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Testimony

MISC. COM. 140

BUDGET (BUD)

Councilmember Radiant Cordero, Chair
Members of the Budget Committee
Honolulu City Council
Honolulu Hale

Aloha Budget Chair Cordero and Members of the Budget Committee,

I am testifying in strong opposition to the suggested amendments to reduce funding for the film office.

My name is Amira Soliman and I am a Location Manager and member of the Local Teamster Union 996 here on Oahu. I have been working consistently in TV, Film, and Commercials since 2010 on a variety of small and big budget productions.

As a member of the Locations Department, we work very closely with the Honolulu Film Office; from scouting feasible yet practical locations to fit the unique creative needs of a production, to concisely laying out our plan so that a permit can be processed, to working through the logistics with various other city and country offices to see our request through. Cutting funding to this office would be detrimental to our industry and heartbreaking to my department.

The Location Manager on a project gets called in at the very early stages of production, before the film company knows 100% that they are going to film in Hawaii. I have worked closely with Walea Constantinau, the Film Commissioner, to present viable options to these companies to get them here. I've been in situations where I'm at a deadend, and Walea will have a flood of ideas. I've attended events with Walea on the mainland where I have firsthand seen her engage with producers and creatives who are interested in bringing film to Oahu. Cutting funding will directly affect the Film Office's ability to entice producers to bring projects here which employees SO many local people and brings in so many dollars into our economy.

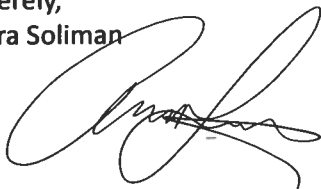
On the MONARCH tv series (Apple+, 2023), we had a huge challenge that the Film Office helped us to overcome. Firstly, the Film Office handled the initial call from the producer and successfully brought the production here based on images and conversations of what Oahu has to offer. During the pre-production, one of the locations that we were going to film had recently experienced a landslide so there were many environmental factors to overcome. The Film Office turned what could have potentially been a very bad situation into an opportunity for success. All answers pointed to no but with creative problem-solving, we were able to proceed.

The Film Office not only supports and advocates for the private film companies, they empower and protect the City and County offices that we work with on all film shoots. Walea and her staff do not always give us the answer that we want because she is tough and scrutinizes what we ask for. The office has the big picture and wants to see the longevity of the film industry flourish by setting boundaries and protecting us from ourselves. Even in a disagreement, I know that Walea is doing her best by being a strong liaison that is watching out for the best interests of both parties.

This is not an office that is easily replaceable or duplicated. The work is hard, engaging, and not for the faint of heart. The staff in this office care deeply about bringing creative, diverse, work to Oahu. I take a lot of pride in my work, and I know they do the same. When I call the Honolulu Film Office, day or night, I know they will take my request or question with care, dedication, and follow-through.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,
Amira Soliman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amira Soliman', written over a white background.