adoption of the proposed Platform amendments, **was not adopted**. Opposition centered primarily on **form rather than substance**, with concerns that many of the proposals were excessively lengthy and read more like resolutions than concise platform planks.

The **second motion was adopted**, directing the **Standing State Central Committee Platform Committee** to undertake a future review and update of the Party Platform, including its purpose,

organization, drafting standards, consistency, readability, and the distinction between platform language and resolution-style provisions.

Link to Report:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/16iwhRA5eEV49-6Qox5apQK59y-smWecuevMm-H6d22U/edit?tab=t.0>

Rules Committee Report

Among the rules adopted were:

- **Data Privacy and Protection Amendments** — establishing explicit protections for Party member information, requiring membership data to be used solely for Party purposes and in compliance with applicable privacy and data protection laws, while prohibiting unauthorized access, disclosure, or misuse of member data.
- **Party-Run Presidential Primary Committee amendments** — addressing procedures related to Party administration of presidential primary matters.
- **State Central Committee Officer Eligibility / Definition of “Candidate” amendments** — clarifying eligibility and definitional standards affecting Party officers and candidates.
- **Midterm Vacancy – Recusal Proposal** — one of the more significant amendments adopted by the Convention.

Under the DPH Constitution, when a vacancy occurs in a Democratic-held **State House, State Senate, or U.S. Senate seat**, the Party conducts a process to identify and recommend three candidates for possible appointment, with responsibility assigned to the affected District Council, District/Precinct leadership, or State Central Committee, depending on the office involved.

The adopted amendment adds a new **recusal requirement: the Governor must recuse himself or herself from participating in the Party’s internal vote to identify the three recommended candidates.**

The proposal’s stated rationale was broader than the Governor alone, expressing the principle that the Governor, incumbent legislators, or other elected officials connected to the district should not influence the Party’s selection of nominees. Supporters argued that because the Governor ultimately chooses from among the Party’s three recommended candidates, the Governor should not also influence the composition of that list. The amendment was intended to strengthen fairness, transparency, ethical safeguards, and public confidence in the integrity of the process.

Because midterm vacancies can significantly affect legislative representation, leadership succession, and public policy direction, this amendment may have meaningful implications for Democratic elected officials and communities throughout Hawai‘i.

One additional proposal concerning **caucus and Young Democrats endorsements during primary elections** generated considerable discussion. That proposal was separated from the main report for individual consideration and ultimately **was not adopted**.

The Rules Committee also did not recommend a proposal involving **ranked choice voting procedures for midterm vacancies**, which therefore was not adopted.

Link to Report:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/10Y_6ZR1i711JE17qGYN7RcbfJ_pA58vj/view

Resolutions Committee Report

The Convention adopted **all recommendations of the Resolutions Committee**.

The resolutions address a broad range of policy, governance, and public issues important to Democrats in Hawai‘i. **I strongly encourage caucus members to read the resolutions report**, as it reflects the policy priorities advanced and adopted by the Convention.

Link to Report:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fsSFjTeHtEl4mpZrImUr2ewxO-zEcAD/view>

Of particular interest to the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus are the following resolutions:

2026-08 Urging the Hawai‘i State Legislature to Increase the Loan Guarantee Limit for Hawaiian Home Lands Mortgages

2026-10 Urging the Hawai‘i State Legislature to Conduct a Statewide Inventory of Traditional Hawaiian Fishponds (Loko I‘a) to Advance Food Self-Sustainability and Cultural Restoration
(I actually withdrew this one because I understand that there is an inventory being done, but the reso still proceeded)

2026-12, Urging the Hawai‘i State Legislature to Ensure Equity in Public Financing for candidates for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs Board of Trustees

2026-13, Calling for the Hawai‘i State Legislature to Require a Study on the Health Effects of Geothermal Development

2016-14, Urging the Hawai‘i State Legislature to Increase the Pro Rata Share of Public Land Trust Revenues Provided to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs

2016-19, Opposing Renewal of Military Leases on State and Crown Lands and Calling for the Return of Pohakuloa to the Hawaiian People

Keynote Speaker and Awards

A highlight of the Convention was keynote speaker Governor Tim Walz, who delivered remarks emphasizing Democratic unity, organizing, civic engagement, and the continued importance of collective action, while offering strong criticism of the Trump Administration.

