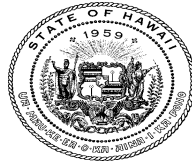


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



JADE T. BUTAY
DIRECTOR

WILLIAM G KUNSTMAN
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

BENNETTE MISALUCHA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
KA 'OIHANA PONO LIMAHANA
830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 317
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96813
<https://labor.hawaii.gov/wdc/>
Phone: (808) 586-8815 / Fax: (808) 586-8822
Email: dlir.workforce.council@hawaii.gov

**HAWAI'I WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
BOARD MEETING**

Minutes

Date: Thursday, May 21, 2026

Time: 9:30 am to 12:00 pm

In-Person Meeting Location: Princess Ruth Ke'elikolani Building
830 Punchbowl Street, Room 317
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Agenda: The agenda was posted to the State electronic calendars as required by §92-7(b), Hawai'i Revised Statutes ("HRS")

Board Meeting Materials: Meeting materials are available for review at
<https://labor.hawaii.gov/wdc/meeting-docs/>

Attendees:

- **Members Present:**

Keith DeMello, Workforce Development Council (WDC) Chair, Senior Vice President of Communication & External Affairs, Ulupono Initiative

Trang Malone, WDC Vice Chair, Manager, Workforce Initiatives, CVS Health

Gina Woo Anonuevo, Vice Chair and Chief Administrative Officer/Chief Human Resources Officer, First Hawaiian Bank

Manu Bermudes, Vice President of Human Resources, Hawai'i Gas

Cheryl Cross, Executive Search Consultant, Inkinen Executive Search

Rona Fukumoto, President & CEO, Lanakila Pacific

Shelli Ihori, Director, Workforce Development, Hawai'i Pacific Health

Derek Kanehira, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Alexander & Baldwin

Sean Knox, President, Hawai'i Employment Services, Inc.

Cary Miyashiro, President, Quad D Solutions
Sean Nakamura, Corporate Controller and Treasurer, TradeWind Group
Daven Kawamura, (Designee.for.Christopher.Lum.Lee)
Kehaulani Kukahiko (Kauai.Mayor's.Representative.to.WDC), Manager of Education and Workforce Development for the Kauai Economic Development Board
Christina Schenk, (Designee.for.Leslie.Wilkins)
Scott Collins, Field Services Officer, MSC/Advocacy, Hawai'i Government Employees Association
Dion Dizon, Director, University of Hawai'i (UH) West Oahu Center for Labor Education and Research
Carla Kurokawa, Employment and Training Manager, Alu Like, Inc.
Dan Kouchi, Policy Advisor – Office of the Governor, State of Hawai'i
Donovan Dela Cruz, Senator, Hawai'i State Senate
Andrew Garrett, Representative, Hawai'i State House of Representatives
Benson Medina, (Designee_Mayor.of.Hawai'i.County), Director, County of Hawai'i Department of Research and Development
Amy Asselbaye, (Designee_Mayor.of.Honolulu)?Director, City and County of Honolulu Office of Economic Revitalization
Nalani Brun (Designee_Mayor.of.Kauai.County), Director, County of Kauai Office of Economic Development
David Rodriguez (Designee_Director.of.Department.of.Labor.and.Industrial.Relations.(DLIR), Equal Opportunity Officer, DLIR
Lea Dias, Administrator, Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation Division
Wanelle Kaneshiro (Designee_Superintendent.of.Hawai'i.Department.of.Education), Director, Workforce Development Branch, Hawai'i Department of Education
Keala Monaco, (Designee.for.Wendy.Hensel), University of Hawai'i (UH) Community Colleges
Thomas Chock, (Designee_Director.of.Department.of.Business?Economic.Development.and.Tourism.(DBEDT) Program Specialist

