

September 29, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact: Anne Frederick
(808)212-9616 x1/anne@hapahi.org**



The “People’s Congress”: New Coalition Launches to Champion Justice in Hawai‘i

(HONOLULU, Hawai‘i) – Leading non-profit and advocacy groups in Hawai‘i launched “The People’s Congress,” a new initiative to build a more just, fair and healthy future for Hawai‘i. Working with organizations and individuals across the islands, this coalition seeks to end systemic barriers to justice with the launch of a “People’s Agenda” - a political and organizing strategy for lasting positive change in Hawai‘i.

The main launch event of The People’s Congress is a two-day statewide convention on December 2-4, 2016 in Honolulu, hosted by organizations and community leaders working across the islands on issues of social, economic, racial and environmental justice. Also, from October 19th - 27th, community forums will be held on each island to convene local leaders and gather input for the People’s Agenda.

The People’s Congress will provide an opportunity to engage in shared movement building and concrete action. More information is available at: <https://www.facebook.com/PeoplesCongressHI>. (Upcoming website address: www.PeoplesCongressHI.org)

People’s Congress Partner Organizations include Aikea Movement, Community Alliance on Prisons, Hawai‘i Alliance for Progressive Action (HAPA), Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice, Hawai‘i Center for Food Safety (HCFS), Hawai‘i People’s Fund, Hawai‘i SEED, Hawai‘i Teachers for Change Caucus, Hawai‘i’s Thousand Friends, Life of the Land, Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (NHLC), Sierra Club of Hawai‘i, the Aloha ‘Aina Project, and Unite Here! Local 5 Union.

Why Now?

Hawai‘i residents are facing fundamental challenges: historic wealth inequality and a high cost of living, lack of affordable housing, an education system in crisis, and the 6th highest rate of poverty in the United States. And Hawai‘i’s lands and waters are at increasing risk: local funding for environmental protection is dropping as the climate crisis worsens; streams are diverted even as we face drought. Because Hawai‘i imports 80% of our food and much of our energy, we are vulnerable to high food and energy prices, shortages in basic necessities, and unstable job markets.

Hawai‘i’s residents need fundamental change. That is why The People’s Congress will convene concerned citizens throughout the islands to focus on positive solutions to these long-standing problems.

"Hawai‘i Appleseed is excited to be a part of the People's Congress because of its potential to bring together a strong, unified voice to address the most pressing issues facing Hawai‘i," said Gavin Thornton, Co-Executive Director of the Hawai‘i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice. "So many of our residents struggle with high housing costs, low wages, inequitable tax burdens, and other widespread

problems that threaten their ability to achieve economic stability and fulfill their potential. The People's Congress can help create a shared vision of a better Hawai'i and raise the chorus for positive change."

Cade Watanabe, of Unite Here! Local 5 and Aikea Movement said, "We live in a Hawai'i that today provides less and less opportunity for Hawai'i's working families. The People's Congress is an exciting opportunity for our members to connect, strategize and organize for a better Hawai'i. It's time for us to take back our community."

Tiare Lawrence, Project Coordinator for HAPA, and also a founder and community organizer for the Aloha `Āina Project, believes that the People's Congress "will allow us the opportunity to build partnerships and help us help each other. I believe these partnerships will assist us in achieving our goals for a better Hawai'i."

Moses K.N. Haia, Executive Director for the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (NHLC) said, "The People's Congress represents cooperative and collaborative work which seeks proactive change for the benefit of the entire community. For NHLC, this initiative provides a partnership opportunity that will greatly assist with identifying the issues important to members of the larger community as a means of engaging in a collective effort to align those interests with the best interests of the Hawaiian community."

The head of the Hawai'i "Teachers for Change" Caucus, Mireille Ellsworth, makes clear "we want to establish connections with activists on other issues that also affect our students, members and the larger community. Without developing shared understanding of the need for crosscutting solidarity in action, we will always be easily isolated and defeated."

Marti Townsend, Director of Sierra Club of Hawai'i said, "People's Congress provides a unique opportunity for us to work together with others of like-mind and mission. The Sierra Club's mission is to protect both the natural and human environment. To achieve this mission we need a fair and open government committed to serving the interests of the people, not corporations. We need a system that respects and includes all of us equally. We need a community united in our collective best interest to overcome the oppression and fear that dictates so much of our decisionmaking today."

"There are so many good people working on important issues, from protecting our natural resources for future generations, to issues of homelessness, wealth inequality, open government, education and equal rights," said Anne Frederick, Executive Director of HAPA. "We believe that if we come together through the People's Congress to identify the barriers we face in common and illuminate the root causes of injustice we all face, that we (and our work) can be more powerful and effective."

###

Note to Editors: Photos are available.

Available for interviews:

Anne Frederick, HAPA, 808.212.9616 x1, anne@HAPAhawaii.org