



Executive  
Office on  
Early  
Learning  
STATE OF HAWAII

**DIRECTOR SEARCH**

# **PUBLIC COMMENT**

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## Public Comment - KE'ŌPŪ REELITZ

**From:** NATALIE WALLSGROVE  
**Contact info:** nw@hawaii.edu  
**Sent:** 3/3/22 15:17:39

**Comment:** Aloha,

I have had the benefit of knowing Ke'ōpū Reelitz for many years, including the nearly 4 years that I have been a mother. When the time came for my husband and I to find quality childcare for our newborn, Ke'ōpū was instrumental in our navigation of the complex and decentralized early childhood system here in Hawai'i. She helped guide us to public resources available for finding quality care, and thanks to her help, we were lucky enough to secure a trusted caregiver within our budget. When the time came for our daughter to transition from daycare to preschool, Ke'ōpū was once again instrumental in our navigation of the maddening process to secure Child Care Connection Hawaii funds to help shoulder the burden of her tuition. We would never have managed to secure that vital financial help without Ke'ōpū's guidance. When our daughter became old enough to be eligible for Kamehameha Schools' PKS scholarship, Ke'ōpū once again offered guidance and support for the application process. My experience as a mom of a young child in Hawai'i has been significantly easier thanks to Ke'ōpū's advocacy for my family and my child's education. Ke'ōpū was able to offer such support not only by her professional experience within the field of early childhood learning, but also by her experience as a mother who has had to navigate the same complex system for her own family. She is a fierce advocate for social justice, and she knows the foundation of that mission starts with equitable access to early learning. It is my belief that her experience, knowledge, and understanding of EOEL combined with the value she places on the perspective of Hawai'i families will make her an excellent leader for the future of EOEL.

Mahalo nui for your time,  
Natalie Wallsgrove

## Public Comment - GENERAL COMMENT

**From:** KATHLEEN ALGIRE  
**Contact info:** kalgire@hawaii-can.org  
**Sent:** 3/4/22 15:59:33

**Comment:** Chair Peters and Early Learning Board members,

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the special meeting relating to the selection of the new Director for the Executive Office on Early Learning. As a community organization with a specific focus on children and children's well-being, we would like to share points for your consideration as you move through your selection process.

For the role of the Director, we believe that there are core skills and experiences that would serve the position well.

Understanding and support of Hawai'i's children and families  
The Early Learning Board is a representation of all the voices that make up our early learning community. These voices are unique to Hawai'i and support the children and families throughout the islands, like FCILs and Hawaiian language immersion early learning programs. The communities ELB represents deserve a Director who understands their programs, the families they serve and will honor each piece of our early childhood system.

Strong belief in building power in community and engaging community  
Valuing the insight and input from families is essential to the work of the Director. Understanding the choices families have (or don't have) is key to building a system that works. As the entity charged with developing the system to support early learning and other services for children from prenatal to kindergarten, it is vital that the Director believes in listening to families and values their input.

Desire to maintain and strengthen relationships between state departments  
The system coordinated by the EOEL spans across departments. The new Director should have strong relationships with all the departments that overlap, but especially with the Department of Human Services, Department of Health, and Department of Education. The ongoing work for Act 46 (2020) requires continuous collaboration and for the legislation's goals to be actualized, it will require a director who has experience working across departments.

Ability to work with legislators  
In previous years, the early learning community experienced legislative wins that were accomplished by working with legislators and

understanding the process. We will always have need of legislative victories to accomplish the goals of the office and therefore, the Director should possess the ability to be a strong advocate in their capacity and work with legislators to bring about the best outcomes for children.

Understanding of the state budget process and federal funding opportunities

The state budget process is complicated and incredibly important for the success of EOEL. The new Director should understand the budget process and how to use it to meet the goals of the department. Additionally, understanding and knowledge of the federal funding the state currently receives or could receive will become increasingly important. To be ready to act, we will need a director already familiar with federal funding and how to leverage it to support and expand the work on state dollars.

