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HTA Release (21-42)

### **T. Ilihia Gionson Joins the Hawai'i Tourism Authority as Public Affairs Officer**

**HONOLULU** – The Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) announced today that T. Ilihia Gionson, a longtime public affairs and community engagement professional from Hawai'i Island, will join the organization as public affairs officer. He begins work at HTA on November 1.

Gionson brings more than a decade of experience to HTA developing and executing strategies for federal, state and municipal government agencies, businesses, and non-profit organizations. He most recently was the founder and principal of Hiehie Communications, where he provided strategic integrated communications and community outreach services to a range of clients across Hawai'i in hospitality, renewable energy, and sustainable development. He has also served as field representative and Hawai'i communications director for U.S. Representative Tulsi Gabbard from 2018-2020, as well as executive assistant and communications director for the late Hawai'i County Mayor Billy Kenoi from 2011-2016.



In this newly created position developed through the recent restructuring of HTA, Gionson will be responsible for anticipating, gathering, analyzing, and interpreting opinions, attitudes, and issues that may affect the organization and its mission, Mālama Ku'u Home (caring for my beloved home) through the principles of regenerative tourism. He will also work with the HTA Board of Directors, executives, and staff to formulate communications and disseminate information to HTA stakeholders and the public about how the organization's activities will enhance community well-being. In addition, he will be responsible for HTA's government relations, media communications, issue management, corporate and social responsibility programs, information dissemination, and strategic communications.

"Ilihia brings a strong background in community building and government relations to our HTA leadership team and we are excited to have him join as we continue to execute on our strategic plan," said John De Fries, HTA president and CEO. "Effective communication and engagement is a key part of building greater collaboration between tourism and the community. His working knowledge of the unique tapestry of Hawai'i, as well as the Hawaiian culture, has made him an effective strategist and communicator throughout his career."

With a strong history of guiding clients from within and outside Hawai'i in sensitive and challenging situations, Gionson is well-versed in geographic and socioeconomic nuances across the islands. A kama'āina of O'ahu and Hawai'i Island, he is fully bilingual, trained in Hawaiian language and culture.

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“The visitor industry is a part of the fabric of Hawai‘i’s society, amplifying our potential to help heal the world with the values that have guided us for generations,” said Gionson. “The industry has grown in ways that call upon us today to rebalance, realign and reprioritize. My hope is to continue the important work already taking place at HTA to build trust between the industry, the community, and our elected leaders through clear and responsive communication. At the end of the day, we are all neighbors and ‘ohana in this home we love.”

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**Ilihia Gionson Headshot:**

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/tktb7h24z6zwxbn/Ilihia%20Gionson%20Headshot.jpg?dl=0>

**About the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority**

The [Hawai‘i Tourism Authority](#) is the State of Hawai‘i agency responsible for strategically managing its support of the tourism industry. Established in 1998 to support Hawai‘i’s leading industry and largest employer, HTA continually strives to help ensure tourism’s sustainability and the benefits it brings to residents and communities statewide.

For more information about HTA, please visit [www.hawaiitourismauthority.org](http://www.hawaiitourismauthority.org). Follow updates from HTA (@HawaiiHTA) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and its new [YouTube Channel](#).

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