The Convention also recognized distinguished service and leadership through its awards presentations:

- **Dr. William Puette** — *Meritorious Service Award* for his longstanding contributions to the Party and his service as Parliamentarian.
- **The late Colleen Hanabusa** — *Kāko ‘o Award* in recognition of her enduring leadership, support, and service to Hawai‘i, the Democratic Party, and Native Hawaiian causes.

Workshops and Educational Programming

The Convention included a number of informative and meaningful workshops and discussions, including:

- Ranked Choice Voting
- Native Hawaiian Political Relationship with the U.S. Government
- Housing and Affordability
- ActBlue and Campaign Organizing Tools
- Additional policy, governance, and community topics

These sessions provided valuable opportunities for education, discussion, networking, and deeper engagement on issues important to Democrats statewide.

A separate report concerning the Native Hawaiian Political Relationship with the U.S. Government is attached.

Convention Operations

For the first time in many years, the Convention completed its business **ahead of the scheduled adjournment time** — a noteworthy accomplishment attributable to excellent planning, preparation, and leadership by Convention Co-Chairs **Bronson Silva** and **Micah Kosasa**, together with staff, volunteers, committee leadership, and delegates.

Reflections and Bottom Line

Overall, the 2026 Democratic Party of Hawai‘i Convention was well organized, productive, collegial, and efficiently managed. Chair Derek Turbin, his staff, and the convention coordinators did an outstanding job. In his closing remarks, Chair Turbin reflected on the Party’s accomplishments over the past two years and acknowledged that those achievements were made possible through the shared dedication, teamwork, and support of his staff and many others throughout the Party.

The Convention successfully completed important Party business, elected leadership, adopted committee recommendations, and provided meaningful educational programming and opportunities for statewide engagement.

At the same time, a shortcoming of the convention was the less than desirable participation of Democrats in committee meetings. The convention rules stated that the Rules, Platform and Resolutions committees shall be composed of a minimum 41 party members (including the Committee chair and Vice-chair) who are registered delegates to the convention, at least one person from each of the recognized caucuses and from the Young Democrats; and no less than 5 members from each county. Less than 25 members were appointed to each of these committees.

Broader participation and engagement by Democrats on substantive policy and organizational issues would strengthen deliberations and help ensure that Party discussions reflect the widest possible range of Democratic voices and perspectives.

P.S. Following the convention, on Sunday, May 31, the State Central Committee held its first meeting to elect its officers. Elected were:

Vice Chair Lynn Robinson-Onderko

Secretary Micah Kosasa

Assistant Secretary Jacqueline Tavares

Treasurer Joe Francher

Assistant Treasurer Aria Castillo

Note: This report does not include information on the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus Hospitality Room or Information Table in respect to the President or members, Pohai Ryan and Kaimo Muhlestein who led these activities.

HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS CAUCUS

UPLIFTING THE LAHUI AND PROTECTING NATIVE HAWAIIAN PROGRAMS

Background: The Hawaiian Affairs Caucus hosted a workshop, titled, “Understanding the Political Relationship of Native Hawaiians: Advancing Native Hawaiian Priorities”, at the Democratic Party of Hawaii convention, on May 29, 2026, 1:00-3:00 p.m. The room was jam packed with approximately 100 attendees.

The workshop was offered in reaction to growing legal, political, and fiscal challenges at both the federal and state levels to Native Hawaiian programs, rights, and funding. As national debates intensify around Indigenous programs and constitutional law, understanding the unique political relationship between Native Hawaiians and the United States has never been more important.

This timely workshop examined the historical, legal, and policy foundations underlying Native Hawaiian programs and trust responsibilities, while exploring emerging threats and strategies to safeguard Native Hawaiian priorities moving forward.