- **Guests & Staff:**

Bennette Misalucha, Executive Director (ED), WDC
Jeanne Ohta, Employment Specialist, WDC
Margaret Miura, Program Specialist, WDC
Tyrone Apolinar, Program Specialist, WDC
Jung Yun Ha, Deputy Attorney General, Labor Division, State of Hawai'i
Carey Price, Program Specialist, DLIR
Douglas Chang, General Manager, Ritz-Carlton
Ashleigh Loa, Founder, Hale Ku Hawai'i
Kimberly Lehn, Senior Director, Pacific Forum
Gary Ablitz, Managing Director, Imua Onipa'a
Nick Winfrey, Executive Director, Imua Onipa'a
Leelynn Brady, Systems Advocacy Coordinator, Aloha Independent Living Hawai'i
Deborah Zysman
Lisa Pereira
Christopher Wiecking
Erin Nicole Fernandez
Su Lazo

Colin Peros
Charles Miller

- Excused:

Christopher Lum Lee, Chair, Oahu Workforce Development Board

Rossella Guardascione, Chair, Hawai'i County Workforce Development Board

Leslie Wilkins, Chair, President, Maui Economic Development Board

Amber Akana, Union Representative, Seafarers International Union of North America

Pane Meatoga III, Deputy Political Director, Operating Engineers Local 3

Tui Scanlan, President, International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees Local 665

Donovan Dela Cruz, WDC Assistant Vice Chair, Senator, Hawai'i State Senate

Jade Rojas-Letisi (Designee_Mayor.of.Maui.County), Director, County of Maui Office of Economic Development

Lui Hokoana (Designee_President.of.the.University.of.Hawai'i.System)

- I. [Video 00:00:22] The meeting was called to order by WDC Chair Keith DeMello (Chair DeMello) at 9:45 am. Following roll call, Chair DeMello confirmed that 24 board members were present and 16 board members were needed for quorum.

Chair DeMello recognized that Deputy Attorney General Kelly (Jung Yun) Ha was also present.

- II. [Video 00:11:34] Approval of the meeting minutes for February 18, 2026, and April 2, 2026, Special Meeting were deferred to the next meeting, tentatively scheduled for September 10, 2026.

- III. [Video 00:12:03] Ceremonial swearing in of new and returning Board Members was deferred to the next meeting, tentatively scheduled for September 10, 2026.

Chair DeMello recognized Amy Asselbaye as the new designee for Honolulu Mayor Blangiardi.

- IV. [Video 00:12:59] At 9:58 am, Chair DeMello recognized retiring Board Member Sean Knox and gave a big Mahalo for his service to the State and to the Workforce Development Council.

[Video 00:13:59] Dion Dizon logged into the meeting. Chair DeMello recognized that quorum was increased to 27 Council Members.

- V. [Video 00:15:10] Presentation: Workforce Challenges in the Defense Industry

[Video 00:15:40] At 10:00 am, Kimberly Lehn, Senior Director of Pacific Forum, presented on the Workforce Challenges in the Defense Industry.

[Video 00:39:38] Board Member Cheryl Cross made a motion to have WDC direct staff to coordinate and report back on workforce development strategies related to foreseeable military, maritime, and Indo-Pacific economic impacts affecting the State of Hawai'i including:

1. Drafting a letter to the Governor regarding anticipated workforce challenges and opportunities in the coordination with appropriate stakeholders, including, but not limited to, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and related entities;
2. Coordinate a meeting with the Governor's Policy Team alongside relevant military and regional stakeholders to discuss strategic workforce planning considerations;
3. Engage with the Chamber of Commerce of Hawai'i, the Military Affairs Council (MAC), Department of Business and Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT), Military Affairs Office (MACRO), regarding pathways and workforce implications associated with potential maritime prosperity zones for Hawai'i and have staff report back to the Council with updates and recommendations at a future meeting.

[Video 00:41:11] Carla Kurokawa second the motion.

[Video 00:41:26] Wanelle Kaneshiro-Erdmann expressed support and wanted to ensure that education, particularly the K-12 sector, remains an active part of statewide discussions on advanced manufacturing and shipbuilding workforce needs. Multiple groups have already approached K-12 educators about supporting advanced manufacturing pathways, which highlights the need for a more coordinated, statewide approach. She further expressed the need for the education sector to be included in future conversations.

