December 30, 2005
Kaua'i County Charter Commission
Lihue, Kaua'i, HI 96766

Dear Chair Robeson and Members of the Charter Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and thank you, especially, for your participation in the Charter Commission. Your efforts give the citizenry of Kaua'i ownership and, indeed, empowerment, to participate in government affairs and democracy in action. I am happy to exercise my right to do so and I hope doing so will have a positive effect on our beloved Garden Island.

I appear today to provide testimony on two issues. Both issues have to do with the Kaua'i Fire Department, and if I had to give priority to one issue over another, it would be the formation of a Fire Commission.

First, I think it is important to publicly state that my husband is a 25+ year dedicated member of the Kaua'i Fire Department –working his way up from Firefighter, to FAO (Fire Apparatus Operator), to Captain, and formerly serving as Administrative Battalion Chief. He is currently serving as an 'on-the-line' Battalion Chief.

I believe it also needs to be publicly stated that I recently approached the Kaua'i Fire Department Chief, Robert Westerman, whom I hold in highest regard, for permission to start a Junior Firefighter/Fire Explorer Program on island. This is a worthwhile Program, which I have wanted to start since my children, now ages 21 and 23, were in elementary school. The Chief graciously approved my proposal and has since received an approval from the Mayor to proceed.

I am currently working with Captain David Bukoski of the Fire Prevention Department, within the Kaua'i Fire Department, to implement such a Program.

I hope that you will deem such an effort worthwhile and provide any assistance and support possible. I believe the Program will be a positive addition to Kaua'i and provide another opportunity for the youth of Kaua'i to be involved in healthy lifestyle, after-school activities. I also hope that eventually the Program can possibly be a training ground for the Department in recruiting qualified Kaua'i applicants- both male and female.

I detail the above so that my next comments are not misconstrued. I am grateful to Chief Westerman for being community minded and community spirited to support a Junior Firefighter/Fire Explorer program. I also think that there have been positive changes within the Department, under the direction of Chief

Westerman, which have resulted in the community being better served by its Fire Department.

I believe, however, that Kaua'i County has been remiss in NOT having an Assistant Chief or Deputy Chief and a Fire Commission. The Commission would, among other duties, select the Fire Chief for our island. I must emphasize that these comments are in no way a reflection of my feeling that the current Chief is not a good or competent Chief. It is in no way a reflection of first-hand knowledge of there being an issue within the Department regarding Chief Westerman's appointment. I personally think Chief Westerman has a very inclusive style of leadership.

Also, having talked with the Chief many times, especially regarding starting a Junior Firefighter/Fire Explorer program, I feel grateful that Kaua'i 'lucked out' with Chief Westerman, but, that is my point exactly- the island should NOT be subjected to 'lucking out' in the selection of such an important position which has far-reaching effects on our island and to our island's well-being. Furthermore, I believe that such an important position should NOT be, and should NOT be perceived to be, an opportunity for elected officials to use as "pay back" for those who supported their respective political campaigns, yet it seems to me that this is the case with the Fire Chief, and has been the case for as long as I have lived on Kaua'i- since I was a teenager.

Kaua'i is the ONLY island in the state which does not have an Assistant and / or Deputy Fire Chief and a Fire Commission. I was shocked to learn this. That fact, alone, should encourage action and the immediate hiring of an Assistant Chief and the immediate formation of a Fire Commission on Kaua'i, but there are other reasons to do so as well. As an admitted outsider of the Department, I believe that had we had a Fire Commission we would never have had the recent situations of bringing people out of retirement (!) to assume the Chief's position. While I have high regard for every person who has ever served in the Fire Chief's position, I will use recent examples I encountered in my employment, within the DOE, to support the view that bringing someone out of retirement to head up a Department or school has a negative impact and creates a serious morale problem- regardless of the competency of the individual. In fact, I believe it sets up a situation where the appointed person is almost 'doomed' because of the nature of the situation; because the appointment is always viewed as temporary.

When one is brought out of retirement to fill a head position, the people 'below' can only wonder how long the person 'in charge' is going to remain in charge and how much of a commitment the person 'in charge' has to long-term employment and making changes- often very needed changes which require strong leadership to change- within the Department. Understandably, this is somewhat unfair to the person who comes out of retirement, who is presumably acting in a

noble fashion to come out of retirement for the purpose of public service, but that is just the nature of most people's reactions when confronted with such a situation. It's a bad practice, in my opinion, all the way around. It also is somewhat of a 'slap in the face' of those who are currently employed who could be promoted to fill the head position. In the case of the Kaua'i Fire Department, this is especially an issue since there are so many 'lifers'- and one can usually 'only' be promoted when there are retirements.

While I was at Kapa'a Middle School, our principal moved off island and a principal was brought out of retirement to cover. I think it is safe to say that the majority of the staff felt that the appointment was 'just' transitional and that had far-reaching effects regarding the addressing of existing problems and planning for the next year. This is in no way a criticism of the principal who left or the principal who assumed the position.

Similarly, although not a case of retirement, but still I think a relevant example, when I was at Kapa'a Elementary and Cliff Bailey passed away, we had what can only be described as a 'revolving door' of administrators after that. It negatively impacted the school as it relates to addressing existing discipline issues and planning. Again, I am not criticizing anyone, but it was repeatedly said by 'temporary' administrators that, "I am just temporary and so I don't want to make long-term decisions which others will have to live with after I am gone." While that attitude is, in many ways, to be admired by those temporarily in charge, it also served to put us 'on hold' for a ridiculously long time and issues did not get addressed, albeit through no one's 'fault'. It did create a definite morale problem when we were already in mourning about Cliff's unexpected passing. Perhaps made more so because Cliff was a very hands on and progressive principal.>>>

Lest you, or anyone else, think this testimony is 'sour grapes' as it relates to my husband and his current position, let me share that while my husband is certainly free to act in whatever manner he chooses when it comes to his employment, I asked him not to apply for the permanent Fire Chief's position, although I fully supported his decision to apply for and fill the temporary, Acting Fire Chief's position- out of a sense of obligation to keep continuity in the Department and because I believe in public service. It would, however, quite frankly, not at all be worth it, from a financial stance, for my husband to assume the Fire Chief's position. He would have more responsibilities and LESS PAY! That is a crazy situation which most definitely needs to be addressed by the Salary Commission and has been a long-standing issue on island in many County departments.

