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April 19, 2010

City Council,
Todd K. Apo, Chairman
Budget Committee,
Nestor Garcia (Chair)
Gary Okino (Vice-Chair)
Ikaika Anderson
Ann Kobayashi
Council Bill 15 CD1

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HONOLULU, HAWAII

Dear Honorable Council Members,

The Friends of Ala Wai Ballroom Dance Academy is a nonprofit organization that promotes and supports ballroom dancing in Hawaii. We have been in existence for nearly six years and represent about 400 ballroom dance enthusiasts. Moreover, most of our members are senior citizens or nearing that demographic group. In addition, we are one of a number of ballroom dance nonprofit associations that represent and serve the same constituency, some for more than 50 years.

The ballroom dance community in Honolulu is an active group of seniors and non-seniors, whose activities and much of its fund-raising endeavors are dependent on the Ala Wai Golf Course Multi-Purpose Facility (known as the "Palladium"). We are unique in that many communities on the Mainland do not have such an outstanding facility that brings the dance community together in such an enriching and engaging way.

It is also a unique facility in that the Palladium's genesis was born out of a public-private partnership, where the dance community raised funds to support the construction of the Palladium. That partnership continues to this very day, with many of the clubs voluntarily contributing to the upkeep of the facility through their fund-raising efforts. As for Friends of Ala Wai, active support of the Palladium is a core part of our mission statement, one which we have faithfully followed over our relatively short lifetime.

As the City Council weighs budget considerations in these tough economic times, we recognize how easy it would be to dismiss "recreational" activities related to the Parks and Recreation Department. Certainly, in light of other essential services, it would hard to argue. Council members also have the unenviable task of having to choose between the services of one group of constituents over another. Nevertheless, we would argue strongly that Hawaii's kupuna, after years of serving our community and contributing a lifetime of work (and in many

cases continuing that service through their volunteerism) deserves more than a little consideration.

The Palladium and ballroom dancing provides the kind of social interaction and healthy exercise that are exactly what most health and other experts recommend for our seniors. The sedentary alternatives, they say, usually not only ends up costing seniors more in terms of their health and health care costs, but for our society as well in terms of social services costs. Moreover, statistics show that this is the fastest growing segment of our society along with costs associated with them.

For these and many other reasons, we strongly recommend that in looking at cost cutting measures, the City Council and Parks and Recreation seriously consider maintaining the very important services that the Palladium provides to Honolulu's seniors.

Respectfully Submitted

Warren Mitsunaga
President
Friends of Ala Wai Ballroom Dance Academy