

SPECIAL SESSION MEETING MINUTES

**TO BE
APPROVED**

Board/Commission:	LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION	Meeting Date	August 10, 2026
Location	Lihue Civic Center Pi`ikoi Building, Suite 300 4444 Rice Street, Lihue, HI 96766	Start of Meeting: 8:30 a.m.	End of Meeting: 2:40 p.m.
Present	Members: Chair Leland Kahawai, Vice-Chair Chad Pacheco, Gerald Bahouth, Paul Endo, Lorna Nishimitsu and Tess Shimabukro, Liquor Control Staff: Interim Director Gerald Rapozo, Private Secretary: Malialani T.M. Kelekoma, Boards & Commission Administrator: Ellen Ching, Deputy County Attorney: Todd Dickenson, Human Resources: Jill Niitani, HR Manager, Reina Kurisu, HR Specialist IV		
Excused	Commissioner Gerald Matsunaga		
Absent			

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Call to Order	Chair Leland Kahawai called the Open Session Meeting of the Liquor Control Commission on August 10, 2026, to order at 8:30 a.m.	
Roll Call	A roll call ensued to ascertain a quorum; Commissioner Gerald Matsunaga was excused, and six (6) Commissioners were present to conduct business.	The Quorum was established with six (6) Commissioners present.
Approval of Agenda		<u>Motion:</u> Vice Chair Chad Pacheco moved to approve the agenda as circulated. Commissioner Endo seconded the motion. Hearing no objections, the motion passed 5:0.
Public Testimony	Interim Director Gerald Rapozo asked if anyone would like to give testimony on any agenda item.	NONE

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	<i>Commissioner Gerald Bahouth entered the Special Commission Meeting @ 8:48 a.m.</i>	
Applicants for the Director of Liquor Control	The Department of Human Resources will be interviewing ten (10) candidates who were determined to have met the minimum qualifications for the County of Kaua'i Department of Liquor Control Director position and possess either a bachelor's or master's degree in public administration or have eight (8) years of experience in the liquor industry, police or law. The Candidates are as follows: <u>Aaron Reeves:</u> Ms. Jill Niitani, August 10th, 2026, and we are here with Aaron Reeves, candidate for the Liquor Director position. Before we get started with the questions, we'd like to inform you that this interview is scheduled for one hour. There are 10 questions, so we ask that you use your time wisely as this interview will be concluded at the one-hour mark. We will give you a 5-minute reminder at the 55-minute point, as a courtesy. And if you would like me to repeat the question, please feel free to do so. Are you ready to begin with the first question? For the record, the time is 8:42 AM. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #1. Please walk us through your career history, highlighting the key experiences and milestones that make you the right fit for the liquor director role.</u> Mr. Aaron Reeves, first off, I'm not sure if everything was shared or not, but I apologize, I'm a little casual, but I'm actually in Norway right now. It's 8:30 at night for me. I'm wildly jet lagged. We have only been here a little while, but I didn't bring anything better than a polo with. I appreciate the opportunity still. It's a little more casual than I would like to be in an interview. But as far as the question goes, I have almost 30 years of local government	

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	leadership and administration experience. I've spent about 20 years in Minnesota, almost five years in Wisconsin, and now about three years in Colorado. For a majority of my career, you know, roughly 25 years, my role was either as a city administrator or a city clerk. And in those roles in Minnesota, Wisconsin, you have the statutory authority over licensing, which includes liquor licensing and related enforcement and things like that. I have extensive experience in liquor control, including licensing, enforcement, all sorts of things, working with local establishments, license holders, all those sorts of things, on sale, off sale, special events, you know, kind of everything related to it. I think some of my most relatable experiences in this role would be serving as city clerk for the city of Rochester, Minnesota, which is roughly 130,000 people. And as I said before, I had the statutory authority as the city clerk to do all the liquor related licensing enforcement and those sorts of things. I've got a lot of experience in that area. I think that background, not only in just the, in the liquor enforcement and licensing and that sort of thing, but also just my local government leadership and experience make me an excellent candidate for this position. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #2. As a Liquor Director, how would you prioritize your first 12 months of the job? Please break down your immediate focus for the first six months and how that shifts as you approach the one-year mark.</u> Mr. Aaron Reeves, sure I mean, I think it's as with almost any role. You know, first it's getting to know the commission and the staff. What is, what are the commissioner's, you know, goals and objectives? Where do they see things standing with the department? What would they like to see differently? What are they happy with? What are they not happy with? What are the immediate issues that they see. Same with the staff, getting to know the staff, you know,	

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	what do they see on the day-to-day with the enforcement, with the licensing? What are their priorities? Where do they see the issues, opportunities? Where do they need the help right now so they can be successful in their roles? Part of that then is also getting to know the license holders, whether it's your restaurants, your bars, your on-off sale sort of establishments, but getting out there, knowing your license holders, hearing what they have to say, what are their concerns with things? Are they happy with things? How is the training? What are opportunities that are available? to them to make sure that they are able to stay in compliance and that their staff know what they're supposed to be doing, things like that. So, it's a whole lot of listening. It's a whole lot of learning. And I think that first six months will fly by just doing those sorts of things. And then the next six months, of course, is then trying to do that implementation. What am I hearing? What am I hearing from the commission? What am I hearing from staff? What am I hearing from our license holders? What am I hearing from the public? And even possibly, you know, commission, county board members, things like that. What am I hearing from them? And then how do I turn that into an action plan? How do I take what I'm hearing from everyone, turn that into something that's truly actionable? What am I doing to make sure that I'm meeting the goals and objectives of the commission? What am I doing to make sure that I'm helping our staff be successful? What is it that they need? What do I need to start implementing to make sure that they can do their job safely and effectively? And then also, as I talked about, listening to the license holders, what am I hearing from them? What are some of the things that could be actionable there that I could be bringing back to the commission for discussion? So, it's a lot of listening. It's a lot of learning in the first six months. And then after that, for the next six months, it's a lot to start the implementation process. It's working with the commission, working with staff. What do	

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	we need to do to address some of these things that have come up through my, you know, first few months on the job of hearing things? And then what is that plan? How do we start implementing? What do we start doing? To make sure that we're moving things forward, we're maintaining what we need to have as a licensing authority, that we're doing the proper enforcements and we're addressing any of the red flag issues that have come up through that early process. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #3. How will you ensure your enforcement team consistently and fairly applies the laws under Hawaii Revised Statutes Chapter 281?</u> Mr. Aaron Reeves, it's about that support and training. If we're not effectively enforcing the laws, there's a reason for it. So, do we have the proper training in place for our staff? Do they have all the resources they need to be successful? Are we properly staffed? Do we have enough staff to do the job that we're supposed to be doing under the statutes? So again, that's part of that early process is the listening and learning part from our staff. What am I hearing from them? What am I hearing about what they need to be successful? What am I hearing about where they're having issues, where they're hitting roadblocks, things like that. And then how can I take what my background and experience is and turn that into actionable items to support them and do what they need to do to make sure that all the proper laws, statutes, everything are being enforced in a way that everyone expects them to be done. I mean, liquor licensing is definitely liquor licensing. Are we making sure that there's not underage sales happening? Are we making sure that people are selling the proper alcohol at the proper times? Or are we making sure that hours are being enforced? All those sorts of things. But the only way that you can do that is to make sure that your staff is properly	

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	trained, that your staff is properly supported, and that I provide the leadership they need so that they can do their jobs and be successful. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #4. Based on your past management experience, sorry, let me read that again. Based on your past management experience, how would you describe your leadership style?</u> Mr. Aaron Reeves, yeah, I'm very much, you know, kind of that, I think I fall within that servant leader. I mean, my whole career has been in local government. My whole career has been a local government leader, whether as a city administrator or department head. So, I lead by example. I'm a hard worker. I'm highly ethical. I'm an ICMA, International City County Managers Association. I'm A credentialed manager which means that we have a code of ethics that we must follow. I must go through a renewal process every year to make sure I maintain my certification. So, I'm very much, I think, a servant leader. I lead by example. Staff know that I am supportive of them. I know that their jobs can be difficult, especially in liquor enforcement and licensing. You're often dealing with people that are very upset, whether it's, you know, the actual license holders, whether it's servers, whatever the situation might be that, you know, usually when they're coming into the office, quite often there's a problem. And so, I know how difficult that role can be. So, I am there as a leader to support them. I'm there as a leader to lead by example. I will always lead out front. I am happy to talk with anyone that has issues or concerns, whether it's citizens, whether it's our license holders, Anybody that has a concern with some of our establishments, I'm happy to be that person that talks with them, that understands the issues, that can help our staff then address the	

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	problems, because I do know what, you know, what it is that they're having to deal with. And I think, you know, one of the things I've prided myself on over my career is that I've always had an excellent relationship. You know, with my staff, with my department heads, you know, frontline staff, whatever it might be. I establish trust. They know that I know what they're going through. I know how hard the work can be, and they know that I'm there to support them, and I'm there to sometimes often be that face. That will deal with the criticisms and the things like that to help so they can just do their jobs and not have to, you know, necessarily always deal with angry people that have concerns over whatever the situation might be. And I think with that, you establish that trust, you establish those positive relationships, and then you know, from there, I think you develop that team that where you all know that you're part of something. You all know that you're working towards objectives, you're working towards goals, you're all helping each other achieve what needs to be done. As we talked about before, under the law, the commission's expectations, things like that. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #5. After 6 months as the Liquor Control Director, you begin to implement changes that you feel will provide for greater operational efficiency. You had previously discussed these changes with your team and took their input into consideration. One of your staff members, Bob, has consistently opposed your changes, and the suggestions that Bob has made did not align with your goals. As you roll out your changes, Bob continues to oppose them and is openly critical of these changes in front of everyone. How do you proceed?</u> Mr. Aaron Reeves, well, that's part of being, you know, being a leader, and especially in my role as a city administrator and things like that. Sometimes you just have to make the decisions. And as you said in your question, that's exactly how I would do it. Take all the input	

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	from the staff, understand what they're saying. But ultimately, I have to make a decision about how we're going to move forward. And not all staff may agree with that. So in my role, in a situation like this, I talked to Bob and it's, you know, Bob, you know why this decision's been made, we're moving forward with it now. And as you said, you know, Bob continues to openly criticize, that's my role then to sit down with Bob one-on-one and say, Bob, listen, the decision's made. If you're finding issues with the decision that aren't working, cause I know that I don't know everything. I know that decision may sound great. It may look great on paper. We may have talked it through with staff. We may have talked it through with the commission. We have talked it through with license holders. We start to implement it. It's not working. Bob, if you know for some reason or another that it's not working, come to me. Here's tell me why. Tell me why this isn't right. But if it's just because you don't agree with it, that's where my conversation with Bob changes to, you don't have to agree with it, but you have to do it. It's your job. It's your role. You have to do it. If you don't want to do it, that turns into something else then. But you need to do it. You need to do it in the way that we have laid out. And if you unfortunately don't want to do it that way, and it becomes a performance issue, then we're going to deal with that in a very different manner. And then it does become a personnel matter. And then it does become a situation where if you have an employee that's undermining the efforts of the commission and undermining the efforts of the department, you must address that with the employee. And the employee has to either be willing to change or that employee must then, unfortunately, go through that disciplinary process of addressing that they're not following direction, that they're not following the plan that has been laid out. And if they can't do that, you have to go through that, work with HR, work with Bob. But ultimately, if there's no real	