[Video 00:42:14] ED Bennette Misalucha highlighted that WDC will not be the lead but rather be supporting whoever is the lead whether it be MAC or MACRO.

[Video 00:42:41] With no Executive Committee members indicating opposition, Chair DeMello proceeded with a voice vote. All members present voted 'Aye,' and the motion carried.

VI. [Video 00:43:40] Presentation: Workforce Development Council's Strategic and Implementation Plans on Artificial Intelligence Transformation in the Workforce Systems

[Video 00:43:55] At 10:28 am, ED Bennette Misalucha, Gary Albitz, and Nick Winfrey presented on the four-part symposium series titled "The AI Transformation: Preparing Hawaii's Workforce for the Future," which brings together stakeholders to examine AI trends, industry impacts, governance issues, and workforce strategies for an AI-enabled economy.

[Video 00:53:39] Leelynn Brad asked the following question for Gary Albitz and Nick Winfrey: What steps are you taking to address or accommodate individuals with different types of disabilities, particularly in relation to AI?

Gary Albitz responded that they have a program that observes how participants learn during seminars or trainings by asking questions and identifying whether they learn best visually, auditorily, or through hands-on activities. Using this information, the system adapts training to everyone's learning history and preferences. This AI-driven approach enables personalized instruction, monitors learner progress, reinforces areas where they struggle, and integrates multiple educational strategies to support overall success.

Nick Winfrey added that people with newly acquired disabilities, such as recent vision loss, are already using AI to learn and access new job opportunities. Gary Albitz and Nick Winfrey emphasized that this is an important discussion as AI reshapes workforce access and thanked the participant for raising the issue.

VII. [Video 00:56:31] Governor's Time

[Video 00:00:00] At 10:41 am, Dan Kouchi reported that the legislative session concluded on May 8, resulting in 268 bills passed (267 excluding one CONM), with 20 already signed by the Governor. Ongoing work includes reviewing remaining bills, with key deadlines of June 30 for the intent-to-veto list and July 15 for bill signing. He further highlighted major measures, including the state budget, funding for green-fee projects, a tax credit bill adjusting various credits to support lower- and middle-income households, and the film tax credit bill, which the Governor strongly supported. Dan Kouchi also noted upcoming events: the Governor's transition to chair of the Western Governors Association in late June/early July and Hawai'i hosting the annual WGA meeting in December 2026.

VIII. [Video 01:00:37] Labor Director's Update

[Video 00:00:00] At 10:45 a.m., David Rodriguez delivered the DLIR Director's update, covering disaster-related initiatives, legislative measures, departmental priorities, and budget matters. He reported that Disaster Unemployment Assistance applications opened May 7 and that the department is preparing a National Dislocated Worker Grant application to address economic impacts from recent storms. David Rodriguez highlighted key 2026 legislative measures, including budget cuts in HB1800, structural concerns raised on SB3282 regarding the Workforce Pell Program, and the status of internship program legislation, noting that despite HB2468 not passing, Hele Imua funding remains available. He also outlined the department's continued focus on serving WIOA-eligible populations, ongoing challenges with federal compliance and corrective actions, staffing sustainability concerns, and upcoming salary increases for BU13 exempt employees. David Rodriguez concluded with a brief overview of the department's FY2027 budget and related fiscal considerations.

IX. [Video 01:08:41] Update on Workforce Pell

[Video 01:08:57] At 10:53 am, ED Bennette Misalucha updated the committee on the Workforce Pell Grant program, which is a new federal initiative supporting short term training, and is scheduled to launch July 1, 2026. Unlike traditional Pell Grants, Workforce Pell programs must be approved by the State Workforce Development Board to ensure they

meet criteria such as demand, stack ability, and alignment with high-wage career pathways. Funding will be administered directly by schools, not the WDC.