Ironically, the current Chief, who was not a Kaua'i Fire Department member before being appointed, and who was not, therefore promoted from within the ranks, is in a perfect position to advocate for a change in salary for the Fire Chief.

I strongly advocate the formation of an Assistant Chief/Deputy Chief position and the formation of a Fire Commission on Kaua'i. I see such a move as being of tremendous benefit to the County by 1) assisting the Department in ways in which they have not been assisted- this could even include the writing of grants by the Commission; 2) removing politics from the appointment of Assistant Chief and / or Deputy Chief and Fire Chief; 3) providing the Department with the ability to enjoy long-term planning, and therefore the ability to see the resolution of issues which can only be addressed through long-term planning 3) continuity in leadership for the sake of that alone and also to see long-term planning to fruition. Currently, because the Chief is an appointed position, the Chief comes and goes with each new Mayor- or even sooner which has been the case recently with resignations.

Relatively recently the Department assumed the Lifeguard program, from the County Parks and Rec. Department, under its jurisdiction. As the Administrative Battalion Chief, the over-seeing of the Water Safety Officers was given to my husband. It has taken effort and TIME to bring the Water Safety Officers and Water Safety Program into line with the rest of the Kaua'i Fire Department. This transition started with Fire Chief Sproat, continued through Fire Chief Hiramoto, through Fire Chief Furushima, and now with Fire Chief Westerman. The Fire Chief needs to be able to have job stability to make changes and see them through to completion. I believe our Fire Department deserves that in its leader and, perhaps most importantly, I believe the citizenry of Kaua'i deserve that when it comes to a Department whose work has a direct impact on one's health, property and safety.

I fully understand a new position, being a new position, would require financing, but again, if you look at every other Department across the State you will find an Assistant Chief and / or Depty Chief position- except on Kaua'i. Across the nation it is also standard to have either an Assistant Chief and / or a Deputy Chief. I believe that one is traditionally Mayoral appointed and one is not- I advocate for the position which is not Mayoral appointed.

Why don't we have an Assistant or Deputy Fire Chief? When I read the County Charter, it states, " There shall be a Fire Department consisting of a Fire Chief and necessary staff." I think it behooves the County to learn why other Departments across the nation and, in fact, in our own state, have Assistant Fire Chiefs and / or Deputy Chiefs and consider them necessary, and why we don't have one which results in one reaching the conclusion that we don't consider such a position necessary. I believe an Assistant Chief IS necessary staff.

There needs to be recognition that the island has grown and the population is greater, and therefore, there are increased amounts of property structures. This, to me, is a safety issue. The population has just about doubled since I first

moved to Kaua'i. An Assistant Chief and / or Deputy Chief position, in my mind, constitutes "necessary staff" as noted in the Charter. Just as the island has grown, so, too, should the Fire Department grow to keep pace with island growth so that they can protect our residents and visitors and our property.

Why don't we have a Fire Commission? Again, I think it behooves the County to learn why other Departments across the nation and, in fact, within our state, have Fire Commissions. They are in existence, quite simply, to help each Fire Department better do its job. Doesn't our Fire Department deserve the same support? Not many of us put our lives on the line when we go to work- but members of the Fire Department regularly do. Don't we have an obligation to, out of all the County Departments, fund them exceptionally- both in financial resources as well as human resources- as a result of the recognition that the job they perform is like no other within the County?

Please consider doing what needs to be done to form a Fire Commission, whether it be providing for a voter referendum to initiate one to add to the Charter, or providing support for Kaua'i County Council action to form one. Should you desire it, I would be more than happy to provide you with a thumbnail sketch of what all the other islands in the State have in the way of the their respective Fire Commissions and as it relates to the composition of the members of their respective Fire Commissions. Please also consider providing for an Assistant Chief and / or Deputy Chief as part of the Fire Department.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. I apologize for the length of my testimony, but I felt the details given were important to having a full understanding of the issues I have presented.

I urge you to support the Junior Firefighter/Fire Explorer Program, and work to install an Assistant Chief and / or Deputy Chief, as well as a Fire Commission.

I eagerly await your deliberations and decisions on these most important issues facing all of us on the Garden Island.

Sincerely and with appreciation for your most important work,

Pat Hunter-Williams

attached:

Fire Commission supporting documents

1) Honolulu City and County Fire Commission description from Honolulu City and County web site;

2) Personal emails from Pat Hunter-Williams to Honolulu Fire Department re: their Fire Commission; Responses from Gary Takeuchi, Deputy Corporation Counsel for City and County of Honolulu;

3) Appropriate/ Applicable print-outs of Honolulu City and County Charter as it relates to the Honolulu City and County Fire Commission (Sections 6-1005; 130103; 6-1006; 6-1004; 6-1003;

4) Maui County Fire Commission Fire Commission description from Maui County website;

5) Appropriate / Applicable print-outs of Maui County Charter as it relates to the Maui County Fire Commission (Title MC-06, Subtitle 1, Chapter 102)

Please Note: Appropriate / Applicable Hawai'I County Fire Commission print-outs to be forwarded, along with draft proposal for Kaua'I County Fire Commission.