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	reason, and if there is real reason, I'm here to listen. If Bob has great reasons why this isn't working, I'll listen to that and we can pivot. But if it's just that Bob doesn't like it, there is a process that can be followed. And Bob's either going to do his job or, you know, we will address that through personnel actions. And ultimately, either Bob's going to want to be part of the team or Bob's not going to be part of the team. And that will be, you know, his choice. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #6. In regulatory roles in government, maintaining public trust is critical. Describe a time when your professional responsibilities collided with a personal connection or a gray area and how you managed it.</u> Mr. Aaron Reeves, so, I think I mentioned ICMA credential manager. So, we have a very strong code of ethics, especially about personal conflict and things like that. And as mostly as being a city administrator or city clerk, you know, you have to be kind of above that, that you're not that they're not personal, personal connections that affect, you know, how you do your job. And you know, the answer is just that you have a job to do, regardless of, you know, maybe how it may affect others. I think, you know, probably a good example, going back maybe with the city of Rochester and being a city clerk and having to do liquor license and things like that, we lived in Rochester for a very long time. Our kids were raised there. I coached a lot of sports teams. So, I knew, you know, a lot of parents through the, through the, you know, our kids and their teams and things like that. And a lot of times within our licensing or other interactions that I had with our business community, I knew those, you know, the business owners, through the fact that I coach their kids in soccer, I coach them in basketball, whatever it could be. But regardless of that, whatever it was, I never could do anything that would be, could be	

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	perceived as favoritism or anything like that. Regardless of what my relationship might be, how well I might know somebody, I have a job to do. There are codes, you know, there are ordinances that have to be enforced. You have, you know, state statutes that have to be followed. And so, you know, my role is to make sure that those are always followed and regardless of what my personal relationship might be. And, you know, I think, you know, one of my, as I said, one of my good examples in Rochester was, is I knew fairly well through my role and owner of many of our off-sale liquor establishments in the community, multiple. Whenever licensing came up, whenever there was potentially an issue, whatever it was, that part didn't matter. I was always very straightforward with the owner and said, here's a problem. Here's what we have. We had a, you know, potentially an issue, something like that. Not to get into too many details, but we have to address it. And that's the only way you can handle a situation like that. Because if you even... Give a little. Like, you know, we're friends, you know, we know each other. We might even go bowling sometimes. I'll let you know, here's a few more days or here, we'll let it go this time. But next time you have got to make sure that this doesn't happen. If you do that once, you've lost all trust with your staff. You've lost all trust because it's going to get out. You've lost all trust with the public, other license holders. So, there's this, there's never a time when you can let any sort of personal relationship get in the way of what the job is. And if the other person involved doesn't like that, and it affects your personal relationship, then so be it. Then that's just something you have to deal with in a role like this. And like I said, this has been my whole career. I've almost 30 years now. And sometimes you have to make hard decisions that affect people that you're friends with and that you know. But if you don't, you're going to lose that credibility. You're going to lose that faith from the public, from the commission, from your staff. And once you	

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	do that, you can't be effective in the role anymore. It brings a negative light not only on yourself, but it brings on the department. It brings it on the employees of the department. It brings it on to the commission members. And you can't have that. You can't have that local government. You have to try to maintain that highest order of trust with the public and with your license holders. That's all you can do. And so regardless of the situation, I will make sure that the laws are enforced, regardless of what personal impact it might have on friendships or things like that. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #7. Edwin, one of your liquor control investigators, mentions to you that during an on-site inspection at a local liquor establishment yesterday, he was harassed by one of the workers. Please explain what your process would be to properly address the matter.</u> Mr. Aaron Reeves, sure, like I said, I think these are tough jobs. You know, in my role, especially as City Administrator, I mean, I've had building inspectors, police officers, obviously, underneath, you know, my supervision, and of course, you know, liquor control enforcement as well. And these are all areas where it's tough because you're going in enforcing things that people don't want. That they don't want to have to deal with. And they can get very upset about it. And my role, as I talked about before, is to be out front on that, to shield them from that as much as possible so they can do their jobs. So, in a situation like this, I talked with Edwin, what happened? Who did what? What was the employee? Who was the employee involved? Kind of what happened? And I will go out, I will talk to that license holder and say that you have a staff member that is, you know, harassing one of our enforcement officers.	

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	This officer is just trying to do their job. These are not easy jobs. And we can't have that. And generally speaking, you know, you do have some authority within usually the licensing. that you go talk to the license holder and say you can't have your staff doing that. If that continues, you know, we're going to have some enforcement action because you can't be harassing our staff. It's being out there, being in front, getting, not just saying, oh man, that's a tough one. Hopefully next time that doesn't happen but actually going out there and talking to the license holder, talking to the person that did the harassing and say, listen, we're just doing our job. You may not like that we have to do our job, but this is our job. You work in a licensed establishment. If you don't want to have to deal with this, don't work in a licensed establishment then. Go do a different job where you don't have to deal with things like enforcement officers. But we have to do our job. Our role is to enforce the laws, to protect the public, to protect the youth, to protect the citizens in these situations, we exist for a reason. There are laws that are in place for a reason. So, we're just following those laws. We're enforcing those laws. And if you have an issue with that, come to me, talk to me. If you don't like what we're enforcing or how we're enforcing it, I'm happy to talk to you about it. I'm happy to try to figure out you know, what you think your concerns are. But the bottom, you know, at the end of the day, the bottom line is that we have to do our job. We have to be able to do it safely. And if our staff don't feel like they're safe, they're not going to be able to do their job effectively. And we're going to lose good staff. We're going to lose a lot of staff if you, if they're not feeling safe. And so my role is to make sure that they do feel safe, to get out there, talk to the license holders, talk to the establishment, talk to the person doing the harassing and let them know. Just explain, here's what we're doing. Here's why. You don't understand it. I'll give you all the information you need. If you have an issue in the future, please don't interact with our	

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	enforcement officer. Feel free to come to me. Trust me, over a 30-year career, I've been yelled at many, many times by people who are upset over different things. You remain calm, professional, you explain the situation and you listen. Sometimes they may have valid concerns that nobody's listened to before. And so, they come out in a way that can be aggressive, it can be loud. But if you can take the time and listen, maybe we can figure something out that would help and we won't have this happen again. But it's to be in front, is to address those situations and do the best I can to protect our staff and let them be effective. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #8. Tell us about a time you encountered a highly complex regulation or issue. What was your step-by-step process for interpreting the rule and determining the best path forward?</u> Mr. Aaron Reeves, it's always interesting because you always get these things that come up that aren't fully addressed by law. Like, we want to have a special event, but we'd like to serve alcohol, but it's going to be at a non-licensed establishment, but we can get a caterer, but we're going to actually supply the alcohol from a fifth party and There's always these situations that you're dealing with where there's... There's always a lot of gray area when somebody wants to do something. The law doesn't always fully line up to what they want to do. So, in situations like that, you just have to look everything through. Okay, so what do we want to do? Where is it that this situation is going to occur? How does this then fall into law? And then can you make it work?	

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	Because my goal in these complex situations that can come up is get to yes. I mean, you can't always. I mean, there are just sometimes some situations where... It just doesn't line up with law. You can't make it work within the regulatory structure. But a lot of times you can. You just have to be able to work with the other party, whether it's a company, whatever it might be. How do we work together to get there? How do we, you know, what can we do? And if we can't do exactly what they're looking to do, how can we kind of get close to what they want to do? And then here's how it fits in. Here's the licenses you need. Here's the permits you need, you know, things in that sort of situation. So, I think a good example is, during COVID, everything sort of had to shut down for a while. We all know that. But then every state was a little different about when they would allow things to reopen and how they could reopen. One of the biggest things that we had with our bars and restaurants is, at that time, the state of Wisconsin was where I was city administrator in, we opened up. But...it was unclear about like license, we had what's called licensed premises. So, you have licensed premises and that's the area where you're allowed to serve alcohol. Well, when you're not wanting to have a bunch of people inside anymore, how do you get them outside? And this is the idea that we work with our license holders on like the parklets where you can start putting out tables outside or we'll allow for the kind of barriers to be put up and to put some seating on the street where you usually have on-street parking, things like that. But now you're outside your licensed premises. So, what can we do to allow this to happen within our existing local ordinance and expand out the licensed premises. Because, licensed premises are within 4 walls or somehow within an enclosed area. But as we said, during COVID, all of a sudden, you don't want everybody inside. You want them to be able to spread out. You want them to be	

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	outside. How can you get more room? A lot of our bars and restaurants weren't necessarily very big, so how can you allow them to get onto the sidewalk? How can you allow them to get into the parking areas within the road? What can you do then to make sure that your ordinance addresses, how can they make sure that the area is enclosed? How can you make sure that people aren't walking away? with drinks from an area, you know, things like that. So, we worked through that process. We worked with our local license holders. What are we looking for? What can we do? You want to, you want to do some things in, you know, behind in your parking lot. Okay. Let's figure out how we can make that safe. We worked with our, with our police department. What would you like to see happening here? How would you like to see it, you know, your concerns addressed with people walking away from drinks? We don't want people just walking down the street holding a beer. If you're sitting outside with one, great. Don't leave the restaurant's general area, but how do we define that? And then how do we allow for the use of basically public right of way. It wasn't a big thing that we were doing. We didn't have a whole lot of seating on sidewalks. We definitely did not have seating and parking areas, for sure. That was not a thing. But like I said, with COVID, you had to get creative. And we did. We were able to modify our ordinances. We were able to work on enforcement. And we adjusted. So, we did what we thought we could do to let people start serving. We started then seeing how it went. Do we have issues? Okay, well, we have to adjust something then to make sure that we address these issues. And it was, I think, a big win for our bars and restaurants. I think it helped them get customers coming back that didn't feel comfortable sitting inside, but we're okay sitting outside. And like I said, a lot of our places didn't really have outside seating. So how do you expand that and allow that to happen? It's looking at what you can do and getting a yes to help your local businesses. Because our goal in this situation with liquor enforcement is not to	

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	have a negative impact on our businesses. It's to protect public safety, is to make sure that laws are being followed, but we want our businesses to be successful. So, what can we do in our role to make sure that they can be? And anything that you can do, as I said before, to get to a yes to help your local businesses be successful, that's what you want. And especially in that situation where COVID was very hard on local businesses. How do you ensure that they can come out of it and stay? You don't want to see your storefronts empty. You don't want to see your bars, your restaurants, your off sales closing. So, what can you do as the enforcement agency to help them? Let's figure out a way together to help you be successful through a very difficult time. And even post-COVID, now, whatever the situation is, how, you know, our role is not to be the bad guys. Our role is to enforce the law, but at the same time, to work with our local establishments to make sure that they're not only staying within the law, but that they can be successful within it. And sometimes they have ideas, like they want to do who knows what? And then my role is to see, okay, well, how does that fit within the laws and what you can do? And if it doesn't quite fit, what can we do to maybe adjust it to help you be successful so you still can do it? And get a yes where our local businesses can be successful, but we're still within what's allowed within the law and we can still enforce it and make sure that it's a safe environment for everyone when it involves liquor. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #9. Tell us about a situation that you've encountered where you had to address an employee's lack of performance.</u> Mr. Aaron Reeves, sure well, I think I said, I've basically been in local government leadership	