Guest speakers were Esther Kia’aina, Breann Nuuhiwa, and Rebecca Soon. Facilitated by Elmer Kaai and Roth Puahala.

The Hawaiian Affairs Caucus may wish to pursue the following next steps in light of recent lawsuits and as a means of putting into place a permanent solution to codifying the political relationship Native Hawaiians have with the U.S. Government, and therefore, possibly protecting Native Hawaiian programs:

1. The HAC develop and consider adoption of a Hawaiian Affairs Caucus resolution that:
 - Recognizes the growing threats to Native Hawaiian programs;
 - Supports interim federal recognition under 43 CFR Part 50, Procedures for Reestablishing a Formal Government to Government Relationship with the Native Hawaiian Community
 - Supports Native Hawaiian self-determination;
 - Calls for collaboration among Native Hawaiian organizations. Particular effort should be made to engage organizations with significant statewide constituencies, including the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs, Sovereign Council of Hawaiian Homestead Associations, Hawaiian Council, Ka Lāhui Hawai’i, Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, Ali’i Trusts, and the Royal Hawaiian Benevolent Societies.
 - Supports continuing education for the Democratic Party of Hawaii and the community on federal recognition

Guiding Principle

Federal recognition should not be viewed as an end in itself. It should be evaluated as one possible tool for protecting Native Hawaiian programs, strengthening Native Hawaiian governance, and advancing the long-term well-being and self-determination of the lāhui.

[43 CFR Part 50 – Procedures for Reestablishing a Formal Government-to-Government Relationship with the Native Hawaiian Community](#) sets forth the Department of Interior administrative procedure and criteria for reestablishing a formal government-to-government relationship between the United States and the Native Hawaiian community that will allow:

- (a) The Native Hawaiian community to more effectively exercise its inherent sovereignty and self-determination; and
- (b) The United States to more effectively implement and administer:
 - (1) The special political and trust relationship that exists between the United States and the Native Hawaiian community, as recognized by Congress; and
 - (2) The Federal programs, services, and benefits that Congress created specifically for the Native Hawaiian community (*see, e.g.,* [12 U.S.C. 1715z-13b](#); [20 U.S.C. 80q](#) *et seq.*; [20 U.S.C. 7511](#) *et seq.*; [25 U.S.C. 3001](#) *et seq.*; [25 U.S.C. 4221](#) *et seq.*; [42 U.S.C. 2991](#) *et seq.*; [42 U.S.C. 3057g](#) *et seq.*; [42 U.S.C. 11701](#) *et seq.*; [54 U.S.C. 302706](#)).

The Secretary of the Interior will reestablish a formal government-to-government relationship with only one sovereign Native Hawaiian government, which may include political subdivisions with limited powers of self-governance defined in the Native Hawaiian government's governing document.

Attached is a draft resolution to enable discussions and a position taken by members of the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus. To enable informed decisions before any vote on the resolution, conduct a meeting with members, experts and policymakers to address whether federal recognition, might impact on the following, since any recognition effort should clearly provide that participation does not waive:

- Claims arising from the overthrow;
- Land claims;
- Trust claims;
- Sovereignty claims;
- Independence positions;
- Other future self-determination options.

We should also assure sound advice concerning frequently raised concerns regarding Federal Recognition:

- Potential weakening of Hawaiian Kingdom claims
- Perception of accepting tribal status
- Congressional plenary authority
- Internal divisions within the lāhui
- Possibility that recognition may not fully insulate programs from litigation

2. Join or Form a Recognition Action Group: Determine whether an existing coalition already exists. If not, explore formation of a Recognition Action Group composed of representatives from interested Native Hawaiian organizations, beneficiaries, legal experts, and policymakers. Such members must be committed to federal recognition and strong enough to weather criticisms from opposers. This work is not for the ill-hearted and requires patience and perseverance.

