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March 20, 2013

The Honorable Ernesty Y. Martin, Chair & Presiding Officer
The Honorable Ikaika Anderson, Vice Chair
and Members of the City Council

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Dear Chair Martin and Council Members:

My name is Kukunaokalā Yoshimoto, I am a graduate student at the Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa. I am also the Ohana Program Specialist for Hui Mālama O Ke Kai located in Waimānalo. I am writing today in support of Resolution 13-1 requesting the city administration to provide electronic benefit transfer point-of-sale terminals at the city's peoples open market program venues to assist low-income families in purchasing fresh and healthy foods.

For the past six months, I have been blessed to have the opportunity to work with the Waimanalo Youth and Family Collaborative to establish this type of service for the Waimānalo community. Through various partnerships and collaborations we were able to gather some eye opening statistics and information surrounding the health and socioeconomic hardships of the people who live in this community. According to the 2010 U.S. census, 35% of all individuals who reside in Waimānalo fall below 185% of the federal poverty guideline. The censes also states that 21% of all households are recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, 36% of all households with Social Security in come, and 25% with retirement income.

Presently, Waimānalo SNAP families do not have access to affordable, fresh fruits and vegetables in the community. There are currently only two grocery stores in Waimānalo and although they do accept EBT cards from SNAP families, both are retail operations that mark up fruit and vegetable wholesale prices by at least 100%. As such, SNAP families will generally opt to purchase canned rather than fresh fruits and vegetables in order to maximize their monthly EBT benefits. Because of the high sodium and sugar contents in canned foods, these are not healthy choices for SNAP families, who, according to recent health surveys conducted by the Waimānalo Health Center, are not only among the highest percentage below the poverty level but are also generally among the highest percentage of Waimānalo residents who suffer from chronic diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular illnesses.

With the implementation of an EBT station at the Waimānalo Peoples Open Market, SNAP families will be able to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables at lower costs and eat healthier. It will also increase revenues for vendors at the Waimānalo POM and in turn attract new vendors to offer a wider variety of produce.

Mahalo nui for your time and consideration with this very important matter. Again, I am in total support for RESOLUTION 13-1.

Me ka haʻahaʻa,

Kukunaokalā Yoshimoto