

Aia Iā Kākou Nā Hā'ina - The Answers Are Within Us: Language Rights in Tandem with Language Survival

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Language rights positions taken by any individual, group or state, is “all fine and dandy,” as the expression goes, but the human dynamics required in the process of legislating points of view into law is a different matter entirely. This paper presents the human story in back of Public Law (PL) 101-477, better known as the Native American Languages Act (NALA) of 1990 based on my personal experience and communication with other individuals involved in these events.

The story begins in Hawai'i with a small group of Hawaiian language educators who opened the first Pūnana Leo Hawaiian language immersion preschools in 1984-1985, to “feed” the Hawaiian language into the ears and mouths of young toddlers in order to bring life to Hawai'i's dying Indigenous language.

To facilitate condensing the story of the passage of PL 101-477, I will highlight events using a chronology of dates and a summary of events relevant to each date that connect to the enactment of the NALA federal legislation.

- 1841** Hawaiian Department of Education formed as a Hawaiian medium system with education and administration through the language.
- 1893** The sovereign Hawaiian Nation is overthrown by U.S. Marines at the request of American business interests and a Provisional Government is set up.
- 1896** Hawaiian Language as a medium of education is outlawed by the Republic of Hawai'i. This ban follows United States practice with Native American languages.
- 1898** Hawai'i is annexed by the United States.
- 1941** United States enters World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in the U.S. Territory of Hawai'i. After the war, American nationalism grows strong in the Territory and Hawai'i's push for statehood is fervently pursued. In light of this political context, Native Hawaiian issues are of insignificant concern.
- 1959** Hawai'i becomes the 50th State of the United States.
- 1969-77** Ten years after statehood, the eviction of farmers for urban development on O'ahu (some of whom are Hawaiians), the participation of young Hawaiian entertainers with Hawaiian cultural concerns in the Hawaiian music industry, and a 167% increase in Hawaiian language class enrollments at the University of Hawai'i, the campaign to stop the military bombing exercises of Kaho'olawe island and the revival of traditional Polynesian seafaring navigation, are some of the undertakings bringing focus on the issue for the survival of the Hawaiian culture. This period is sometimes referred to as the “Hawaiian Renaissance.”
- 1978** Several major Hawaiian issues come to the fore at the Hawai'i State Constitution Convention. Hawai'i's voters approve several amendments relevant to Hawaiian affairs. Hawaiian language is approved as an official language of Hawai'i along with English; Hawai'i being the only State to recognize its Indigenous language as an official state language. It is because of the concern for the Hawaiian language that English is also officially recognized.

- 1981** Senator S. I. Hayakawa of California introduces a constitutional amendment (S.J. Res. 72) in Congress to make English the official language of the United States. Although the resolution never made it out of committee, it launched a decade of what has become known as The English Only Movement.
- 1982** Hawai'i Superintendent of Schools Donnis Thompson and the Hawai'i Board of Education visit the only school on the island of Ni'ihau on the opening day of classes in the fall of 1982. All the teachers of the Ni'ihau School are Native Hawaiian speakers from the Ni'ihau community. She declares that significant changes need to occur to improve the educational standards of the school.

The island of Ni'ihau was purchased fee simple in 1863 from the Kingdom of Hawai'i by a private owner. The entire community on the island of Ni'ihau (about 200 in 1982) are Native Hawaiian speakers and they represent Hawai'i's last unbroken, viable Native Hawaiian language link to time immemorial. The sole school on the island is under the jurisdiction of the Hawai'i Department of Education. Ms Thompson's declaration for change at the school causes reaction of concern from major Hawaiian community leaders. It is at this time that Dr. Mitsugi Nakashima, the Kaua'i School District Superintendent who is more directly responsible for the Ni'ihau School, receives a proposal from Dr. William (Pila) Wilson, Head of the Hawaiian Studies Department at the University of Hawai'i, Hilo. The proposal is to allow Hawaiian as a language of education to address the concern of Superintendent Thompson for the Ni'ihau School rather than English only because for thousands of years the people of Ni'ihau have conducted their lives through the Hawaiian language. Several meetings take place whereupon in December of 1983 the Hawai'i Board of Education approves the use of Hawaiian as a language of instruction for the Ni'ihau School. Upon this approval however, the Department discovers a law from the Republic of Hawai'i in 1896 that forbids the use of the Hawaiian language as the language of instruction. The attempt to allow Hawaiian as a language of instruction for Ni'ihau's school does not move forward.