3. Survey the following organizations to ascertain the actions they are taking to protect Native Hawaiian programs and to uplift the lahui, such as seeking federal recognition or other forms of self-governance.

- Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs
- Dept of Hawaiian Home Lands
- Sovereign Council of Hawaiian Homestead Associations*
- Office of Hawaiian Affairs
- Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation
- Hawaiian Council
- Royal Societies (Royal Order of Kamehameha; 'Ahahui Ka'ahumanu; Hale O Na Ali'i O Hawai'i; Daughters and Sons of Hawaiian Warriors-Mamakakaua and Ali'i Trusts
- Ka Lāhui Hawai'i
- Other sovereignty and self-determination organizations

*Note that the DOI procedures require at least 50,000 Native Hawaiians cast votes in favor of the governing document; and that 15,000 Hawaiian Homes Commission Act Native Hawaiians cast votes in favor of the governing document

Questions to Explore:

- Does the organization support federal recognition?
- Does it support interim recognition?
- Has it adopted a formal position?
- What actions are currently underway?
- What concerns or objections exist?
- Would it participate in a collaborative effort?

4. In participating with a coalition, recommend the coalition adopt a resolution to seek funding by OHA and the Ali'i Trusts to enable the process of seeking federal recognition. A statewide

recognition effort could require substantial resources for legal review, governance development, community consultation, ratification, communications, and federal advocacy. Preliminary estimates suggest costs ranging from approximately \$750,000 to several million dollars depending upon the scope of the effort.

5. Establish an outreach, educational plan to educate the Democratic Party of Hawaii and the community on federal recognition and what it would mean to the lahui. Apply to funding resources to enable development of curricula and delivery of the education.

6. Be cognizant of opposition to federal recognition. When the DOI held public hearings about its rulemaking process, the Star Advertiser quoted the following as in opposition:

Star Advertiser: Hawaiians reject federal input

Posted on **June 25, 2014**

The Star Advertiser reports "[Interior Department meetings draw testimony opposed to recognition of a future native nation](#)"

The vast majority of people who testified before a federal panel Monday soundly rejected any attempt by the Obama administration to pursue federal recognition of a future Native Hawaiian governing body. In often passionate, sometimes heated testimony, dozens of speakers said they opposed any effort by the Department of the Interior to start a rule-making process that could set the framework for re-establishing a government-to-government relationship with Native Hawaiians.

Most of those testifying said the department does not have the authority to re-establish that relationship and implored the agency to halt the process and not interfere in Hawaiians' right to political self-determination.

"We don't need you folks to come in and tell us what to do," Hawaiian activist Dennis "Bumpy" Kanahale told the panel Wednesday morning at the state Capitol auditorium. He expanded on those remarks at an evening meeting in Waimanalo, where 154 people signed up to speak. "You gotta realize that a crime has taken place," Kanahale said. "And the United States essentially came back to the crime scene. We need to decide how to govern ourselves. We don't need the federal government."

At the evening session he was followed by Brandon Maka'awa'awa of Waimanalo.

"In the past the Native Hawaiian people have suffered the manipulation of our rights to self-determination on numerous occasions," he said. "Once again our inherent sovereignty and rights to self-determination are being undermined by these DOI meetings. It is our political right to govern ourselves. The Native Hawaiian people have already begun the process and should be allowed to finish it without the interference of the U.S. government."

Many of the speakers said they are not interested in seeing Hawaiians attain a tribal status similar to American Indians, which was what backers of the so-called Akaka Bill in Congress unsuccessfully attempted to do for more than a decade.

They said Hawaii is an illegally occupied sovereign nation and that any government-to-government dealings should be between a kingdom government and the U.S. secretary of state, who deals with foreign nations on behalf of the United States, not the interior secretary.

DeMont R.D. Conner of Nanakuli used the analogy of a car theft and the federal government's 1993 apology for the 1893 overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy to question the department's current actions: The thief apologizes to the owner but keeps the car. "Go back and tell your boss, 'Give 'em back the car!'" Conner told the panel. "It's very simple: You don't have jurisdiction here," said testifier Remi Abellira, adding, "We don't need recognition. We know who we are."

HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS CAUCUS DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAI'I

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE PURSUIT OF FEDERAL RECOGNITION AND AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP TO PROTECT NATIVE HAWAIIAN PROGRAMS AND ADVANCE NATIVE HAWAIIAN SELF- DETERMINATION WITHOUT PREJUDICE

WHEREAS, Native Hawaiians possess a unique political, historical, and trust relationship with the United States and the State of Hawai'i, as reflected in numerous federal and state laws, including the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920, the Hawai'i Admission Act of 1959, and Public Law 103-150, commonly known as the Apology Resolution; and

WHEREAS, Native Hawaiian programs relating to health, education, housing, cultural preservation, economic development, and self-determination are increasingly facing legal, constitutional, and policy challenges that threaten the well-being of Native Hawaiian beneficiaries and communities; and

WHEREAS, the United States Department of the Interior has promulgated 43 CFR Part 50, establishing procedures through which a Native Hawaiian governing entity may seek a formal government-to-government relationship with the United States; and

WHEREAS, many Native Hawaiians believe that substantial educational and organizational efforts have already occurred through Kana'iowalu, Na'i Aupuni, federal rulemaking proceedings, and decades of community discussion regarding Native Hawaiian governance and self-determination; and

WHEREAS, many Native Hawaiians have historically opposed federal recognition out of concern that it could prejudice claims relating to the Hawaiian Kingdom, national sovereignty,

self-determination, or independence; however, an interim government-to-government relationship expressly preserving all historical claims and future political options may provide a means of protecting Native Hawaiian programs while allowing continued discussion regarding the ultimate political future of the Native Hawaiian people; and

WHEREAS, the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus recognizes that Native Hawaiians hold differing views concerning sovereignty, federal recognition, nationhood, independence, deoccupation, and other political status options, and respects the right of Native Hawaiians to pursue their preferred political future; and

WHEREAS, any effort to pursue federal recognition should expressly preserve and not waive any historical, legal, political, land, trust, sovereignty, or self-determination claims that may be asserted by Native Hawaiians now or in the future;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus supports the pursuit of federal recognition, including the establishment of an interim government-to-government relationship between the United States and a Native Hawaiian governing entity, as a means of protecting Native Hawaiian programs, beneficiaries, trust resources, and political rights while preserving all future self-determination options available to the Native Hawaiian people; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus affirms that support for federal recognition shall not be construed as requiring Native Hawaiians to relinquish or abandon any position regarding sovereignty, independence, nationhood, deoccupation, reconciliation, or other political status options, and that participation in any recognition process should be without prejudice to such positions; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus calls upon Native Hawaiian organizations, beneficiaries, policymakers, and community leaders to work collaboratively toward the development of a Native Hawaiian governing entity capable of pursuing recognition under 43 CFR Part 50 or other available federal pathways; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus urges the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Native Hawaiian organizations, beneficiary associations, and interested community leaders to convene discussions regarding the formation of a Recognition Action Group to coordinate efforts relating to federal recognition, interim recognition, governance development, legal analysis, community consultation, and advocacy; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus supports review of prior governance initiatives, including Kanaʻiolowalu, Naʻi Aupuni, and related efforts, in order to determine what work has already been completed and what actions remain necessary to pursue recognition; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus encourages the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and other interested organizations to evaluate the financial, legal, administrative, and community resources necessary to support a successful recognition effort; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs, the Dept of Hawaiian Home Lands, the Sovereign Council of Hawaiian Homestead Associations, the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, Papa Ola Lōkahi, the Royal Hawaiian Benevolent Societies, the Ali'i Trusts, the Hawai'inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge, Hawai'i's Congressional Delegation, the Governor of the State of Hawai'i, and other interested Native Hawaiian organizations for their information and consideration.

ADOPTED this _____ day of _____, 2026, by the Hawaiian Affairs Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i.