



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Dr. Aaron J. Salā Appointed as New President and CEO of the Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau

Honolulu, HI – The Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB) today announced the appointment of Dr. Aaron J. Salā as its new President and CEO. With a distinguished career as a business entrepreneur and educator working in creative storytelling, culture and arts knowledge and advocacy, and solutions-oriented futures, Dr. Salā brings unparalleled experience and expertise to HVCB.

Dr. Salā succeeds Tom Mullen, HVCB Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, who has served as Interim President and CEO since January 1, 2024, following the retirement of John Monahan. Monahan stepped down last year after serving as the organization's top leader since 2003.

As the President and CEO of Gravitas Pasifika, Dr. Salā led a boutique firm dedicated to advancing Native Hawaiian, local Hawai'i, and Pasifika talent through innovative and creative production. He also established the Foundation for an Engaged Pacific, a not-for-profit corporation focused on engaging, educating, and elevating Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities through leadership and professional development.

Salā received his PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. His academic research in Hawaiian music traced the life and career of Hawai'i's Mahi Beamer, who through his music, served as an ambassador of Hawai'i at a time when the modern world was just coming to know Hawai'i. As an educator, he most recently served as Director of the 'Upena Moananuiākea project at UH-West O'ahu. The project brings together faculty and students to engage with NHPI content through innovative technologies, pointing them to consider more solutions-oriented futures for Hawai'i and the greater Pacific region.

Dr. Salā served as the Festival Director for the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture, successfully overseeing the planning, coordination, and execution of the festival, which was held in Hawai'i for the first time last month. His leadership extends to board roles with several organizations including Awaiāulu, Hawai'i Opera Theatre, and the Hawai'i Youth Symphony. He is also a former chairperson of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority and previously served as a board member of PBS Hawai'i.

Born into a family deeply immersed in the tourism industry, Salā gained an early appreciation for the benefits tourism brings to our communities. His father's career as a Waikīkī entertainer, flight attendant for American Airlines and role in executive management with South Pacific Island Airways, and his mother's work as a Polynesian dancer in Waikīkī before her career at the iconic Aikāne Catamarans, informed and influenced Salā's own work in the industry starting as a host at the Polynesian Palace before his work with Tihati Productions and his own performing

career took him to stages around the world. All of this has given Salā a set of unique insights and a deep and personal understanding of Hawai‘i’s visitor industry—which will undoubtedly serve him well in his new role.

HVCB board chair and executive vice president/chief commercial officer for Outrigger Hospitality Group, Sean Dee, lauded Salā’s appointment stating, “Aaron’s extensive experience and deep understanding of our cultural heritage make him the ideal leader for HVCB. His commitment to elevating Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities in his work is unparalleled. We are confident that under his leadership, HVCB will continue to thrive and promote the rich cultural tapestry of Hawai‘i.”

Tom Mullen, HVCB interim president and CEO, expressed his confidence in Dr. Salā’s leadership, saying, “Aaron is the right person to lead HVCB into the future. His innovative approach and dedication to cultural preservation and promotion align perfectly with our mission. We are excited to see the positive impact he will have on Hawai‘i’s tourism industry and our community.”

Dr. Salā’s appointment will be effective September 1, 2024.

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About HVCB

The Hawai‘i Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB) is a private, non-profit membership organization founded in 1945. Contracted by the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority (HTA) for marketing services in the continental U.S., HVCB works in partnership with its members to promote Hawai‘i as a premier visitor destination. HVCB serves the people of Hawai‘i by showcasing the state’s unique culture, natural beauty, and aloha spirit to the world, aiming to foster a regenerative tourism model that ensures the social, environmental, and economic balance for our island home. For visitor information, visit gohawaii.com. For more about HVCB, visit hvcb.org or follow updates on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Special note to media: The Hawai‘i Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB) recognizes the use of the ‘okina [‘] or glottal stop, one of the eight consonants of the (modern) Hawaiian language; and the kahakō [ā] or macron (e.g., in place names of Hawai‘i such as Lāna‘i). However, HVCB respects the individual use of these markings for names of organizations and businesses.

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