- 1983** 'Aha Pūnana Leo is incorporated as a non-profit educational organization. No sustainable funding is secured. Only a few small, private donations are received.

The Ni'ihau community is represented by Ilei Beniamina as a co-founder of 'Aha Pūnana Leo, and members of the Ni'ihau community are among 'Aha Pūnana Leo's first teacher cohort. The issue of the Hawaiian language as a medium of education that was focused upon earlier in 1982 is coalesced with the goals of 'Aha Pūnana Leo.

- 1984** Hawai'i House Bill 2155 and Senate Bill 1938, relating to the Department of Education to allow Hawaiian as a language of education in Hawai'i public schools is submitted. This is an attempt to legislate Hawaiian as a legal means of education for the Ni'ihau School. The bill does not pass.

In September, the first Pūnana Leo School opens at Kekaha, Kaua'i, staffed entirely by Native speakers from the Ni'ihau community. The legal status of the school is questioned because it teaches through Hawaiian rather than through English or a foreign language to revitalize the Hawaiian language beginning with preschools conducted entirely through Hawaiian.

A bill is submitted to the Hawai'i Legislature to provide Pūnana Leo the same status accorded private foreign language schools which have the right to have unlicensed Native speakers as teachers. Parents, children, family and friends, lobby the State Legislature but the bill does not pass.

- 1985** In February, Pūnana Leo schools are started at Kalihi, O'ahu and at Hilo, Hawai'i. Pūnana Leo Schools are threatened to be closed because Native speaking Hawaiian teachers do not meet state certification. Schools are inspected on a monthly basis for compliance with health and safety regulations and upon finding no shortcomings the schools are allowed to remain open until their next monthly inspection.

Within three months children begin to speak in phrases and continue to gain more fluency as the week's progress. This outcome is the essence that drives the maintenance of the schools.

1985 cont. Pūnana Leo founders continue to research regulations regarding foreign language schools and exemptions afforded to “purely educational” private schools. Pūnana Leo families, staff and children lobby again at the state legislature for teacher exemption. In joint committee, the bill is changed so that it excludes children under five years of age, thus eliminating Pūnana Leo.

Heather N. Giugni, Producer of the Hawaiian culture video series, “Enduring Pride” films the family of Pila Wilson and Kauaoe Kamanā-Wilson and their two children, Hulilau and Keli’i Wilson, Hawai’i’s first household outside of the Ni’ihau community to return the Hawaiian language into their home as their first language. This film debuts on one of Hawai’i’s major TV channels in January 1986 and draws attention to the plight of Hawai’i’s Indigenous language.

Heather is the daughter of Senator Inouye’s long time confidant and aide, Henry Giugni who was the first Hawaiian to serve as the Sergeant of Arms for the Senate. Heather lived in Washington, D.C. but became interested in addressing Hawaiian issues through film production. She returned to Hawai’i to start her business. Lurline McGregor who also worked as an aide to Senator Inouye, was also interested in working with media and Hawaiian cultural affairs. She assisted Heather with the filming of the Wilson family. She and Pila immediately started the early discussions for protecting and maintaining the Hawaiian and Native American languages based on the Native American Religious Freedom Act. Senator Inouye was the Chairperson of the Committee for Indian Affairs. It was Lurline who eventually became the manager of the Native American Languages bill for Senator Inouye when it entered the congressional process to become a law.

1986 In January, Pūnana Leo is back at the State Legislature to support a bill that would allow Native Hawaiian speakers and fluent second language learners without early childhood college credentials to teach and care for pre-school aged children in the Pūnana Leo Hawaiian immersion setting. After a four-hour hearing, S.B. 2126-86 passes amending Act 79 that removes legal barriers for Pūnana Leo and its teachers.

