



BOR Meeting, April 20, 2023 - Letter of Support to Award an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters to Edith Kanaka'ole

Keiki Kawai'ae'a <keiki@hawaii.edu>

Tue, Apr 18, 2023 at 5:47 PM

To: bor.testimony@hawaii.edu

Cc: Pila Wilson <wilsonwi@hawaii.edu>, Bonnie Irwin <bdirwin@hawaii.edu>, Lei Kaponu <donna@hawaii.edu>, Ka'iu Kimura <lesliek@hawaii.edu>, Iota Cabral <jasoncab@hawaii.edu>

Aloha,

On behalf of Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language at UH Hilo, we submit our letter of support to award an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters to Edith Kekuhikuhipu'uoneonaali'iokohala Kenao Kanaka'ole.

Mahalo,

Keiki Kawai'ae'a

Director, Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani



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KULANUI O
HAWAII MA HILO

Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani
College of Hawaiian Language

<http://www.olelo.hawaii.edu/khuok/>

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He Mea Hai Ma Ka Papaha
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MEMO

To: University of Hawai'i Board of Regents
From: Dr. William H. Wilson, Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani College of
Hawaiian Language, University of Hawai'i at Hilo
RE: Agenda Item VII. C. Awarding an Honorary Doctorate of
Humane Letters to Edith Kekuhikuhipu'uoneonāali'iokohala Kenao
Kanaka'ole

Aloha Members of the Board of Regents,

On behalf of Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language, I write in strong and unwavering support for the awarding of an Honorary Doctorate of Human Letters to Edith Kekuhikuhipu'uoneonāali'iokohala Kenao Kanaka'ole. As the senior faculty member of the College, I can attest to the beginnings of the College that are based on the work and contributions of Aunty Edith.

It is my honor to provide the testimony of the College in support of awarding the Honorary Doctorate of Human Letters to Aunty Edith. Among the current faculty and staff of the College, I have been a particularly close witness of her work and her leadership in developing the College and its various programs, from the P-12 Hawaiian language medium laboratory school to the Doctorate in Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization.

I was recruited to help develop a baccalaureate program in Hawaiian Studies for UH Hilo in 1978. At that time, Aunty Edith held an assistant professorship in its Foreign Languages Department. She was head of a campus committee developing the plan for a distinctive two-track B.A. in Hawaiian Studies. When the administration offered me an opportunity to come to Hilo to work on that plan, I contacted Aunty Edith to receive her approval as a condition for accepting the University's offer. We met during the Merrie Monarch Festival of 1978. She brought me a bouquet of lokelau flowers from her yard for my wife, who was dancing that year, and warmly indicated that she supported my coming to Hilo. We then discussed what conditions might be placed on the University for me to leave my work at the State Archives to help develop the degree. The decision was to call for UH Hilo to establish a separate Hawaiian Studies department with the department operated and taught through Hawaiian rather than through English. These proposals were accepted by the University, although at the time, a

separate Hawaiian Studies and the use of Hawaiian to teach non-language content, much less administer a program, was not in existence anywhere.

I met with Aunty Edith on the contents of the proposed Hawaiian Studies degree during the 1978-1979 school year. Aunty Edith had already laid the groundwork for a distinct Hawaiian Studies Department by incorporating the teaching of Hawaiian 'Ohana Life, Hawaiian Ethnobotany, and Hawaiian Chant, among other things, under the Hawaiian language alpha. My job was to take the plan she and her committee had developed and flesh it out with more detailed course descriptions. Aunty Edith had a vision for Hawaiian Studies, particularly Hawaiian language and performing arts, that went beyond the B.A. degree. Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani reflects that vision through our P-25 educational model that focuses on the local community, Hawai'i as an archipelago, and the broader world of Indigenous peoples through our B.A. degree, the Hale Kuamo'o Hawaiian Language Center, the Kahuawaiola Indigenous Teacher Certificate program, the Master's and Doctoral degree programs, and our P-12 laboratory program.