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	for a really long time now. And so, I have been through pretty much every... disciplinary process you can think of from simple verbal and coaching to written to, you know, going through, you know, an entire process up to an unfortunate termination. You know that is always your last resort. It is never the result you want to have to get to, but sometimes it does happen. And I've done this in union, non-union environments. You know, so I've worked with union reps, I've gone through mediation, arbitration, you know, all those sorts of things. And so, I've done the whole gamut of personnel-related actions with employees. But again, the bottom line with it is, is that the goal is not punishment, the goal is to change. The goal is the change of action that caused the situation. I want my employees to be successful. If they're having issues, I don't want this to be a punitive process. I want it to be a change process. This happened; this cannot happen anymore. What do we have to do to make sure that that doesn't happen, you know, happen again? And that's why we have an HR department. That's why we have a personnel policy. That's why you have a process that you follow. Oftentimes I've worked in civil service situations, so I've had to work through civil service when it comes to situations of discipline. So, I have a full understanding of all that. And none of them are easy because 90% of the time, the employees aren't trying to do the wrong thing, but sometimes the wrong thing happens. And so, then my role is to address that situation, follow the policies to make sure that sometimes discipline is necessary as part of that process. But then the ultimate goal is the change. It's to make sure the employee doesn't do that anymore, that the employee does change and they can be successful in their role. And I want them to be successful. I want them to stay. I don't want to get to the termination point, but if it has to happen, I definitely have done that many times before. And it's not something that is ever easy. No matter, sometimes it's very warranted or sometimes you have no choice. It's just the situation that the employee	

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	has put you in as a supervisor. But even in those, I try to do my best to make it the most human process possible because you are dealing with another person. Oftentimes they're going through could be bad situations that are causing what's happening to occur. You know, I think these are hard ones because you don't want to go into specifics because you are talking about a person and you are talking about somebody that went through something that I had to address directly. But, you know, like I said, I'm trying to be just in general that I definitely have done that. But, you know, I've had very good employees who have made mistakes. They've, speaking of these situations, they have gotten a DWI and they lose their driver's license. Well, if you're a public works employee, you can't do your job if you don't have a driver's license. You might be a great employee. You might have made one mistake one night. But unfortunately, you have to go through that process. And ultimately, you end up having to, you know, terminate an employee because they can't do their job. If you don't have a means to drive a vehicle, let alone a CDL, there's no way you can, you know, you can complete that role. But I guess what I'm saying, you know, just in general is that I've gone through all the processes. My goal is to coach. My goal is to lead and train, but ultimately it is that, you know, my responsibility to make sure that our policies are followed and that if we have personnel issues that they get addressed and that I do what I can to support the employee through the process, even if it's, you know, ultimately a very difficult process that could end in termination. I want to do it in a way that supports the employee in the best way possible. And I do all of these things in conjunction with HR. You know, I want to make sure that what I'm doing is right. So, I want to make sure that HR is reviewing everything I'm doing before I do it to make sure that I'm not missing something. I'm not an HR professional. So, I recognize that I want their input. I want their	

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	involvement all the way through just to make sure that, you know, ultimately when it's done, it's done. I have never had a decision overturned, whether it's a union, civil service, you know, whatever it might be. I've never had an appeal overturned. I've always made sure I follow the proper steps. I've documented everything in the right way. And I want to make sure that I, you know, that always is the case in conjunction with HR to make sure that these things are addressed as they need to be, unfortunately, at, you know, at times. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #10. Provide an example of when you had to manage or influence a decision involving your company's or department's budget and resource allocation. How did you balance operational needs with fiscal responsibility?</u> Mr. Aaron Reeves, yeah, I mean, city administrator, that's your job, is to listen to your council, what their goals and objectives are, and then give them a budget that they can approve. And it's not always easy. You're dealing with five, seven, or more elected officials that all have very maybe different views and goals and objectives for the organization. And my role as the administrator is to listen to all those and then put together a budget that meets all those varying goals, objectives, desires, all those sorts of things of the elected officials. And I've done that successfully many, many times. I love budgeting. I am very good at budgeting. I pride myself on the financial side of my roles. And... It is, as I talked about, I think, in a number of these situations, a lot of listening. It's a lot of hearing of, you know, what is it that's needed by the organization, and then how do you provide a budget that can do that? And in many cases, throughout my career, you know, budgets are dictated by statute. So, I've worked with very strict levy limits. You can only raise your tax levy so much. I've worked, you know, with various limitations of fiscally conservative councils, but still high expectations, all	

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	those sorts of things. So, the process is just. You know, you have your bottom line. This is what the department does. You have to be able to fulfill these functions. What does it cost to do that? What can you do more efficiently? You can't always, you can almost never do less. You almost always have to do more. So how can you continue to at least do what you are doing or even more, but with a finite amount of budget? You can't come in with just every year, like we need another 10%, we need another 15%. It's not realistic. You must be able to operate within a realistic budget and my role is to put that budget together. My role is to work with staff, figure out efficiencies, figure out how we can do things smarter? How can we do things better? Can we use technology more? What can we do to help keep our costs down where we can still provide the high level of service that's expected for the department? And I think I'm very good at that. I've done it for a very long time. I think I've been very successful with it. I think if you, I think any more, there's nothing you can hide. I mean, do any Google searches and things like that. I've always had councils very, very happy with my budgets, the service levels that we provide. I think I'm very good at finding efficiencies. I think I'm very good at finding better ways to do things. Just because you've always done it this way doesn't mean you always have to do it that way. There may be better ways to do it. There may not be, but there may be. What you do doesn't always have to remain the same either. Yes, you have to enforce laws. You must make sure that that baseline is being met. But how are you doing that? What else are you doing within the department that maybe can be adjusted to focus on the resources where they really need to be and where the concerns are? I pride myself on being able to do that very well. And I think I have a great history of it. I think I have a very well-documented history of it. And bottom line is I'm good with budgets. I really like working with staff and	

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	elected officials, appointed officials, to get to budgets that everybody's happy with. The board's got to, ultimately, the county board's got to approve it as part of the overall budget. And I want to make sure that we're giving them something that they're always very happy with and can approve without issue. Ms. Jill Niitani, that was the last question. Mr. Aaron Reeves, half hour. Do you get bonus points for being that far under? Do you guys get a break? Ms. Jill Niitani, Oh, no, you don't, but OK, so just I think that was it. I don't have any follow-up. We don't have any follow-up questions here. So, we'd like to go ahead and conclude the interview for the Director of Liquor Control position from 9:21 AM. So, we wanted to thank you for your time, Aaron, today. I know you are far away from us right now, but we appreciate you connecting with us today. Mr. Aaron Reeves, yeah, I definitely appreciate it and thank you for letting me do it from Norway. I appreciate that. So that's great. I'm glad I didn't miss the opportunity. Ms. Jill Niitani, thank you, We will get back to you shortly with the status of here. Reeves, Aaron, sure. Ms. Jill Niitani, thank you very much. Reeves, Aaron, all right, thank you. <u>Ken Herman:</u>	

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	Ms. Jill Niitani, we are here with Ken Herman for the interview for the Director of Liquor Control position. And just to let you know, Raina and I are going to be the interview panel for this phase two of the director position recruitment. These interviews are being held in open session and members of the public as well as the liquor commission members are free to be present at these interviews. Today's date is August 10th, 2026, and we are here again with Ken Herman, candidate for the Liquor Director position. Before we get started with the questions, we would like to inform you that this interview is scheduled for one hour. There are 10 questions, so we ask you to use your time wisely, as the interview will be concluded at the one-hour mark. If you'd like me to repeat a question, please feel free to ask. Are you ready to begin with the first question? Ken Herman, yes, thank you. Ms. Jill Niitani, for the record, the time is 9:49 AM. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #1. Please walk us through your career history, highlighting the key experiences and milestones that make you the right fit for this Liquor Director role.</u> Mr. Ken Herman, yes, thank you. I started, excuse me, I started with the department as a liquor trainee I had a lot of experience in. Uhh...loss prevention, law enforcement, and military also. But that was the only position open at the time, and I wanted to get into the department, so I accepted a trainee position. I worked my way up from there into every level of the department, except for the administrative side. And during that course, I've... made changes, I guess, in the way that the department handled enforcement. Not really a lot of time to go into every detail, but when I first started with the department, there were certain... ways that we did enforcement that I figured could be kind of updated, but so I just	

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	tried them and they worked out well. And then I started a program. To where? We were insured to make it to every licensee every month and that people weren't repeating going to the same places just because they liked the place or something to that effect. And that worked out well. And as I moved up. I... Created a... Youth awareness program, and I've implemented that at all of the Boys and Girls Clubs, and a lot of the...Middle schools, it's kind of geared more to middle school age kids. I've joined the Hookele Coalition, which is a... a group coalition on the island. Assisting with youth on the island, also, there's a lot of training and... Really helps you to build the local youth. Through a lot of different programs, I was also...the acting investigator for, I was getting paid for that at one point. And during that time, the director, the interim director was Director Baliaris, and who had to go out on a medical for a couple months and I took over as the interim or the temporary director at that time. And... did not get paid, but that was not an issue because I was already getting paid in the temporary position as the investigator for. So, during that time was during COVID. And. That was a challenging part of that, but I guess to sum it all up, I've worked my way up and learned every aspect of every position I was in. I feel I excelled at all the positions, and I always...I always try to rise to whatever position I am put into or asked for. Thank you. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #2. As the Liquor Director, how would you prioritize your first 12 months on the job? Please break down your immediate focus for the first 6 months and how that shifts as you approach the one-year mark.</u> Mr. Ken Herman, the first, first thing I would probably do is...any weak points that I have tried to really strengthen those points. Also reach out to every licensee, which I already have very good relationships with every licensee on this island, who have worked with me and the	

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	feedback I get is really, really well with that. Letting them know that I am in the position and always open to them if they need. I have some other ideas, that sort of thing, but the main thing for the first six months is to make sure that I learn. Any aspect that I may not have been aware of at that level and work closer with the other islands in trying to bring back some programs that we have not had in quite a while. I have some ideas for that, but I want to run those past the other islands to make sure that everybody's on board. And learn as much as I can from Director Rapozo before he goes back into his retirement. But, all in all, the first six months is going to be letting, letting the licensees know that I'm there listening to their needs, their thing to make sure that we are not just a regulatory part, but that we're also there to assist them. To make sure that we're partners in that, because in the end, that's where our budget and everything comes from also. And to make sure that the staff is always fully staffed and has what they need and try to bunk up a little bit of training also. But thank you. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani Question #3. How will you ensure your enforcement team consistently and fairly applies the laws under HRS Chapter 281?</u> Mr. Ken Kerman, the enforcement team, we have 3 new investigators that are doing extremely well. And learning fast, and what was always installed to me into my system of enforcement was...to treat everybody fairly. If you're going to do something with one licensee, then make sure that you hold on to that and you do that with every licensee. There are going to be mitigating circumstances and that sort of thing that would change certain things on a case-by-case basis, but overall, I believe our department has a good reputation for being fair, firm but fair, and being a partner like I mentioned earlier. But making sure also that the rules and the laws match. What we're	