This list is not exhaustive, but we wanted to share the skills and experience we believe would be most beneficial to the community. With interest in early learning and early childhood at the state and federal level we may be able to move mountains for our kids but only with the right leadership in place.

Thank you,

Kathleen Algire  
Director of Early Learning and Health Policy

## Public Comment - KE'ŌPŪ REELITZ

**From:** KU'ULANI KEOHOKALOLE  
**Contact info:** kuukeoho@gmail.com  
**Sent:** 3/6/22 16:13:08

**Comment:** Aloha, Early Learning Board:

My name is Ku'ulani Keohokalole and I am the owner/principal consultant of People Strategies Hawai'i. In a previous role, I worked for then Good Beginnings Alliance as the Program Director and was heavily involved in community engagement around early childhood issues.

I am writing with my strongest recommendation for Ke'ōpū Reelitz as EOEL Director. I have known Ke'ōpū for a few years now, and in that brief time I have found her to be incredibly smart, grounded in community, astute at early childhood policy, and a fierce advocate for equity and social justice not just on Hawaiian issues but on all issues of inequity.

You need someone in this role who possesses all of those things. As someone who works with organizations and advises around diversity, equity and inclusion, I can tell you how often candidates are chosen who possess the skillsets but not necessarily the intrinsic bend towards equity and advocacy. Ke'ōpū has it all – and she is both a keen listener and an apt communicator, something folks across the state will expect out of someone in this role.

I believe Ms. Reelitz can hit the ground running with her expertise in early childhood policy, her deep understanding of Hawai'i's communities, cultures, politics, relationships, and histories – and her strong penchant for advocacy and equity. I have no doubt in my mind that she would direct Hawai'i's early childhood efforts in a way that is inclusive, fair, and solution-oriented.

I highly recommend her for this role without any hesitation and welcome any questions.

## Public Comment - KE'ŌPŪ REELITZ

**From:** LIANNA LAM  
**Contact info:** liana.hl.lam@gmail.com  
**Sent:** 3/6/22 19:52:40

**Comment:** Aloha EOEL board. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Ke'ōpū Reelitz! My name is Lianna Lam and I've served the past four years as board chair of Wai'alae Public Charter School's Governing Board. During the past two years, I've had the great fortune of working closely with Ke'ōpū Reelitz through her volunteer service on the Wai'alae PCS Governance Committee and in her role as Chair-elect. Charter school Governance Boards have heavy responsibilities - CEO evaluation and hire, Learning program changes (in-person or distance), \$5 million budget oversight (including deliberations about budget shortfalls and last year's furlough discussions), HSTA negotiations and grievances, and well as typical board governance tasks like bylaw and policy review or revisions.

I've known Ke'ōpū Reelitz to be remarkably courageous and sensitive, empathetic yet rational, superb in systems analysis, direct and honest - unafraid to have hard conversations with compassion. All these attributes make her a top thought partner for me and our CEO, and essential in navigating the pandemic. We originally recruited Keopu for her expertise in organizational culture and Mission/Vision alignment, however quickly discovered and depended on her strong skills in crisis communications and managing competing stakeholder needs (teachers wanted schools in distance learning, families were struggling and wanted kids in person, admin and board in the hot seat, tact and diplomacy, and sensitivity to the organization's politics). In our board deliberations, she always put students and families first and asked what is the school doing to meet child care needs.

Ke'ōpū Reelitz has volunteered countless hours to Wai'alae Public Charter School...and not the fun kind of warm fuzzy stuff like reading books or gardening with the little ones (though those are important volunteer roles too!). Ke'ōpū's volunteering was of the HARD, messy, high stakes decision-making during the darkest of times in the pandemic. She endured hours of deliberations and listening to upset stakeholders, only to spend additional time helping me draft communications to our community...all as a volunteer!! I can only imagine the kind of positive impact she could make in a paid leadership role that is aligned with her passion for educating Hawai'i's keiki! Mahalo again for the opportunity to submit testimony and I wish you all the best in your big decision!