Pūnana Leo explores alliances with other U.S. Native American languages in the early spring of 1986. During a trip to participate in a hula workshop in Los Angeles, Kauaoe Kamanā a co-founder of Pūnana Leo, makes a trip to visit the Hualapai of Peach Springs, Grand Canyon, and becomes acquainted with the language work of the Hualapai and its program founder, Lucille Watahomigie.



Figure 1. Lucille Watahomigie (Hualapai) and Sandra Johnson who worked with Lucille on Hualapai curriculum at Peach Springs see how bananas grow in Larry Kimura’s backyard at Laulā Street home in Hilo, Hawai’i . They came to visit Hawaiian immersion in Hilo at the end of 1989.

Lucille recommends that Pūnana Leo send representatives to Oklahoma City later that spring of 1986 for the Sixth Native American Languages Issues Institute (NALI), the largest organization for Native American languages.



Figure 2. Pow Wow dancing at NALI 1986 conference, Oklahoma.

Pūnana Leo representatives, Kauanoē Kamanā, Larry Kimura and No‘eau Warner attend their first NALI conference in Oklahoma in 1986. They are concerned that young linguists who present their research papers predicting the extinction of various Indian American languages offer no suggestions to help maintain these endangered languages.



Figure 3. 1986 NALI Oklahoma planning committee receives lei from Pūnana Leo delegates. From left to right, Mary Tidwell (Cherokee), Harlene Green (Cherokee), Pat Locke (Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, South Dakota), Kauanoē Kamanā (‘Aha Pūnana Leo), NALI participant, Sandra Johnson, and Shirley Brown (Kickapoo-Oklahoma). Pat Locke and Sandra Johnson each came on separate trips to Hilo in 1989 to visit Hawaiian language immersion.

The Pūnana Leo representatives meet many other Native American language leaders among whom are Dr. Ofelia Zepeda of the Tohono O’odham of Arizona and Pat Locke of the Lakota people and this initiates a Hawaiian-Native American Indian languages relationship, which will prove crucial to the passage of the 1990 Native American Languages Act.



Figure 4. Kauanoe Kamanā and No‘eau Warner (Pūnana Leo) meet with Ofelia Zepeda (Tohono O‘odham, University of Arizona) and Juana Jose (Tohono O‘odham, Arizona Dept. of Ed.) in 1986 at NALI Oklahoma

1986 cont. In the 1986 Hawai‘i legislative session, the issue of the law established during the Republic of Hawai‘i in 1896 to eliminate the Hawaiian language as the medium of education when Hawai‘i was overtaken by the United States, still remained in the Hawai‘i Statutes. Senators Clayton Hee and Charles Toguchi sponsor Senate Bill 2463-86 to dissolve this 90-year-old law and it is approved on April 17, 1986, amending Act 47 of the Hawai‘i Statutes thus allowing again the Hawaiian language as a medium of education for Hawai‘i public schools.

In August, the first Pūnana Leo graduates on O‘ahu enter kindergarten in public school and are assigned to the Second Language English Proficiency (SLEP) Program along with children of immigrant parents. Hilo parents refuse to send their children to mainstream English schools and instead teach kindergarten in Hawaiian at their Pūnana Leo site. This program is named Papa Kaiapuni Hawai‘i “Hawaiian environment class.”

The ‘Aha Pūnana Leo declares itself a public school in accordance with Act 47, following the State schedule and charges no tuition.

By the end of 1986, after five States make English their single official language, Pūnana Leo is concerned that the English Language Only movement, although lobbied at the state level, could become a federal threat to the Hawaiian language and all other Native American languages.



Figure 5. Pat Locke is received at Larry Kimura’s Hilo, Hawai‘i home in the fall of 1989. From left to right is Kauanoe Kamanā, Pila Wilson, Kalena Silva and "Uncle" Joseph Maka'ai. Pat has come to visit Hawaiian immersion programs.

1987 Governor John Waihe‘e appoints Senator Charles Toguchi as State Superintendent of Education. Superintendent Toguchi is well aware of the positive educational impact the Pūnana Leo program has made on the children and families that identify with the survival of the Hawaiian language through the years of the Pūnana Leo lobbying efforts while Mr. Toguchi served at the State Legislature. Senator Clayton Hee arranges for Superintendent Toguchi to meet with the leaders of the Pūnana Leo Hawaiian immersion schools to start a Hawaiian Immersion Program in the Hawai‘i Department of Education (DOE). Superintendent Toguchi supports the initiation of Hawaiian immersion for the DOE if approval can be obtained from the State Board of Education.