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	putting out there and, I think sometimes a problem with if we have a full staff. And this runs into the administrative side and the enforcement side, making sure that when people call in with questions that were consistently giving the same answers across the board. Our investigators currently are running on an average of about... 10 to 15 checks a night. And we get pretty good questions while we're out there, so making sure that we consistently give the same answers to everyone, and if we don't know the answer, that we let them know that we will research it and get back to them as soon as possible, and that we follow up on that. The second part of that question, the second part of the answer to that question, also makes sure that all the investigators and the administrative staff have. The training and the proper tools to be there and assist the licensees during normal hours and I've always had a good relationship with the establishments to where they know they can reach out to me at any time if it's if need be. I'm always available to them. Thank you. <u>Miss Jill Niitani, Question #4. Based on your past management experience, how would you describe your leadership style?</u> Mr. Ken Herman, my leadership style has, I guess, the best way of putting it in has evolved throughout the years. The military, my fairly long time in the service. The coaching styles that they used, the leadership styles that they used to teach at Leadership Management, we call LMET, Leadership Management Educational Training that I've had throughout the years, always taught that the best leadership styles were authoritarian coach. So, it took a while to adjust, coming out of the military into civilian life, and changing that authoritarian coach to strictly coach. I very much believe in the coach leadership style and meritocracy and things like that to where we're building people up. But I've now actually been in the department longer than I was in the military. So, I think I've got it down fairly well. And	

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	even through my leadership positions out at PMRF as a contract police officer and my years of loss prevention. Just learning a lot from your subordinates and the people above you, having good and bad examples above you, you tend to learn what styles work with a lot of different personalities. So, I gear myself to the personality of each individual that I'm working with and make sure that we come to a style that works, you know, in for them and for me. But mostly out of just years of experience of doing it. You learn along the way, and the word I'm looking for is hopefully perfect style. And I'm not perfect, but I think we've I've, I try to be especially with employees because I want them to feel comfortable coming to work every day and knowing that they can confide in their supervisor. But thank you. I'm sorry, can I add one more thing to that? Also making, making sure, not often is part of leadership style, but making sure that you have the answers for them when they have questions or they have needs. So, being knowledgeable, I think, has a lot to do with leadership style also. If you can be one of the greatest leaders, but if they come to you every time and you don't have the answers, then they're going to lose confidence in you. All right, thank you. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #5. After 6 months as the Liquor Control Director, you begin to implement changes that you feel will provide for greater operational efficiency. You had previously discussed these changes with your team and took their input into consideration. One of your staff members, Bob, has consistently opposed your changes, and the suggestions that Bob has made did not align with your goals. As you roll out your changes, Bob continues to oppose them and is openly critical of these changes in front of everyone. How do you proceed?</u> Mr. Ken Herman, depending on the level of how strong Bob is speaking, especially in front of other people, that sort of thing. First, I would try to meet with him, and work things out. Find out if maybe he's got a specific reason why he's totally against it, uh, and try to be, you know,	

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	openly listen and not just let my ego go with it and be like, no, I'm the boss. This will be this way. But if it comes to that point, yeah, the buck needs to stop somewhere. But. Depending on what level of dissent you're talking about, if he's speaking. Especially about this in front of people, and... especially out to the licensees, that sort of thing. I think an investigation at that point would be warranted, and... Depending on, again, the level of it, if it can't be taken care of. Then there's union rules, there's all kinds of stuff on how to conduct. A proper investigation if an employee is not. Following all the rules. So, first thing I believe is the employee needs to be informed of the investigation and see if that helps quell the attitude, so to speak. If that does not, at that point, make sure to have HR and possibly legal on board. But hopefully it never reaches that level. And as has happened in our department sometimes. Hopefully it can be taken care of with meeting with the individual 1st and quell the situation at the department level. That's kind of a short answer. I mean, it's going to be complex depending on each situation. But from what you told me, that's pretty much how I would handle it. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #6. In regulatory roles in government, maintaining public trust is critical. Describe a time when your professional responsibilities collided with a personal connection or gray area, and how you managed it.</u> Mr. Ken Herman, that's actually a very good question also and have experience. The first thing that comes to my mind was during COVID. The governor was putting out rules on distancing, that sort of thing, and we were told, by the governor's office that we would be enforcing. Some of these rules. I believe our department and I believe Parks and Recreation was also told the same thing by the governor's office that we would be enforcing COVID rules. On, uh, for lack of a better	

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	word, civilians. Uh, people that weren't licensees. This was talking mostly in. pertaining to our department talking about enforcing these on customers inside of establishments. That sort of thing. And our whole department pretty much was very uncomfortable with this. So, it was very hard to try to satisfy both sides to where you're following, you know, what your government is telling you to do. But knowing that we are... sworn law enforcement officers only within 281, HRS 281. This was a difficult thing for all our investigators at the time. So, the way that we handled it, and I was the field, one of the field supervisors at that time. The way that we had handled it was... We did a lot of verbal cautions, that sort of thing, but we never cited anybody. Any customer in an establishment for not following the COVID rules. We could usually use kind of verbal judo skills and being polite with customers and mostly working through the establishment's management, making sure that they're following all the COVID rules and that they have things set up to where the customers aren't confused about. Uh, the rules. That's the main thing that comes to my mind. There were some things that with a past director that, there was conflict with, but I tried every. Every way to resolve a lot of that with the director himself, and was basically told to stay in my lane, that sort of thing, but. That's probably not a not a good example, but we tried to. Follow as much as we could. And satisfy all parties involved, uh, mostly through talking things out. Making sure that we kept our integrity because not like you mentioned in the question. The public sees how the public sees us all the time when we're out there. And this day and age of electronics and that sort of thing, we are always in public view. We are being recorded. We are just making sure that your own ethical. Behavior is about par. And anytime somebody outside of the industry asks questions, you know, be polite and	

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	explain to them what we do, because a lot of people do not understand what we do. Thank you. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #7. Edwin, one of your Liquor Control Investigators, mentions to you that during an on-site inspection at a local liquor establishment yesterday, he was harassed by one of the workers. Please explain what your process would be to properly address the matter.</u> Mr. Ken Herman, okay, good question, and it does happen. I have had investigators who were threatened with bodily harm, that sort of thing. The first thing I normally would normally do is contact Management of the after speaking with the investigator and getting the getting the full story or getting half of the story at least from him. I would contact you. Management of the establishment. Sorry, the reason I mentioned the establishment is the management of the establishment, because the question didn't really state if this was a member of the public or if this was a member of the staff of the establishment, so...yes, please, sorry. Ms. Jill Niitani, for clarity, the question. I'll read it again, just to be clear. So, Edwin, one of your liquor control investigators, mentions to you that during an on-site inspection at a local liquor establishment yesterday, he was harassed by one of the workers. Please explain. Mr. Ken Herman, okay, my apologies. I heard the question incorrectly. Thank you for your clarification. So, as I was saying, then I would contact management of the establishment, and get their side of the story also, if they were even aware of it. And, depending on the, You know, let them know that, hey, you know. We don't condone that in any way, shape, or form. And if need be, pull video.	

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	It's going to depend on the level of harassment, if it was any way, shape, or form. Close to physical or extreme verbal abuse, then quiet police could be called on the on the individual, for further investigation also. But we do have rules within our establish rules and laws that state that the investigators will not be harassed in there, performance of their duties. So, they could be ultimately cited for that. I'm sorry, I do not have the specific number of the HRS or the rule in front of me right now, but there are. It could fall into the realm of not allowing an investigator to complete their duties. But hopefully management between myself and either management or ownership of the establishment would. Take care of it as soon as possible, and then I would follow up with the investigator to make sure that the situation did. Improve, and that he was not harassed again. Thank you. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #8. Tell us about a time you encountered a highly complex regulation issue. What was your step-by-step process for interpreting the rule and determining the best path forward? Highly complex investigation regulation or issue.</u> Mr. Ken Herman understood. Thank you. Oh. The first thing that comes to my mind is more on a licensing issue. There are, I have been involved in some pretty complex investigations, but...I guess I'm familiar enough with most of those to where I've had. Taking care of those, OK, but sometimes. The most complex issues that I deal with sometimes are the licensing issues when it comes to big corporations, hotels where there are multiple entities involved in the actual ownership of the hotel and where the ownership lands. There's a lot of management agreements, this sort of thing that get involved and learning from Mr. Rapozo, mostly on this sort of thing, he's taught me how to kind of. Not go down the rabbit hole too far, and you'll keep finding things as that'll just make the rabbit hole deeper, but... Usually, on these big corporations, these big hotels.	

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	Mostly in the not just hotels, but large corporations that have multiple ownerships, this sort of thing is trying to find out where the where the buck stops, basically, and most of these run management agreements, so the license will actually be under somebody on a management agreement. That's where the buck stops, basically locally, but then making sure that the money is filtering to the right people and that all the liquor proceeds are going to the right LLC or corporation. Can be very complex; leases a lot of times are very complex, and on the enforcement side, on the more regulatory side. Trace investigations, because they...involve dealing with the public and the public safety trust. Making sure that we're following state laws, county rules, this sort of thing to where if we need to go after an establishment that is responsible for a bodily injury accident or death accident out on our streets or...sometimes not in the streets. I've done trace investigations with major assault cases that almost wound up in death. Working closely with legal on the complex issues, on what we can cite for, assisting the investigators on making sure that every...T is dotted and I's are crossed, that sort of thing, but...Having public trust in you can make it very complex and making sure that we're holding that trust. Thank you. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #9. Tell us about a situation that you've encountered where you had to address an employee's lack of performance?</u> Mr. Ken Herman, thankfully that hasn't happened. Very often, I've trained the last, I believe it's now up to 12 or 13 investigators and work closely with all of them. I have had people who, I don't know if work ethic was not the greatest, I guess, is a good way of putting it. Whenever I've had situations like that where somebody's performance. Being at work, you know being	

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	out just while doing checks, just socializing more than doing the job. The way that I normally would handle it is to talk to the person first, let them know, hey, you know, what's going on. Secondly. Make sure I go out and ride along with them. And that I'm showing a good example for them. As I've trained all these investigators, there's one thing I've always got to let them know is that. When it comes to evaluation time or performance review time, there should be no surprises. So, when you're coming into that review, you pretty much know already what that review is going to be. I've worked with you close enough throughout the time. If I have problems with your, or not problems, not a good word, but if I have issues with some of your work, then we're going to work on it and I'm going to build you up. If it tends to be an ongoing issue, then documentation, documentation, documentation. Because some people just...Yeah, some people don't want to perform sometimes, but we've been...We've been fairly lucky that we haven't really had that bad of cases with our investigators. Usually when they leave, it's for other reasons. But in my time, I don't think we've ever had to disciplinary somebody that has, you know. We've had discipline to a small level, but we've never had to get rid of somebody or let somebody go because their work performance was not up to par. The main thing is, is that you've got and if you've got good training and you've got a good supervisor out there having your back and showing you the right way, then anything is possible. Thank you. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #10. Provide an example of when you had to manage or influence a decision involving your company's or department's budget and resource allocation. How did you balance operational needs with fiscal responsibility?</u> Mr. Ken Herman, good question. Thank you. This is one of the areas where I need, if I, if I were	