Workforce Pell funds are available July 1, but additional planning is needed as final federal rules have just been released. A working group will meet next week to review details. UHCC identified three initial programs that may qualify. ED Bennette Misalucha noted that because the WDC Board does not meet again until September 10, a special meeting may be needed in late July or August to approve Workforce Pell policy and criteria.

X. [Video 01:13:19] Legislative updates by Chair Keith DeMello

[Video 01:13:28] At 10:58 am, Chair DeMello reported that he and board member Tui Scanlan were authorized to communicate limited, focused WDC legislative positions during the session. He highlighted several key bills the WDC engaged with, including House Bill 1859 on statewide workforce coordination, which received strong support but did not advance, though many of its elements were later incorporated into a concurrent resolution. He also noted support for House Bill 2315 on state employee benefits, which passed and establishes a vacation-payout pilot program to support affordability and retention. The WDC also commented on House Bill 2383 regarding Workforce Pell, advising that the measure was unnecessary given pending federal guidance. Additionally, the WDC supported the Governor's nomination messages, resulting in the approval of new board members. Chair DeMello acknowledged the expanded role of WDC staff in legislative functions this year and expressed appreciation for collaborative support from DLIR during the fast-paced session.

XI. [Video 01:18:28] Certification of Kauai Job Center

[Video 01:19:41] At 11:04 am, ED Bennette Misalucha reported that an assessment of the Kauai American Job Center (AJC) was completed, with findings included in the meeting packet. Based on the review, the Executive Committee voted on May 8 to extend the AJC's provisional certification, and the Board was asked to ratify this decision, which would continue certification through December 2026. ED Bennette Misalucha also outlined long-term plans, noting that WDD leadership agreed it would be in the state's best interest for a third-party operator to manage the Kauai AJC. A procurement process will begin soon, with additional details to be worked out in the coming months.

[Video 01:21:14] At 11:06 am, Chair DeMello entertained a motion to extend the current certification period for the Kauai AJC to December 31, 2026. Lea Dias made the first motion, followed by a second from Sean Knox. With no Board members indicating opposition, Chair DeMello proceeded with a voice vote. All members present voted 'Aye,' and the motion carried.

XII. [Video 01:22:42] Restructuring of Employer Engagement Committee and Sector Strategies Committee

[Video 01:23:31] At 11:08 a.m., ED Bennette Misalucha reported that over the past two years, Council members have been reviewing each committee's work to ensure roles and responsibilities remain relevant, and one key takeaway was the need to better align sector partnerships and sector strategies with employer engagement. With Gina Anonuevo, Chief HR Officer at First Hawaiian Bank, now serving as the Employer Engagement Committee Chair, the sector strategies function will be moved under Employer Engagement as a subcommittee. At the same time, the current Sector Strategies and Career Pathways Committee, chaired by Cary Miyashiro, will be renamed the Education and Career Pathways Committee to reflect his strong background in education. Additionally, Employer Engagement will launch a new initiative featuring eight listening sessions to gather qualitative and quantitative insights on industry conditions, including preparedness for AI.

[Video 01:21:14] At 11:06 am, Chair DeMello noted that earlier this month, the Executive Committee met and recommended approval of this change, which was formally voted on during its meeting in the first week of May.

[Video 01:26:58] At 11:12 am, Chair DeMello entertained a motion to ratify the Executive Committee recommendation to approve the amendment to the Bylaws on Article VI - Committees, Section 6.3. The following are standing committees of the Council: Sector Strategies and Career Pathways Committee to be replaced by the Education and Career Pathways Committee. Sean Nakamura made the first motion followed by a second from Derek Kanehira. With no Board members indicating opposition, Chair DeMello proceeded with a voice vote. All members present voted 'Aye,' and the motion carried.

XIII. [Video 01:27:57] Fiscal Reports

[Video 01:28:10] At 11:13 am, ED Bennette Misalucha presented a report on WIOA fund spending, explaining that local areas have 2 years to spend their allocations with a current total of \$2.77 million available across all categories. She noted that local areas are not spending funds efficiently due to systemic issues including legal review requirements and county council involvement in releasing monies. ED Bennette Misalucha stated that approximately \$690,000 must be expended each month over the next four months to ensure all available funds are utilized before they revert to the state. She further reported that they are collaborating with local areas to streamline reporting requirements and address systemic barriers that have been limiting spending.

