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Dear Foundation for the Advancement of Health Education,

It is my great honor to support Tina Tamai's nomination for the Dr. Robert Blackburn Advocacy for Advancing Health Education and Promotion Award.

I am President of the Food Hub Hui, Food Coordinator at Kahumana Farms, and Vice-President of the Board of the Hawaii Good Food Alliance (HGFA). My passion is to improve the lives and livelihood of small farmers and to create food hubs to improve sustainable markets for farmers which ultimately support the health and well-being of local communities. While conducting research for my doctoral thesis, I became interested in HGFA because of its participatory and shared leadership approach to finding solutions to the problems and issues facing food systems. And because of the commitment and dedication to supporting multiple underserved and under-resourced communities in Hawaii, I began to seek participation in the organization. Over the past five years, I have become increasingly vested in HGFA's purpose and culture and now am fully invested as a director. HGFA gives me the opportunity to engage in meaningful collaborative efforts with passionate colleagues which have resulted in meaningful outcomes. Most importantly, HGFA allows me to contribute towards bettering Hawaii's food ecosystem while leading my own area of commitment and expertise.

HGFA was designed to address food and food systems as a complex dynamic intersection of multiple sectors and issues. It was founded as a platform to raise community voice and support community leadership and stewardship in solving barriers and issues identified on the ground. Members are respected and supported to coordinate and organize food systems within their communities in the manner they see appropriate while working collectively to improve the overarching state mechanisms and systems affecting communities. HGFA works because of the cohesive and collaborative spirit of its members and the high level of commitment to transform current systems to better serve our community members.

This platform and framework was created by Tina Tamai who intentionally and thoughtfully developed this model to raise community voice, support community leaders, and innovate strategies to facilitate systems change. She is adamant and insistent that HGFA reflect and is led by community and works to avoid bureaucratic or tangential distractions imposed by funding mechanisms. She seeks and listens to members' feedback and input. Her purpose was to empower each and every member to have greater leadership and voice and elevate their collective voice to have intentional impact and influence on the greater food systems level to facilitate transformative systems changes that foster food justice and health equity.

As a result, HGFA members have been supported to innovate and develop highly effective models to address food access and health. In Kalihi, a dense community of multiple immigrant groups, Kokua Kalihi Valley Community Health Center created a unique cultural food hub which incorporates a culture-centered healthy food café, community garden, farmer's market that provides indigenous produce, and other community programs to honor and respect the culture of immigrant Pacific Islanders to promote healthy eating. The Food Basket, our food bank member on the Big Island, used their pantry food delivery system to aggregate CSA produce boxes for their food insecure. This attracted the attention of a major food shipping and distribution business leader to partner with The Food Basket to develop a major

distribution facility on the Big Island to better distribute food to food insecure and other Big Island residents. Our Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center member is integrating Food as Medicine through Produce Prescription programs in their electronic medical record and insurance coding system to support better eating among food insecure patients.

My own work at Kahumana Food Hub and with our Hawaii Food Hub Hui (HFFH) has been focused on increasing awareness and resources to develop community food hubs and innovative prototypes that build new or fill in local food distribution systems voids - by connecting small and socially disadvantaged farmers with local customers through aggregation, marketing and distribution of locally grown foods. HFFH was created with a participatory approach where leaders from each of Hawaii's food hubs came together and formed a group for and by grassroots practitioners. Those efforts were greatly supported and amplified by HGFA. The group, which became the Food Hub Hui, initially consisted of five of the major food hub leaders in Hawai'i grew to represent 14 food hubs in subsequent convenings. During the Covid pandemic, members of HFFH quickly adapted to the situation and demonstrated success, as illustrated by 200–300% growth in performance metrics in revenues generated, employees retained, customers served, and farmers supported. A central concern of all the members of HFFH was the lack of available resources to expand the 14 successful operations which had become a pivotal force in Hawaii's local food system. HGFA's support for the HFFH has led to increased awareness of food hubs among public servants and already resulted in more funding for our programs in times when we did not think it was possible.

HGFA projects are gaining attention and partnerships from funders, large institutions as well as other community organizations. It is growing as an important influence on food systems and health in Hawaii. Tina's leadership and vision has been the key force that moves us forward. The consequence of linking and networking local community initiatives to create greater synergy and transformative impact on our food, food systems and health is immense. I encourage your program to recognize and support the important work of Tina Tamai. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [sazizi@asi-hawaii.org](mailto:sazizi@asi-hawaii.org) for questions or more information.

Sincerely,



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