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	to say I have a weakness, this probably would be my one weakness I've worked with. Budgeting in the past, but it's been a long time ago when I was when I was in the service and I was a tug. What do you call a tug master? Uh, we did have budgets to run to keep within fiscal standards, that sort of thing, but I have not really worked that closely with budgets. Other than I guess in my personal life, I run my household budget very tightly. Granted, this is on a way, way higher level, but I guess for my level in the department, I don't really. That information is not shared with me a lot. I do follow because the budget is posted out within our paperwork, that sort of thing, so I have looked at our budgets, the salaries, the, I guess the intricacies, I guess, is the good way of saying it, but there's a lot of things in the budget that. I guess could look at it being trimmed or whatever. I guess my knowledge of it though also is that we are, along with the water department, only two departments in the county that run off of our own budget. So, our budget is run, is paid for by our establishments, by our partners. So, make sure every year that we meet the gross liquor sales and percentage fees and that sort of thing is extremely important. And I have had to deal with that when I was the acting director. During that time, gross liquor sales, percentage fees and stuff were due, and I have. I was not part of the budget approval process at that time, but I did give the annual report to the mayor. During that time. And, knowing that part of that budget...Is required by law that there's certain training that has to be done. That goes that runs off of the fines. So, a certain percentage of our fines has to show going to training. Either of the licensee or to the investigators or the or the or the department. That is by law, and sorry, it's a little bit off track of the question, but, also, something that I want to get back into and going back into basics is better training. We've kind of slipped away from some of the training for the investigators. And so that's finding a way to make sure that that gets back into the budget. and used properly. And now with virtual training, that sort of thing, it should be fairly easy to implement. And the cost, I believe, is lower than traveling to Vegas like we used to and going through coalitions and that sort of thing in the mainland that costs more. But, yeah, I mean, if I if I was to say I have a weakness, that would be the one thing I'm going to need to really buckle into and get myself up to par. Thank you.	

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	Ms. Jill Niitani, Thank you. Mr. Ken Herman, sorry, one more thing about that too is making sure I have good staff to assist me with that. Ms. Jill Niitani, thank you. So that was the last question. Since we'll officially conclude the interview with Ken Herman for the director of the control position. The time is 10.25 AM. So, thank you very much, Ken, for your participation and your interest in the position. So we will, yeah, we will get back to you shortly to let you know what the status is. Mr. Ken Herman, just thank you everybody for the opportunity. Ms. Jill Niitani, thank you. Ms. Jill Niitani, we are here with Robert Valencia-Aiken for the interview for the Director of Liquor Control position. And just to let you know, Raina and I are going to be the interview panel for this phase two of the director position recruitment. These interviews are being held in open session and members of the public as well as the liquor commission members are free to be present at these interviews. Today's date is August 10th, 2026, and we are here again with Robert Valencia-Aiken, candidate for the Liquor Director position. Before we get started with the questions, we would like to inform you that this interview is scheduled for one hour. There are 10 questions, so we ask you to use your time wisely, as the interview will be concluded at the one-hour mark. If you'd like me to repeat a question, please feel free to ask. for the record, the time is 11:02 AM Are you ready to begin with the first question?	

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	<u>Robert Valencia-Aiken:</u> <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #1. Please walk us through your career history, highlighting the key experiences and milestones that make you the right fit for this Liquor Director role.</u> Mr. Robert Valcencia-Aiken, I was with the county of Pueblo, as well as Colorado Springs. And we had to liaison between the managers of the food, different food managers across the three bases, which included Peterson, Schofield, and Cheyenne Mountain. And the biggest thing was the education, teamwork, community building, and of course, as you probably know, with the Air Force or military, the regulations can only get more stringent. So, everything that we did involves making sure that they had an understanding and education of what they were doing, as well as how to implement those regulations across the board. Communicable Disease Program dealt with a lot of interviews, education, as well as making sure that all data was verified and we had proper filing, Excel spreadsheets and things of that nature as well. And all the while I was doing a nonprofit with my wife. So, there was community service that we did. We helped an orphanage in Guatemala. We were giving goods and services. She was sewing products for the orphanage, as well as trying to give financially and raising funds for them. From that role, I transitioned to consulting. And in the consulting field, I deal with personal development. So, the biggest thing that I do is help individuals and organizations to develop professionally and personally. And a lot of it was communication, making sure that active listening, those areas for me, were handled as best as I could in order to perceive what the pinpoint or the problem is for the individuals and organizations in order to help them anywhere from stress management to marriage coaching, as well as professional development and different leadership skills. And then, most recently here in Kauai, I was helping a church in	

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	the local area, helping to teach, helping the members in Kilauea, as well as meeting with members and making sure that I can help them walk through the various areas of their life and progressing and moving forward. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #2. As the Liquor Director, how would you prioritize your first 12 months on the job? Please break down your immediate focus for the first 6 months and how that shifts as you approach the one-year mark.</u> Mr. Valencia-Aiken, yeah, thank you for that question. So, 12 months. The first six months, I think I would even break that up into four quarters. The first quarter would be learning, you know, whether it was a transitioning liquor director, but a lot of it has to be learning and active listening, getting an understanding of the field, the skill set, administrative roles, as well as learning the I know there's an Article 16, Chapter 281. So, a lot of the logistics of that. So, in my role in the Air Force, I had to learn the regulations before I could communicate them as professionally and objectively as I can. So, the first three months would be learning regulations, communication, building rapport and relationships with everyone that is involved, including the commission. The next three months would be figuring out how my skill set and my strengths can help with liaison with the commission as well as the community. And from my understanding that there's various roles to the director position from administration, as well as making sure that there's an education piece going on. So, the next three months would be that, making sure that the rapport was built. And then the following six months would probably be looking at a couple of things. One of them would be at the tasks at hand, seeing how we can fine tune them, make them better, improve them,	

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	getting feedback from whether the commission or the office, the different individuals, whether above me or below me, and taking that information, figuring out how to streamline the processes that we have and making sure that the objectives are met clearly and more efficiently as best as we can. And I think from that last six months would help to project the next 12 months. I like to work in quarters and breaking them up and then after, you know, probably be around the third quarter. So, right around August, we begin to project the next 12 months and figure out what areas are, you know, like in business, the key performing indicators that we would look at in order to bring improvement to the program. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #3. How will you ensure your enforcement team consistently and fairly applies the laws under HRS Chapter 281?</u> Mr. Robert Valencia-Aiken, yeah, great question. So, the enforcement consistency and fairness. First and foremost, I would probably wager that those that are enforcing have already been part of the program. So, they already understand that. So, we'd have to be on the same page in the integrity piece. The Air Force, we had three core values, service before self, integrity first. And the really big piece is that integrity first that I wanted to highlight. The third one was excellence above all else. And we would really develop unless there already is an ethos or environment or a culture where the fairness is there. in the education piece or with the enforcers, it would be communication, culture building, as well as making sure that we trust each other, that the consistency and fairness across the board happens from a foundational level amongst our team. And that has to really be championed with on the objective piece that we do this according to the regulations,	

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	regardless of who it is, where it is, or what we're dealing with. So, the objective piece is very important. We did that across the board in the Air Force through all our programs, including the food handlers and sanitation program. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #4. Based on your past management experience, how would you describe your leadership style?</u> Yeah, great question. So, leadership style, I lead with person first. So, I am definitely a people person, communication's very important to me. So, I build relationships. I try to build trust. And from the trust and from getting to know the people that I work with, we really, that's the way I lead service, making sure that if, you know, I'm giving an example. I'm not sure if this happens here, but if the toilet's broken, you know, for instance, I would be the first one in there wanting to clean it and really leading by example and making sure that they understand that the workplace is not just what I do. And then at home, I'm a different person. I try to be the same person all across the board. try to be transparent, making sure I have a listening ear to know the individuals that I'm working with, the individuals that I'm supervising, and building trust that way. There was a, the quote, just, it's a beautiful quote. It's that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. That really is the emphasis in how I lead. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #5. After 6 months as the Liquor Control Director, you begin to implement changes that you feel will provide for greater operational efficiency. You had previously discussed these changes with your team and took their input into consideration. One of your staff members, Bob, has consistently opposed your changes, and the suggestions that Bob has made did not align with your goals. As you roll out your changes, Bob continues to oppose them and is openly critical of these changes in front of everyone. How do you proceed?</u>	

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	Mr. Robert Valencia-Aiken, Yeah, good question, so, I would assume that I had several sit downs with Bob. In a lot of scenarios that I've been in, even in the Air Force, where I have handled situations like this, where we would make decisions and there would be subordinates that did not agree. At least in my experience, oftentimes, when the subordinates disagreed, it wasn't a disagreement on what I was doing. It usually had an underlying root problem with it, whether it was their voice wasn't being heard, they disagreed with the way we were handling something or even maybe a leadership style that I had. So, I know that we're already past that. And, you know, Bob is disagreeing and he's really opposing strong. I would attempt to peel the layers back to see if there's a root cause for Bob. I've had situations where there was a home issue that was going on in one of my subordinates in the Air Force, and the home issue actually stemmed to the workplace, and they were opposing the way that we were handling the program that we were doing. And it actually took several conversations for them to really open it up and let me know that, hey, home issues are happening. As we discussed those and navigated those and I helped them to get some help, then the areas of the workplace actually started to get better. So, I'm very much a holistic individual that likes to look at all the pieces. Now, if Bob is continuing to oppose, then it depends with your arena and how you handle, whether it's paperwork, those things like that. But I would have to do it very tactfully and have the conversations with Bob of, hey, Bob, you know, I really like you as a person, separating the person from the workplace objectively and letting them know, hey, if you know, if we continue this way, you know, these are the options that we have. And then let Bob have really his say in the options he would like to do. Maybe he just doesn't like the position. He wants to move position. He wants something else and his voice is not being heard. So, I would	

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	take a little more deliberate time in getting to hear Bob, but actively listen to what Bob is really saying underneath everything. And then depending on what information he gives me, whether verbally, non-verbally, or even reading his facial gestures, helping him to navigate options that would enable all of us as a team to work better together, at the same time helping Bob. Now, at the end of the day, if, you know, if Bob said, hey, you know, I'm done, I really oppose this, then there's really not much that I can do on my end, but as a leader, just helping Bob to walk through the exit as tactfully, as gracefully, and as honorably as I could. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #6. In regulatory roles in government, maintaining public trust is critical. Describe a time when your professional responsibilities collided with a personal connection or gray area, and how you managed it.</u> Robert Valencia-Aiken, Wow, I've had a lot of these. I'll name two of them. So I know regulation roles in the Air Force, because we were the subject matter experts for where we were at, we built a lot of relationships, whether it's with commanders or managers of different restaurants. There were managers that desired to be able to slide on regulations, whether it was food temperature or labeling. There are these little dings that they get. And there was one area, it was a golf course where I was at, where they were close to getting shut down. And the gray area was the relationship that we were building. And it was trying to lean towards of, can we let this slide? But it wasn't a very direct way. And I'm sure you have all dealt with something like that. And really it was verbally, again, communication. If things are not communicated, then there's a big gray area that is left. So, communication piece is simple as, hey, you know, I understand that we have a work relationship as well as a personal	