At the 1987 State Legislature, Senator Clayton Hee, a former Hawaiian language student of Larry Kimura, sponsors Senate Resolution 95, Requesting the Department of Education to establish Hawaiian medium classes in elementary schools serving Hawaiian speaking children, and Senate Resolution 96, Urging the Federal Government to protect and promote the Indigenous Languages of the United States of America. These resolutions pass. The intent of Senate Resolution 96 is clearly in line with what will eventually become the Native American Languages act.

On May 19-22, 1987, Pūnana Leo representatives, Ilei Beniamina, Kauanoe Kamanā, Pila Wilson, Larry Kimura and Koki Williams attend the Seventh NALI Conference in Saskatoon, Canada. Pūnana Leo representatives present papers pertaining to their work in Hawai‘i and participate in a discussion for the revitalization of Native American languages.



Figure 6. Koki Williams (corner of bed), Pila Wilson, Larry Kimura and Ilei Beniamina (all Pūnana Leo), meet with Ojibwe and Mohawk friends in a hotel room at NALI Saskatoon in 1987. Important understanding and ties are made at such informal getting-to-know each-other sessions.

1987 cont. Native American language rights legislation is a high priority and Pila Wilson leads the concern for Native American languages’ legislation. Well known Canadian researchers Jim Cummins and Fred Genesee, in Canada’s French immersion and Canadian Indian languages maintenance initiatives are at NALI 1987 and offer support for the Hawaiian immersion work.

Pila brings the two resolutions that he spearheaded at the 1987 Hawai‘i State Legislature to the NALI conference in Saskatoon. These resolutions are Senate Resolution 95, Requesting the Department of Education to establish Hawaiian medium classes in elementary schools serving Hawaiian speaking children, and Senate Resolution 96, Urging the Federal Government to protect and promote the Indigenous Languages of the United States of America. The text of Resolution 96 will eventually be drawn upon for the Native American Languages Act of 1990.



Figure 7. ‘Aha Pūnana Leo board members Pila Wilson, Larry Kimura, Kauanoē Kamanā and Ilei Beniamina (from Nī ihau), meet informally with Canadian researcher Jim Cummins (center), NALI Saskatoon, 1987.



Figure 8. Another informal meeting over dinner at NALI Saskatoon 1987. Kauanoē Kamanā, Sister Dorothy Lazore (Mohawk), Pila Wilson, Ilei Beniamina, Taehowehs Key (Mohawk), Koki Williams, NALI participant (Ojibwa), and Larry Kimura.

Meeting Dorothy Lazore and learning of her critical work with Mohawk language immersion education initiated a valuable partnership and friendship that helped Hawaiian immersion get over some important hurdles. Sister Lazore gave the Hawaiian effort confidence and support at a lonely time.

Back in Hawai‘i, the Pūnana Leo begins to lobby the Hawai‘i Board of Education through informal meetings. New Zealand Māori Professor Sam Tīmoti Kāretu of the University of Waikato Māori Studies Program is in Hawai‘i and provides information on Māori language immersion and he responds to questions some members of the Board of Education (BOE) and Department staff have regarding this unprecedented approach to education for Hawai‘i. The New Zealand Māori have already established over 300 Māori immersion pre-schools and have already started their first Māori immersion elementary schools.