- XIV. [Video 01:38:53] Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I and III Annual Performance Report: Program Year 2024

[Video 01:39:31] At 11:24 am, Jeanne Ohta presented the Program Year 2025, Quarter 3 Performance Measures submitted to USDOL, highlighting both areas where targets were met and ongoing challenges with employment rates and measurable skill gains across several programs. ED Bennette Misalucha noted that a data entry error affected the dislocated worker performance results; corrective action plans have since been implemented, and technical assistance is being provided to resolve the issue.

- XV. [Video 01:49:34] Executive Director's Report

[Video 01:49:34] At 11:34 am, ED Bennette Misalucha provided a brief update, noting that many members may have already heard portions of the report during recent committee meetings. She highlighted that the first quarter was particularly active, including an internship summit initiated by Hawai'i State Senator Dela Cruz, featuring the U.S. Secretary of Labor as the keynote speaker. The State Unified Plan was successfully submitted, and four webinars were conducted. A snapshot of the plan's implementation schedule was shared, along with priorities for the second and third quarters of 2026.

- XVI. [Video 01:51:12] Acceptance of Written Reports from Core Partners of WIOA.

Written Reports from Core Partners were provided in the Board Packet. No discussion or action taken.

- XVII. [Video 01:52:30] Acceptance of Written Reports from Local Workforce Development Boards

Written Reports from Local Workforce Development were provided in the Board Packet. No discussion or action taken.

- XVIII. [Video 01:52:50] Acceptance of Written Reports from WDC Standing Committees

Written Reports from WDC Standing Committees were provided in the Board Packet. No discussion or action taken.

- XIX. [Video 01:54:02] Renewal of Executive Director's Contract

[Video 01:54:16] Chair DeMello excused ED Bennette Misalucha and WDC Staff to include Jeanna Ohta, Margaret Miura, and Tyrone Apolinar, from the meeting.

Chair DeMello noted that the Executive Director's contract expires on June 30 and clarified that the discussion concerned only the contract term, not the performance evaluation. He stated that he reviewed the bylaws requirement for annual evaluations, with the next scheduled for early 2027, and summarized the timeline leading to the council's consideration: the Executive Committee recommended renewal on May 8, and the council was asked to act on the renewal at the May 21 meeting, with final documents due to DLIR Human Resources by May 30.

Chair DeMello reported that the Executive Committee had recommended a four-year contract, but after consulting with the Department of Human Resources Development (DHRD), they advised that the state does not use four-year terms for comparable positions and would support only a two-year contract.

During discussion, members expressed appreciation for the executive director's work and raised concerns about the administrative burden of frequent contract renewals. Several members supported a longer term to provide stability and align with practices at other agencies. Questions were raised about whether DHRD's guidance applied consistently across boards and commissions, and members noted that while the prior contract was two years, this is shorter than what is typical for similar positions.

[Video 02:05:38] Hawai'i State Senator Dela Cruz motioned for a three-year contract with the ability to extend one more additional year by the Executive Council. And if for some reason the Department of Human Resources says that it is not allowed then we automatically go back to a two-year contract. Carla Kurokawa seconded the motion.

David Rodriguez clarified that his position would have to be consistent with support for a two-year term, reflecting the current direction on hand from the DLIR Director.

[Video 02:10:13] Chair DeMello conducted a roll call vote. Vice Chair Trang Malone stated that there were 19 'Yes', 1 'Abstained', and 1 'No'. The motion passed.

XX. [Video 00:00:00] Workforce Development Council's Next Meeting

XXI. [Video 02:17:30] Next Quarterly Board Meeting

Tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, September 30, 2026, from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm.

XXII. [Video 02:17:48] Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 12:02 pm.