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	relationship. I like to keep the line very clear and very black and white. I handle my job to the highest standard as I can. There's no, how would we say, no ding on our relationship in the way that I perceive you, but I have to make sure that I deal with the work arena as best as I can. And really from there, that kind of shut it down with that one. And then a more recent one, you know, in the role that I was with the church, I deal with a lot of those a lot, whether it's going to an arena where they, you know, want to offer me drinks or things like that, or have me step in a gray area that for me, I have convictions, moral convictions and things like that that I wasn't willing. And again, communication. I built a relationship with the individual. I let them know, hey, this is an area of conviction, boundaries, made sure that my boundaries were clear and letting know that, you know, the public and the professional and the personnel all have to have integrity across the board. There can't be a separation between one or another. And in a lot of those cases, it went well. And, you know, communication was the biggest key. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #7. Edwin, one of your Liquor Control Investigators, mentions to you that during an on-site inspection at a local liquor establishment yesterday, he was harassed by one of the workers. Please explain what your process would be to properly address the matter.</u> Mr. Robert Valencia-Aiken, yeah, if I can just get clarification, so Edwin was on site at a liquor establishment and Edwin was harassed from one of the workers? Ms. Jill Niitani, correct. Mr. Robert Valencia-Aiken, good question. So, for that one, I would have to, if I was already read up on the policies for harassment, then, you know, of course, I would follow the policy. If I was not aware of the full policy, I'd have to make sure that I read it and have an	

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	understanding of how to document everything. I know that with harassment in the Air Force, we had a zero policy. There was just no kidding around for any of it. As soon as something happened, it was reported and there were certain individuals that it would be reported to immediately. We all had a communication on, hey, this is how we deal with harassment. This is who you report it to. This is the documentation that we follow. And then depending on the harassment, the level, then it would be funneled to the appropriate, you know, channel. We had some severe harassment, and it would actually have to go to the authorities and there'd have to be a lot of documentation. There'd have to be separation between the individual that was harassed and the individual that was harassed. So that would be another key element that I would I would assume here is we'd have to make sure that we separated them. and got all the information from both sides. And I'm sure on the establishment side, they would have policies as well. So, we'd have to make sure that we coordinate together and communicate, making sure that we all objectively looked at how to channel this through the proper authorities and whether it elevated higher or there was just a boundary that was established between the Edwin and that liquor establishment. We had to have somebody else go in there for further inspections. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #8. Tell us about a time you encountered a highly complex regulation issue. What was your step-by-step process for interpreting the rule and determining the best path forward?</u> Mr. Robert Valencia-Aiken asked highly complex regulations or what was the second piece? I'm sorry. Ms. Jill Niitani, I'll read it again. Tell us about a time you encountered a highly complex regulation or issue. What was your step-by-step process for interpreting the rules and determining the best path forward?	

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	Mr. Robert Valencia-Aiken, Thank you, that's a great question. The complex regulation issue step by step. So, with the regulations, complex, shade of gray. So, in the Air Force, there was one area that we had to do. We had to make sure that we were enforced when communicable diseases or any of those were reported. They were reported through public health. And we had to go through a long process. There was a management system. I lost the name of it, but there were a couple of things in that. There were times when the regulations needed us to supply as much information as we could for proper data and analyzing as they did all statistics for the county. And we did not have all of the information. So, there was an outbreak that happened in the springs. And the regulation said, you know, there was not a tipping point, I forget the name, the word for it. But when there was a certain amount, then it had to be reported higher. And if it was below the threshold, then you could keep it internal, you would report and you would leave it alone. So, the issue that we had was that shade of gray between the below and we do less work and the above and we do more work. So, in this scenario, it was really the Air Force way. It was figuring out, okay, well, according to regulation, we were okay if we did the shade of gray and went below, we would have been completely fine. Even talking to everybody that, you know, seeking counsel, that was a huge piece is figuring out, hey, has anybody around me ever encountered this? And what did you do? In a lot of them, you know, we had, hey, just leave it the way it is. We're good to go. And then someone, well, you know, if you report it, we're going to have to do more work, but you can at least cover your ****. So, the route that we went was the Air Force Way, which is a higher standard. We reported everything. We had to do more work. In the end, not only did we cover our ****, but we made sure, hey, if we went below and it was worse, it could have been to the detriment of the community. We would have improperly reported.	

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	We probably would not have gotten in trouble because we had that gap where we didn't have information, but because we took the extra length and reported above, then we at least made sure and ensured to the public as well as to their office, hey, when we do things, we're going to do it above. We're going to do more work, but at least we not only cover ourselves, but we're helping the community in case there was an outbreak and it would have been worse. So, it's always the higher and the step by step with that, of course, the first thing that I did step by step, it was looking at the regulations, reading if there are any loopholes, sometimes one regulation would infer, hey, go read this one. We had to do a lot of research between all of the different, they call Air Force regulations, AFRs. And that shade of gray is where we found it. And then from there, I went and sought counsel and called because we did have access to different public health and different bases. So, it was pinging them and saying, hey, have you ever encountered this? We were very big on that. And pinging the other bases. Have you ever encountered this? What have you done? What counsel can you give me so I can make the best decision? And of course, internally, we made the decision to go above and beyond. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #9. Tell us about a situation that you've encountered where you had to address an employee's lack of performance?</u> Mr. Robert Valencia-Aiken smiling because it's happened A lot. So, I'll name this was a younger airman actually. She was young and she did just enough to get by, but her performance, we had to do periodic performance reports with them. I remember sitting down with her. She's sitting across from me and I'm trying to do the communication piece and saying, hey, so-and-so, you know, what's going on? Tell me what's happening. And what happened next was	

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	interesting. She got up. She was very, very upset because she understood that she had already been reprimanded for the performance, but not just performance. It was also dealing with attitude and some of the integrity pieces. And that's when she got up and she was about to head to the door to just walk out on me. And in that moment, you know, I was like, hey, like so-and-so, like, please come back. You know, this is not how we take care of things. In the Air Force, this is something that is a big no-no. And with that, I got up and I kind of stood next to her. I was like, hey, you know, you basically let her know, hey, you're going to want to come back because once you exit in this manner, things above me, they're not going to deal with things as compassionately as I will. By the end of the day, you know, I was able to talk to her, get her back down, sit her down, let her know, hey, what's going on? She gave me some information. Pretty much she was tired at that point. She was stressed out. She was done with the Air Force because she was young. She was 19, first time being on her own. She never dealt with being away from family. This whole, you know, 9 to 5 arena was too much for her. And I did let her know, hey, and objectively on your performance report and how you're performing, I have to ding you. And I, but I had to let her know that where you are now is not where you end. I had to let her know if we work together, we can get to this moment where there might be a trial or you're looked upon poorly, and we can enter into a better arena where I can help you develop and grow, and you can actually progress in your career. You can pick a base. You can actually do more. She felt very enclosed and like she was going to be there forever. So thankfully, and you know, this is kind of like a progress report, you know, at that moment things turned around. She didn't get better right away. Right. We had to have some more conversations, figure out what's going on. We had to, you know, a little back and forth a couple of times, but she ended	

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	up sticking around. She ended up getting better. She ended up getting, you know, better attitude and realized that just that moment did not define her workplace or her character. It was just a moment that she had when she was stressed out. So objectively handled the paperwork, but on a relational level, made sure that she knew I was here for her. I wasn't there to ding her. I wasn't there to put her down. I was actually there to champion her. And I think she saw that. And that helped her to realize, okay, I want to work a little bit better because he's not just trying to get work out of me. He's trying to get the best out of me as a person. So, she progressed and thankfully got into a medical program. So, she's doing a lot better. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #10. Provide an example of when you had to manage or influence a decision involving your company's or department's budget and resource allocation. How did you balance operational</u> needs with fiscal responsibility? Mr. Robert Valencia-Aiken, that's a great question. So that's a big military question. So, we have that a lot. So, influencing decisions, budgets. So, for our Office of Public Health, we're, you know, each of our sectors for the clinic are given a budget. And within that budget, of course, it defines the extent to which we can do things. So of course, when it comes to compensation, it's a given. We're under government, so our compensation is not touched. So, it's more so on the tools and the, of course, operational needs. So, the tools that we use in order to do the job that we have, whether it's paper, iPads, you know, we would go out in the field and we would have iPads in order to do inspections. And we had to make sure that operationally we were doing well. So Fiscally, I remember it was. I forget the fiscal years that we would have, but it was close to the end of the fiscal year.	

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	And we had to do inspections. It was a crunch time because we had the IG, I think it was the inspector general who come in and we had to get all hands-on deck in order to get inspections done. And we didn't have enough tools to get the job done. The inspections for food sanitation, We had one of our programs; we had to actually catch mosquitoes to make sure that we were testing them for malaria. So, there's all the tools that we had to have for there. And what we had to do is we had to borrow. We had to borrow and we had to almost do, you know, like you like a Venn diagram where, you know, you cross over. Some individuals worked over in this arena using the tools that we had limited to us. while the other individuals worked over here. And then some of them could cross over using some of the same tools. We had some technology tools as well. We had nets and all these other things that we had to use. And then we had to ping some of the other bases, even though we did the food inspections for Schofield and for Cheyenne Mountain. There were individuals that were placed there as public health, and we had to call them and let them know, hey, you know, what tools do you have on hand that you do not need in order for us to continue to operate? Because financially we could not make the purchases. So really at that, we had to do the best we could with what we had borrowed. And same thing, and I know I used this earlier, but it was very big for us in public health as I would call some of the other bases and say, hey, we're about to be under an inspection here coming up and we do not have enough resources. And from there, that was really the reason why we did the borrowing. And then we would check with the county because we did a lot of similar things, but we did it all on a basis. And so, getting involved with the county and making sure that we did the job as best as we could and seeing if they had any tools or any resources available in which we could get it done. And at the end of the day, it was a lot of scraping,	

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	manual, you know, paperwork, writing things down, you know, because we are limited on, you know, iPads, technology, that the tools and everything. We also check regulations to see. So for instance, for the mosquito catching, there was a threshold in which our catching for them and sending them to Wright-Patterson in Ohio, it qualified for them testing. And so we, a lot of times, would over catch or overdo just to make sure we met the requirements. This time we were, hey, what is the bare minimum to make sure we met the requirement to send it off because we don't have the resources, the manning, or the ability with technology to do it. And yeah, that was, yeah, that's that we could. Ms. Jill Niitani, however, this concludes the interview for the Director of Liquor Control position. I want to thank you for being available today and your interest in the position. You will, what we'll be doing over the next couple weeks is to kind of put everything together. There are other interviewees. So, we will let you know your status. Mr. Robert Valencia-Aiken, thank you so much. I appreciate it. Ms. Jill Niitani, for the record, the meeting is, or the interview concludes at 11:32 AM. Thank you. Mr. Robert Valencia-Aiken, thank you so much. <u>Keola Siu:</u> Ms. Jill Niitani, August 10th, 2026, and we are here with Keola Siu, candidate for the Liquor Director position. Before we get started with the questions, we'd like to inform you that this interview is scheduled for one hour. There are 10 questions, so we ask that you use your time wisely as this interview will be concluded at the one-hour mark. We will give you a 5-minute	