The BOE finally schedules Hawaiian immersion on its meeting agenda in the summer of 1987 to consider a trial Hawaiian immersion program. Sister Dorothy Lazore, a Catholic nun and an activist of her Mohawk language in Montreal, Canada has already been brought by the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo to work on Hawaiian curriculum material in anticipation of the BOE’s approval of Hawaiian medium classes at the end of that summer. Dorothy also attends the BOE meeting. The Pūnana Leo people first met Dorothy at NALI 1987 in Saskatoon and became a friend and supporter of the program. Her experience with French immersion in Canada and as Principal of her own Mohawk immersion school at Kahnawake, Montreal, provides vital information for the Board at their official meeting. After a lengthy meeting of testimonies of support from parents, educators and members of the community, the Board unanimously approves of Hawai‘i’s first Hawaiian Immersion Program,

named in Hawaiian after the program held at Hilo's Pūnana Leo's first kindergarten class, Papa Kaiapuni Hawai'i, with a modification to *Kula*, or "School", Kula Kaiapuni Hawai'i or Hawaiian environment education. The first probationary Hawaiian immersion sites open in the Fall of 1987, one at Waiiau, O'ahu and one at Keaukaha, Hilo, Hawai'i. The Pūnana Leo is asked by the DOE to assist in providing teachers and curriculum for these initial years of Hawaiian immersion at the DOE level. Both Programs are combined K-1 classes.

In December 1987 Larry Kimura is invited by Dr. Stephen H. Sumida, Professor of Asian/Pacific American Studies and English of Washington State University and a member of the Modern Language Association of America's (MLA) Commission on the Literatures and Languages of America, to present at the MLA convention in San Francisco on, "Discourses and Communities: Language Policy, Literature and Change." Due to personal commitments, Larry is not able to attend, but Pila Wilson attends and presents a paper on one of his Hawaiian literary compositions.

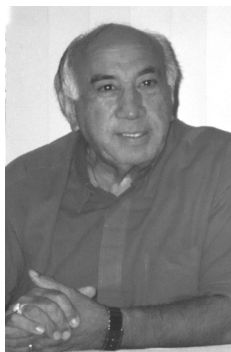


Figure 9. Sam Timoti Kāretu, a dear friend and among the staunchest of supporters of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo.

It is at this MLA convention that Pila meets Ofelia Zepeda whom the Pūnana Leo representatives had met at NALI in 1986. Ofelia is also a writer of literary compositions in her own Tohono O'odham language. Pila discusses with her a draft of a resolution calling for legal rights and support of Native American languages and the Hawaiian language. This is a progression of drafts that Pila started back in 1986 when he first met Lurline McGregor, an aide to Senator Daniel K. Inouye, and who assisted Heather Giugni in the production of "Enduring Pride" focusing on Pila's family returning Hawaiian as the first language of their home. Ofelia and Pila agree to jointly sponsor a resolution calling for Congressional adoption of the draft at the next NALI conference to be held in Tempe, Arizona.

1988 The State DOE funds an evaluation of its probationary Hawaiian Immersion Program with the expectation that like many novel programs, Hawaiian immersion would fall to the wayside. The evaluation however, comes up with too many positive results and recommends that the program's probationary period be extended into another year.



Figure 10. Sister Dorothy Lazore (center of photo) joins a small committee of Hawaiian elementary curriculum developers in the summer of 1987—just before the start of the first Department of Education Hawaiian immersion classes in the fall to share her experience with Mohawk immersion in Montreal, Canada. To her left and around the table is Leinani Tam, Kauanoë Kamanā and Elama Kanahele.

1988 cont. On June 8-11, 1988, members of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo Board of Directors, Kalena Silva, Pila Wilson, Larry Kimura and Kauanoē Kamanā, attend the Eighth Annual NALI Conference in Tempe, Arizona. They present papers on what has transpired in Hawaiian immersion education. Several resolutions are drafted and approved on the final day of the conference.

There are three resolutions drafted and passed at this NALI in Tempe. One resolution opposes any legislation which restrains personal liberty, freedom, and the rights of citizenship of language for minority Native Americans. Another resolution requests the introduction of HCR 2012 on to the floor of the Arizona Senate for debate. HCR 2012 is about Arizona English versus English Only. The third resolution is entitled the Native American Cultural Survival Act/Resolution. This third resolution is drafted by Pila Wilson and introduced by Ofelia Zepeda and should be the prelude to the next step, its introduction to the US Congress. All three resolutions are unanimously passed and the resolutions committee of NALI agrees to move each resolution to their next political process. The NALI headquarters in Oklahoma is delinquent in sending to Congress the Native American Cultural Survival Act/Resolution, but Pila Wilson is able to provide Senator Daniel Inouye's office with a copy of that resolution and the Senator introduces and passes a joint resolution (S.J. Resolution 379), based on the 1988 NALI resolution, through his Select Committee on Indian Affairs but Congress adjourns without taking any action.