## Public Comment - KE'ŌPŪ REELITZ

**From:** MICHELLE ROCCA

**Contact info:** michelle.rocca@gmail.com

**Sent:** 3/7/22 11:42:35

**Comment:** Keopu is a dedicated and passionate advocate of early learning for Hawaii's youth and families. She is resourceful, compassionate, and a natural leader. Keopu is innovative and understands the development, evaluation, and implementation needs of early learning curriculum. She is a dedicated and focused professional and I believe she would serve the mission of this office with the highest standards of excellence.

## Public Comment - KE'ŌPŪ REELITZ

**From:** ERICA YAMAUCHI  
**Contact info:** aloha@ericayamauchi.com  
**Sent:** 3/7/22 15:54:24

**Comment:** Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on Ms. Kéopū Reelitz's candidacy for executive director of the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL).

I first met Kéopū when she was the editor of MANA magazine and I was working on a grant that primarily served Native Hawaiian girls in the children's mental health system. Her talent for storytelling, coupled with her ability to break down complex policy issues in order to affect real change, immediately impressed me during that interaction—and continues to impress me 10 years later.

Kéopū never shies away from controversy or a hard conversation. In fact, as a natural leader and change-maker, I've seen her welcome them—from MANA to the Hawai'i Dept. of Human Services and now with the EOEL—when they are part of bringing people together for a common good.

She is expert in both change management and communications, as well as crisis management and communications, which are both areas where the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) could benefit greatly, especially during this time of upheaval and transition.

And finally, her leadership style is what I aspire to. In this work, we need leaders who are able to work together cooperatively and with diverse audiences. Kéopū is incredibly self-aware and inclusive, actively seeking out different perspectives to inform her decision-making and collaborate more effectively.

I wholeheartedly recommend the board hire Ms. Kéopū Reelitz as the next executive director Executive Office on Early Learning with no reservations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment.

Very sincerely,  
Erica Yamauchi  
Social Marketing Director, Child & Adolescent Mental Health Division,  
Hawai'i Dept. of Health  
Adjunct Faculty, School of Communications, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa  
President, Board of Directors, Hawai'i Children's Action Network



## Public Comment - GENERAL COMMENT

**From:** VIVIAN ETO  
**Contact info:** vivian@ecashawaii.org  
**Sent:** 3/7/22 16:02:53

**Comment:** Given the charge to the Executive Office of Early Learning and the broad scope of the Office's responsibilities, I urge the Board to prioritize the following criteria in the final considerations and selection of a candidate for the Director position:

A deep understanding of early childhood issues from prenatal to age eight that encompasses health, wellness, family support, child care and early learning, ideally gained from experience working with or across a mix of sectors.

A breadth of experience in systems-development efforts that includes meaningful leadership work convening and collaborating with public agencies, private organizations/entities, policy makers, and the philanthropic community.

A willingness to resist silo mentality and challenge partners/stakeholders to align, coordinate, and apply a continuous-improvement mindset to systems-development efforts.

## Public Comment - KE'ŌPŪ REELITZ

**From:** ANN TERUYA  
**Contact info:** 808haikugirl@gmail.com  
**Sent:** 3/7/22 16:59:20

**Comment:** In order for EOEL to continue to move forward efficiently and smoothly we would need to have someone who already understand The ECE landscape in Hawaii, connected to government partners, partnerships with community organizations, understanding of the different settings/programs and full understanding of the State plan.

I believe Keopu has the connections, partnerships, knowledge, expertise and understanding to keep our current momentum going forward. Through her commitment to the ECE field we know and what Keopu is capable of and with her leadership she can lead her team forward ensuring Hawaii is on the right pace implementation of state plan and ACT 210