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	reminder at the 55-minute point, as a courtesy. And if you would like me to repeat the question, please feel free to do so. Are you ready to begin with the first question? For the record, the time is 1:03 P.M. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #1. Please walk us through your career history, highlighting the key experiences and milestones that make you the right fit for this Liquor Director role.</u> Mr. Keola Siu, I originally started off my career as a public defender. I was a public defender in Kona for approximately 5 years. I also worked, after I left there, I worked in private practice, taking court appointed cases in Washington State where I was previously licensed. Since 2015, I have been a prosecutor here on Kauai. Approximately 4 years ago, I was made the first deputy for the office. believe that, you know, my experience as first deputy has made me, has given me a lot of administrative experience. The office is approximately 40 people and it's fairly diverse. There's attorneys, victim witnesses, investigation as well as administrative and clerical. So, there's a number of...working parts that you know you have to understand how all of those work together. That's really been, you know, I think the...experience that has prepared me the best for, you know, a position like this. It's also something that focuses on code enforcement, which I'm very familiar with as a prosecutor. I was also, you know, at times when, you know, the prosecutor is no one is Out of the office, I am, you know, the prosecutor making all of the decisions. So, I have some experience of being, you know, the executive. That's it. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #2. As the Liquor Director, how would you prioritize your first 12 months on the job? Please break down your immediate focus for the first 6 months and how</u>	

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	<u>that shifts as you approach the one-year mark.</u> Mr. Keola Siu, The first six months would just be getting to know the people in the department itself. You know, I pride myself on, you know, really knowing all of the people in my office. You know, I think to be an effective leader, yes, you really have to understand who they are and what their roles are, and I think when people are... You know, I try to check in on, you know, my people, you know, fairly often, um, and... you know, I think good bosses do that. So, I think just getting to know all the people that work there, really getting to know, you know, how the operations are done. That's really the key thing to me. I think within six months, you know, I should be up to speed on, you know, how enforcement is done and what you know, what people really excel at and where they should be. I think within a year, I should be having, putting my own, you know, have developed my own initiatives, you know, having seen what, what is, you know, what has worked and what hasn't worked. And really trying to, you know, innovate and... Do some. do some different things, but I think just the basics, you know, understanding the operations is the absolute key, you know, before I get to that, that stage. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #3. How will you ensure your enforcement team consistently and fairly applies the laws under HRS Chapter 281?</u> Mr. Keola Siu, Fairness is something that, you know, I'm always concerned about, you know, in my role. We try to make sure that, you know, we're not...I guess either going after someone just to go after someone. We try to, you know, be fair in how we apply the law. And, you know, it's something that I spend a lot of time on, you know, trying to make sure that, you know, the punishment that we're asking for really fits you know, whatever the, you know, the infraction or is, and also looking at, you know, historically, what have we, what kind of fines or other things have been levied against people, you know, for that type of infraction. That's something that, you know, I really try to be consistent on as far as like when I'm asking for,	

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	well, in my case, you know, prison time and stuff like that. Obviously not the case, but you know, just trying to be, you know, fair and consistent, you know, not favoring anybody and really trying to look for patterns and make sure that we're not doing that and listening to people to, you know, see, you know, if there is a complaint about, you know, how things are being enforced to, you know, investigate that and make sure that, you know, we're being fair with everyone. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #4. Based on your past management experience, how would you describe your leadership style?</u> Mr. Keola Siu, I really try to let you know my people do their do their work. You know, I trust that you know they can handle things. You know, without too much intervention, the only time I really insert myself is, is to, you know, when I see... When I really, when I see the need, so I just try to. I guess, anticipate, you know, when people might need some more help. Maybe they need another, you know, in my case, another attorney to assist them, you know, with a bigger trial or project, or maybe there's someone else that can help. So, I try to look for people that might be struggling a little bit. The other thing is training, making sure I'm setting up, you know, my people for success, looking for training that I think might be valuable, you know, for them so that they have the skills that they need. And I've done that, you know, a number of times here at my office, you know, particularly with district court. I helped create a manual that now, you know, all of the district court attorneys can use and benefit from. So that's really, Um...Something that I focus on is training.	

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	<u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #5. After 6 months as the Liquor Control Director, you begin to implement changes that you feel will provide for greater operational efficiency. You had previously discussed these changes with your team and took their input into consideration. One of your staff members, Bob, has consistently opposed your changes, and the suggestions that Bob has made did not align with your goals. As you roll out your changes, Bob continues to oppose them and is openly critical of these changes in front of everyone. How do you proceed?</u> Mr. Keola Siu, I would talk to him privately, you know, to try and figure out, you know, what exactly his issue is with these changes. You know, if we're not able to resolve it, you know, I think I would have to involve, you know, HR at that point. But my preference is always to discuss differences, you know, directly with...with an employee, and that's something that I have to do, you know, on occasion in my role. You know, there's oftentimes disagreement about things and just trying to figure out what the best way to proceed, you know, and There are times when, you know, my employees don't necessarily agree with my choice, but I think after we've talked, it's usually, you know, they'll go forward with it. And sometimes they've come back to me and, you know, they understand why I did it that way. Um...So, but to me, communication is always key. If you're not talking, you know, directly to the person and really trying to figure out what the root cause of that issue is, I think that it... You know, we'll just end up being a disaster, you know, with that employee. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #6. In regulatory roles in government, maintaining public trust is critical. Describe a time when your professional responsibilities collided with a personal connection or gray area, and how you managed it.</u> Yes. There are occasionally times when, you know, I'm personally familiar with the person	

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	that's being prosecuted. As soon as I see something like that, I immediately notify, you know, my supervisor and have that case blocked off, you know, access from me so that I'm not participating in the decision making whatsoever in that case. So, <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #7. Edwin, one of your Liquor Control Investigators, mentions to you that during an on-site inspection at a local liquor establishment yesterday, he was harassed by one of the workers. Please explain what your process would be to properly address the matter.</u> Mr. Keola Siu, Was that person alone, or were they with someone else? I guess if the person was with somebody else, I would want to talk to that other enforcement officer. I think just noting, you know, what that issue was, I would want to talk with, you know, the owner of that establishment just to see you know, what had occurred there. Try to see if maybe they have any video surveillance to, you know, to see what had occurred. And I think if it was going to become an issue in the future between that person and the enforcement officer, I'd want a different enforcement officer there or that employee to be not be present when we're doing an inspection. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #8. Tell us about a time you encountered a highly complex regulation issue. What was your step-by-step process for interpreting the rule and determining the best path forward?</u> Mr. Keola Siu, I guess my most recent was with, it's usually with laws that have changed over time and trying to figure out, you know, what the exact date of those changes were, if that law, you know, still applied you know, at the time when I'm charging a case, usually for older cases. Confirming that, you know, with...with the acts that have been passed to see when the exact effective date is and then proceeding from there that comes up. Quite often.	

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	<u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #9. Tell us about a situation that you've encountered where you had to address an employee's lack of performance?</u> Mr. Keola Siu, Yes, We've had. You know it's not. Anyone in particular necessarily, but you know, when we've had... You know, one person. That was not performing and not appearing in court on time. You know, I really, I took a lot of time with that person to address how we could improve their, you know, basically their tardiness, because it's very important. to appear in court on time as scheduled. So just went through a number of different ways with that person to make sure that, you know, they were checking their calendars and trying to find solutions with them, you know, they're really having a difficult time because...of the calendar being changed quite a bit, but just trying to develop solutions that, you know, would help that person, you know, whether it's like putting stickies here, making sure you set alarms, whatever it took. But that's something that I worked on with one employee quite a bit, so... Um...Other times when we've had issues with performance, usually if they're not able to... you know, to meet those benchmarks. You know, they end up leaving at some point, but we do try and work through the issues with them, try to get them better prepared, try to figure out how they can be more efficient, you know, with their work so that those issues don't arise. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #10. Provide an example of when you had to manage or influence a decision involving your company's or department's budget and resource allocation. How did you balance operational needs with fiscal responsibility?</u> Mr. Keola Siu, Not always in charge of the budget part of it. But... I guess trying to identify. You know, a lot of times the budgets get balanced with, you know, employees that are in positions that, you know, haven't been filled or what have you. You know, I think most of the time we're just trying to fill, you know, positions. That's the biggest, you know, issue that we have.	

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	I know that's not directly answering your question about that, but Just trying to make sure that we...you know, can offer, you know, a competitive salary, you know, so that we can attract people. That's usually the most difficult part as far as trying to be fiscally responsible. You know, I really leave that up to the admin staff and how they make, you know, purchasing and things like that. I don't usually get involved in. In that, you know. I do try to limit. my own personal travel. I know that that's something that contributes. I don't like to travel unless it's necessary to travel. I know it's not a huge item, but it definitely helps to. Save money in my department. Ms. Jill Niitani, just to confirm, time is at 1:24 P.m. Rina and I will be scoring and making a recommendation to the commission in a couple weeks. So, we'll let you know what your status is. Mr. Keola Siu Okay. Ms. Jill Niitani, Thank you again. Mr. Keola Siu, thank you so much. <u>Seungjoon Lee:</u> Ms. Jill Niitani, August 10th, 2026, and we are here with Seungjoon Lee, candidate for the Liquor Director position. Before we get started with the questions, we'd like to inform you that this interview is scheduled for one hour. There are 10 questions, so we ask that you use your time wisely as this interview will be concluded at the one-hour mark. We will give you a 5-minute reminder at the 55-minute point, as a courtesy. And if you would like me to repeat the question, please feel free to do so. Are you ready to begin with the first question? For the record, the time is 2:12 P.M. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #1. Please walk us through your career history, highlighting the key experiences and milestones that make you the right fit for this Liquor Director role.</u>	

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	Mr. Seungjoon Lee, absolutely. Thank you. So, I started my career path as a business owner. Not a bar, but it was just a small coffee house. I met a food inspector at the time, and he was inspecting all of my equipment and backs out of kitchen. I was really appreciating That, so that was my first career. My background is hotel management. So, after the business, I wanted to go back to the hotel business, so I started at the I started at the Hyatt and I moved up to...to become a food and beverage assistant director at Grand Hyatt Kauai. I was managing about 300 employees there. The leadership role was, it's big because I'm in charge of all the food and beverage operations. So, I had to be fair, very transparent. And then everything must be all scheduled like that. And now, I'm in lending. I'm a lending manager at Credit Unions. So, I'm in charge of all the conferences, making sure that Whenever we do the audit, all goes through well, and training my employees because we have to comply all the rules, making the procedures for my guys so that they can follow the rules. So, that's the overview of... What have I done in the past 20 years. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #2. As the Liquor Director, how would you prioritize your first 12 months on the job? Please break down your immediate focus for the first 6 months and how that shifts as you approach the one-year mark.</u> Mr. Seungjoon Lee, Absolutely. So, because I was not from the liquor department, I have to familiarize myself with the staff first, because I'll be working with the staff there. for a long time. So, I would like to get to know the staff first. And then second of all, I like to get familiarized with Chapter 281. I have a little bit of an overview of understanding, but I really want to really familiarize myself with that. And also, I like to look at the technologies that we are using. Just making sure that everything is all efficient and optimized for our staff	

