WHEREAS, kalo, the Hawaiian word for taro, is a culturally significant plant to the kanaka maoli, Hawaii's indigenous peoples and to the State; and

WHEREAS, in 2008, the Legislature recognized kalo's role in the State's history and well being by designating kalo as the state plant; and

WHEREAS, In 2008, the Legislature also passed Act 211, which created the Taro Security and Purity Task Force that directed the taro farmers, Department of Agriculture, Department of Land and Natural Resources, University of Hawaii, Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation, and Onipa'a Na Hui Kalo representatives to seek solutions to challenges facing taro, taro farmers, and taro markets for a period of two years; and

WHEREAS, the problems articulated by taro farmers are multi-faceted: the key to expanding the capacity for taro self-sufficiency in Hawaii is access to and affordability of taro lands. The task force found that the State retains numerous lands within its jurisdiction that were former taro lands or are capable of becoming wet or dry taro producing lands on all islands, many of which are prioritized for other uses. It also found that lease rates were inconsistent and in some cases unduly expensive due to the influence of the value of adjacent developed lands, therefore making the land unaffordable to existing or future taro farmers; and
WHEREAS, the task force found that some agricultural leases, both public and private, were as low as $30 per acre per year, but as high as $2,000 per acre per year when they were adjacent to highly valued residential properties or conservation land; and

WHEREAS, the high cost of leases renders unaffordable critical fallowing practices that improve soil health and reduce apple snail populations and fungal diseases in taro soils; and

WHEREAS, taro farming is a practice learned on-farm, through family, and by example, making lease criteria that require specific educational levels or financial status a challenge for taro farmers from qualifying for leases, particularly among young farmers; and

WHEREAS, the State should strive to improve access to taro growing lands and opportunity for taro self-sufficiency; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives of the Twenty-fifth Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2010, that the Legislature urges the Department of Land and Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture to:

(1) Reevaluate their inventory of lands for potential taro-growing lands;

(2) Develop more affordable and reasonable lease rent rates;

(3) Establish accessible criteria for qualifying taro farmers; and

(4) In partnership with the Taro Security and Purity Task Force, facilitate the expansion of taro production and food self-sufficiency; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the Chairperson of the Board of Agriculture, Chairperson of the Board of Land and Natural Resources, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Office of
Hawaiian Affairs, Chairperson of the Taro Security and Purity Task Force, and to the Onipa'a Na Hui Kalo organization.

OFFERED BY:

[Signatures]

MAR 04 2010