1988 cont. On December 27-30, 1988, the Modern Languages Association of America (MLA) is held in New Orleans and again through Dr. Stephen Sumida, members of the Pūnana Leo are invited to present papers on various aspects of Hawaiian literature. The convention presents an opportunity to gain the support of this huge organization of language teachers and scholars. The annual convention in New Orleans drew over 4,000 participants.

Pila and Stephen work out the details and procedure for introducing and soliciting support for the passage of the Modern Language Association of America's Resolution on Native American Languages. Pila keeps to the minimal requirement of MLA resolutions of no more than 100 words. There is full support for this resolution at the convention and it is forwarded to the appropriate committees in Washington, D.C., and especially to Senator Daniel Inouye's Committee on Indian Affairs. Other academic associations that forward resolutions of support are the American Anthropological Association and the Society for the Study of Indigenous Languages of the Americas.

1989 The Hawai'i BOE reviews the immersion program for its second probationary year and deems it successful. It is allowed to continue for another year.

Two new Hawaiian immersion sites are opened, Kapa'a Elementary on Kaua'i and Pā'ia Elementary on Maui.

Hawai'i legislature establishes the Hale Kuamo'o Hawaiian Language Center at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. Larry Kimura leaves his Hawaiian teaching position at the UH Mānoa to join his Pūnana Leo colleagues at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. He becomes the first Director of Hale Kuamo'o whose main purpose is to assist with curriculum development and teacher training for the DOE Hawaiian Immersion Program.

Senator Inouye's office introduces an expanded version of the 1988 NALI American Cultural Survival Resolution in the form of Senate Bill 1781 but it is strongly opposed by the George Bush Sr. administration largely on the grounds that it would require an appropriation of \$20 million. Inouye revises the bill and it passes the Senate but in the House, key members were intimidated by a growing sentiment against the use of languages other than English and they refuse to allow the bill out of committee.

A nationwide call-in lobbying effort is launched to convince Congress to pass NALA. The existing Native American Languages Institute (NALI) and American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI)

networks are employed. Pila calls Alaska and Tribal Headquarters on Indian Reservations to expand the effort. But, "despite a vigorous telephone campaign by Native Hawaiians, American Indians, and Alaska Natives" (Arnold, 2001) the bill is doomed because of the English-only movement.

1990 Senator Inouye's watchful and capable aide, Lurline McGregor, finds another way to incorporate the concern for Native American languages into a bill with a title that made no mention of the word "languages." That bill titled "Tribally Controlled and Navajo Community Colleges, Reauthorizations," was amended on the floor by Senator Inouye and that amendment consisted of the entire text of his Native American languages bill. President George Bush Sr. signed the bill on October 30, 1990.



Figure 11. Larry Kimura, a guest of Lurline, Keli'i Wilson, Lurline McGregor, my Uncle Joseph Maka'ai, at my Lauā Street home in Hilo. Lurline has come to see the Merrie Monarch Hula Festival in 1992, which is already being televised live on the TV.

1990 cont. The Hawai'i DOE Hawaiian Immersion Program is approved to continue into its third year. Its lead class is in the fourth grade.

A fifth Hawaiian Immersion site opens at Pū'ōhala Elementary in Kāne'ohe, O'ahu.

The story of the human energy behind the enactment of the 1990 Native American Languages Act (NALA) is one of many people. Dr. William (Pila) Wilson however, of all those who deserve credit for the enactment, was the driving force that brought the law to reality. Like with many successful endeavors, timing is crucial, and having the right connections plays a major role. In the case of the Native American Languages Act, it took more than that. It was the hard work and accomplishments being coordinated at the local state level as a team effort with a program to revitalize the Hawaiian language that gave strength to achieving federal recognition. Endangered languages do not survive through laws alone, but governments can serve to protect and promote the well being of threatened languages. The answers however, are within us. Therefore, it is through language revitalization work first that endangered Indigenous languages must engage themselves for renewed life, and this will lead us to legislation.

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