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To The Chair and Members of the Executive Matters Committee
Of the City Council of Honolulu

Re: Resolution No. 06-291, Agenda for August 23, 2006, 1:00PM

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There are elders in our community who are very concerned about the response to the Audit of the Neighborhood Board System and the Neighborhood Commission. They have asked me to relay our concerns to you as follows:

Public deliberation at the grassroots level is the essence of participatory democracy, and the Neighborhood Board System (the System) is the closest expression of that idea. Therefore, eliminating the system is unacceptable. As regular attendees at the Waianae Coast Neighborhood Board #24 for many years, we believe our insights carry an ounce of credibility that ought to be given serious concern by you and the Task Force. Here are some of our concerns:

One flaw in the System is the failure on the part of the Neighborhood Board System to mimic the structures that have proven successful at the State and City levels; and this is the system that requires each elected official to serve on Committee(s) where the deliberation about the compelling issues facing communities is discussed fully and where citizens have the opportunity to have input. When Neighborhood Board Members elect not to attend Committee meetings, their participation as Board Members lacks enthusiasm, commitment and purpose. Increasing the power and providing compensation without more accountability does little to improve Neighborhood Boards' providing effective and efficient liaison between the City and the community, or failing to address the issues raised in the audit. It might encourage participation on the Board of the wrong type of people, those seeking Money and Power

We approve taking a good look at methods by which Neighborhood Board Commission actions could strengthen the System. The suggestions for the Task Force seem only to address the idiosyncracies of Neighborhood Board members but do not address the issues of residents. However, realigning of some Neighborhood Board districts—NOT the Waianae Coast #24—might improve the issue of lack of quorum. More training for Board members could also be helpful.

Finally, we feel strongly that changes at the Executive Director and Commission Chair level have already made a substantial improvement in the functioning of the Neighborhood Board Commission and the System itself.

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