Of particular importance for the Hawaiian language focus of our Hawaiian Studies B.A. program was Aunty Edith's organization of, and leadership of, Hui Ho'oulu 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, an organization of East Hawai'i Hawaiian speaking kūpuna who sought to ho'oulu or grow the Hawaiian language. They pushed for Hawaiian to be introduced into the schools, especially at Keaukaha School on the Hawaiian Homestead where Aunty Edith lived. This was the beginning of the Kupuna Program here in Hilo. In later years, after the passing of Aunty Edith, Keaukaha became the site of the first public Hawaiian language immersion school, and from it emerged our P-12 Hawaiian language medium laboratory school Nāwahīokalani'ōpu'u. Aunty Edith also worked with the statewide 'Ahahui 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, where I first met her. I vividly remember Dr. Dorothy Kahananui, the founder of the 'Ahahui 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, recounting how impressed she was with Aunty Edith after the two of them shared a hotel room in preparation for a statewide conference held by the 'Ahahui 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. At that conference, Aunty Edith and Mrs. Kahananui, along with various other kūpuna, teachers, and students, shared dreams for the revival of the endangered Hawaiian language, still illegal as a medium of public K-12 education at that time.

Perhaps best known the work of Aunty Edith today is her work in hula and chant. She was a well known hula teacher in Keaukaha, drawing students from the community and focusing largely on serving community events. As a Hawaiian language and culture teacher at the University, she moved to build a higher level of knowledge of Hawaiian culture and dance for young adult students through her Hālau O Kekuhi. At the time, the idea of revitalizing hula kahiko within a hālau model rather than a hula studio model was revolutionary. It was also unusual for a hālau to connect to students within a university program. Her university students flocked to Aunty Edith's hālau.

Aunty Edith was an extremely warm and giving person. Young Hawaiians from throughout Hawai'i would travel to Hilo to seek her advice and learn from her. She was also very open to individuals of other backgrounds. She exemplified Hawaiian aloha while at the same time balancing that with a Hawaiian value of maintaining welo 'ohana, or specific features that distinguished a family and

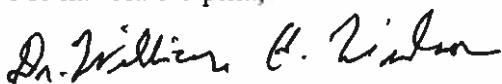
lineage. Aunty Edith was also recognized for and actively embraced other Indigenous peoples. I remember, in particular, her account of leading the protocol for welcoming the Queen of Tonga to Hilo.

At the death of Aunty Edith in the fall of 1979, her students gathered to present a mele at her funeral. The song was E Nihi Ka Hele, written by King Kalākaua for his wife Kapi‘olani as she departed Hawai‘i for England and Queen Victoria’s Jubilee. The song includes quotes from the story of Pele and Hi‘iaka, beloved by Aunty Edith, and the line “A hea mai Kalani a e kipa – e kipa a‘e ‘oe” When the Heavenly Chief calls you to join him, go forth and do so.” Aunty Edith epitomized the Hawaiian closeness to the spiritual realm, both that which sprung from Hawai‘i itself and that of her faith in the Christian god as well. She was a very religious person and spiritually strong. She used that strength to support and protect her Hawaiian people and students and move all of us forward.

Awarding a Doctorate in Humane Letters to Edith Kekuhikuhipu‘uoneonāali‘iokohalaa Kenao Kanaka‘ole is highly appropriate. The Doctorate in Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture at the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo is built upon a foundation she laid over forty years ago. Her very name predicted what was to come. Aunty Edith has been “The Architect for the Chiefs,” not only for those of us here on Hawai‘i Island but for those from the larger Hawaiian Islands united by the Ali‘i Kamehameha born in Kohala. She also embraced and supported the Indigenous peoples of the world who have been inspired by the distinctive culture and heritage of the lāhui Hawai‘i which Aunty Edith, in her most humble way, held up for all to appreciate.

The faculty, students, and staff of Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘elikōlani most strongly lend our voices in support of the proposal that the Doctorate of Humane Letters be awarded to Aunty Edith.

Me ka ‘oia‘i‘o piha,



Dr. William H. Wilson