Outlook

New Public Testimony

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Representing

Hawaii Agriculture Research Center

Agenda Item

Docket No. SP26-416 Kaawanui Solar, LLC

Position

Support

Testimony

May 11, 2026

Re: Testimony in Support of Docket No. SP26-416, Kaʻawanui Solar, LLC

To the Members of the Land Use Commission:

My name is Juli Burden. I serve as a Research Associate and Project Lead at the Hawaiʻi Agriculture Research Center (HARC), where I oversee the Hawaiʻi Agrivoltaic Research and Demonstration Center, a satellite research site in Mililani, Oʻahu, collaborative project, in partnership with AES Hawaiʻi, Longroad Energy, and Clearway Energy. I am writing to offer my professional support for the Kaʻawanui Solar project and to speak to the agricultural potential it represents for West Kauaʻi and the state.

The Kaʻawanui Solar project represents one of the most meaningful opportunities in the state to demonstrate that utility-scale solar energy generation and productive commercial farming can and should coexist on the same land. This concept, known as agrivoltaics, is the focus of my work at HARC, and the scientific evidence supporting it has grown substantially in recent years.

At the Mililani research site, we have been systematically evaluating which crops grow effectively under and alongside utility-scale solar panels. Our findings to date indicate that a meaningful range of high-value crops can perform as well or better under partial panel shade than in full open sun, particularly where water availability and heat stress are

limiting factors. Crops including coffee, ginger, turmeric, vanilla, sweet potato, and certain floriculture species show strong compatibility with agrivoltaic systems. These crops represent some of the highest-value agricultural commodities produced in Hawai‘i, and many face the same water costs and labor pressures that threaten the long-term viability of farming on agricultural lands statewide.

What AES Hawai‘i is proposing at Ka‘awanui is consistent with the direction the science is pointing. By committing to genuine co-located agriculture and partnering with a local Kaua‘i farming operation, this project offers a model that could demonstrate to farmers, landowners, and policymakers across the state that large-scale renewable energy development need not come at the expense of our agricultural land base but actively supports it.

I recognize that the Land Use Commission must weigh many considerations in evaluating a project of this scale. From an agricultural science perspective, I am confident that the compatible agriculture component of this proposal is worth supporting. HARC stands ready to contribute crop-specific research and technical guidance to help ensure the agricultural mission of this project achieves lasting, measurable results.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Respectfully,

Juli Burden
Research Associate and Project Lead
Hawai‘i Agrivoltaic Research and Demonstration Center
Hawai‘i Agriculture Research Center (