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	to do their best. Because my goal is always public facing. So, I tell my staff at work right now we want to, I set up the procedures for that so that they can do their job easier and better. So that will be one of my focuses maybe within like three months to four months. That would be the first quarter. And then second quarter would be like, since I would know, hopefully by then I'll be familiarized with all the systems that we are using in the county. And then trying to see if we can update or optimize our, like, such as the internet or anything can be optimized or update. Because I'm a big believer of technology, because that always makes our life easier and makes it more efficient. And then after that, I will check with staff again and then see if this, if my plan or my implementation helps their workload make their job easier. And then within one year, I would like to make sure that I am established. I know every single thing that is happening, understanding all the liquor laws and then procedure of dispute and procedure of doing all these licenses. And then I will ensure that everything is all complying because, as I said, making the workflow simple, streamlining workflow is my key thing, as always. I'm always efficiency focus and have a good reputation as a public-facing department. Because I would like to really balance of local economy and also public safety. That will be my initial goal for one year. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #3. How will you ensue your enforcement team consistently and fairly applies the laws under HRS Chapter 281?</u> Mr. Seungjoon Lee, So this will be like ongoing training, right? And then I will have feedback from our business owners on that. And history will show the number of violations and all that. So, I, from the, From the data that I will get, I can compare with the previous years, making sure that we are almost up to the par. I should not say up to the par, almost the same level. If the number of violations is going down, that means it could be compromised or it could be really, we did our best so that violation, number of violations went down. So, there's a couple	

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	of different scenarios I can evaluate but mostly is really coming from education and training. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #4. Based on your past management experience, how would you describe your leadership style?</u> Mr. Seungjoon Lee, well so, I inspire my guys by being a good example. I actually heard this comment from my staff the other day that when new system was introduced, I was the one who wanted to learn and then train myself and training. My employees, so my leadership style is. Be a good example. And then from there, our step will learn. And then also, I'm very innovative. As I mentioned earlier, I love technology. So, people will think of me as not only just being a good leader, as a good example, but also, he is very innovative and always trying to accept and evolve the department. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #5. After 6 months as the Liquor Control Director, you begin to implement changes that you feel will provide for greater operational efficiency. You had previously discussed these changes with your team and took their input into consideration. One of your staff members, Bob, has consistently opposed your changes, and the suggestions that Bob has made did not align with your goals. As you roll out your changes, Bob continues to oppose them and is openly critical of these changes in front of everyone. How do you proceed?</u> Mr. Seungjoon Lee, so I mean, that can happen. Oh, all kinds of businesses. You don't have to agree. For all the changes. So, what I would do is I would talk to the person why he is opposing or she is opposing. And also I will tell him, understand, make him understand why this change is very important and how does this change will make his life	

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	easier. And it's not here, we are not making the change to make their life miserable or trying to make them more work. This is just to make them convenient, make their life easier and job easier, so that we will compromise sort of talking. and we will have a mutual understanding. The person probably has a lot of experience in that department. Me, I don't have any experience, but I have a fresh eye. He may not, so...those fresh eyes and the person that doing the same job all the time may conflict. That's very natural. But I'm sure and 100% sure that this one can be compromised and then agreeable and then move on to the next Project, if the person is... Right, right, so then maybe you can change. Just a little bit, right? Because it's not always one direction is always correct. Sometimes you can make pivots. So that's what I would do. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #6. In regulatory roles in government, maintaining public trust is critical. Describe a time when your professional responsibilities collided with a personal connection or gray area, and how you managed it.</u> Mr. Seungjoon Lee yes, the public, I mean, the personal connection it's.. Like, it's so funny that you asked me because today I was talking to one of my staff that how small this island is. I met a person that I have not seen in her last 10 years. And then I met her yesterday in one of my friend's houses. And then happened to be she was my friend's neighbor. So, everybody's connected here. Everybody knows everything. That's why that's called Coconut Wireless, right? Personal relationships are very important. However, because I'm in that role, in the public facing role, I must be very transparent, and I must be very fair with everyone. I cannot compromise myself to changing the, doing the favor like that because I know the person. And, if the person knows me well, he will know or she will know that I won't compromise because they understand my ethic. And ethics are a really important value	

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	for me, because I was born and raised in Korea. And that really taught me a lot to be a good person. That's how I get my reputation from everyone that I know. And then that's how they. Respect me as a person, as a manager. So, the person that knows me will understand and will respect my decision because I'll be very fair to the person. Thank you. <u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #7. Edwin, one of your Liquor Control Investigators, mentions to you that during an on-site inspection at a local liquor establishment yesterday, he was harassed by one of the workers. Please explain what your process would be to properly address the matter.</u> Mr. Seungjoon Lee, so let me ask you a question again. So, the inspector was harassed by one of the workers in that, like, let's say, bar.so in those matters, everything needs to be documented. So, the inspectors are there to do their job. So, he or she, hopefully, should have been already trained in what to do in that case. Documentation is the key. And then who, where, what happened, and all those details will be the key to determine what happened. And I don't know if it's possible or not. And then if with the privacy law, I was also even thinking have like pod cam whenever we go to inspections. So that everybody knows exactly what happened in the moment, and then it would be like very transparent for both parties, so... Once the documentation is done, I will sit down with a person and then talk to the business owners and find out what happened. And then normally, I don't know if this will be my decision or not, to go to the committee. to decide what happens. But if that would be my own decision, then I will be making sure that they are well trained so that when it happens, knows how to react in those types of situations.	

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	<u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #8. Tell us about a time you encountered a highly complex regulation issue. What was your step-by-step process for interpreting the rule and determining the best path forward?</u> Mr. Seungjoon Lee, so it could kind of broke up a little bit. Could you repeat it one more time? Ms. Jill Niitani, Sure, tell us about a time you encountered a highly complex regulation or issue. What was your step-by-step process for interpreting the rules and determining the best path forward? Mr. Seungjoon Lee, so is that from the violations or is that something that comes up with new rules or is a past rule that is written somewhere? Ms. Jill Niitani it could be law that. You've encountered the. Was difficult to. to come to some decision on how you would proceed. So, what is your step-by-step process to. Mr. Seungjoon Lee, Things that happen like that, that I will have a hard time interpreting to be, because at the end, this is making the sound judgment. So, if I'm thinking that I cannot make a sound judgment, I need to ask for help. So hopefully the county has a legal team that I can ask for the questions. And so get a little bit better opinion from the person. And then. Probably, I don't know if the staff would know or not, I may ask steps too. So, my first process would be, I'm going to ask the staff if they know. And then the second process will be, I will seek professional opinion from the county that understand more Regulations, and then third of all. Based on all the gathered information, I'll make the sound judgment after that.	

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	<u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #9. Tell us about a situation that you've encountered where you had to address an employee's lack of performance?</u> Mr. Seungjoon Lee, if I counted a situation where I see someone's performance is not good. Ms. Jill Niitani, Correct. Mr. Seungjoon Lee Sorry, keep breaking. Okay, so my staff performance is not good. Is that what basically that's the question? Ms. Jill Niitani, Yes, and how did you address it? Mr. Seungjoon Lee, yes, that's a good question. That happens everywhere, right? Whether it's a hotel business, or whether it's a credit union, or even when I had my own first business, so always have a performance issue. So, we need to find out the root cause and then we need to find out what expectation we are getting from the person, right? So, does this employee understand the expectations of what we're trying to do or what we're trying to achieve? Does this employee really understand? their job, right? So, if they don't understand what they're doing and what their job role is, we got to have a really intensive training because being there for 20 years doesn't mean that they were trained. Because I'm talking about training so many times here, because I know the importance of training. Like within my job right now, like I'm just giving you an example. Um...We do, we process a credit card application, for example, but we don't get credit card applications all the time. So even if I train the person, They may not. Remember everything, how to process it, right? So, I make a manual. So, I make a manual, the guideline, step by step training manual, right? So now I'm expecting this person to be not only trained, but also you have your own guidelines step by step. And then still making a mistake, then now I need to find out what's going on. Hey, are you? Is there something I missed in the training manual, or do you really understand how this system works? So, I need to find the root cause and then fix it. So that will be what I would do. If I find some employees underperform, I work with the person and then try to achieve the goal that we set up.	

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	<u>Ms. Jill Niitani, Question #10. Provide an example of when you had to manage or influence a decision involving your company's or department's budget and resource allocation. How did you balance operational needs with fiscal responsibility?</u> Mr. Seungjoon Lee, yes, that's a good question. So, I really need to find the disadvantage and what the pros and cons, right? So, the fiscal budget it's already determined prior year. And then... Ms. Jill Niitani, no. Mr. Seungjoon Lee All of a sudden, we have a sometime of...Emergency expense we have to do for whatever reason. So, we all understand that this is an emergency, but is it an emergency for all or emergencies only for certain departments? So, after you evaluate the emergency, like what kind of emergency it is, then you have to determine, and I guess you have to go to higher up and find out and explain. And then if this is not emergency for everyone, then maybe we need to wait. But at the same time, we need to find alternative solutions because we need that budget for whatever to fix it or something. So, we need to find alternative solutions to until we have a proper budget. To fix it, I will talk to the team because the team there has been there longer than me. And then also I will talk to other leaders and find out how these accounting rules work and then make a determination how to handle that type of situation. That's all. Ms. Jill Niitani That was the last question. So, I just wanted to formally conclude the interview	

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	for the Director of Liquor Control position. Want to thank you again for joining us today and for your interest in the position as always comes to you. So, the time is 2:37 P.m. And just wanted to let you know that we do still have a few more interviews, but we will let you know in the next couple weeks. On your status. Mr. Seungjoon Lee okay, well, thank you so much for this opportunity. I'm really honored to have this opportunity with you all. And I hope that I'll get a call and get this job. Ms. Jill Niitani, Thank you so much. Mr. Seungjoon Lee, thank you everybody. You guys have a great day. Aloha.	
Executive Session	Under Hawai'i Revised Statutes §§ 92-4, 92-5 (a) (2), and (4), the purpose of this executive session is for the Commission to consult with its attorney on questions and issues related to the Commission's powers, duties, privileges, immunities, and liabilities as they may pertain to the following items below. Pursuant to HRS §92-7(a), the Commission may, when deemed necessary, hold an executive session on any agenda item without written public notice if the executive session was not anticipated in advance. Any such executive session shall be held pursuant to H.R.S. §92-4 and shall be limited to those items described in HRS §92-5(a).	NONE
Adjournment		Commissioner Bahouth moved to adjourn the Special Commission Meeting of August 10, 2026. Commissioner Nishimitsu seconded the

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		motion. Hearing no objections the motion passed 6:0. At 2:40 p.m. the meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by: _____
Malialani TM Kelekoma, Private Secretary

Reviewed and Approved by: _____

- () Approved as circulated.
- () Approved with amendments. See minutes of _____meeting.