

## Javan Santos Written Testimony on Resolution No. 93-36 (LS)

Håfa Adai, Speaker Terlaje and members of the 36<sup>th</sup> Guam Legislature. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on this resolution. My name is Javan Santos, and for the sake of transparency and for the record, I was formerly employed under the Office of Senator Ridgell, but I no longer work in the Legislature and am testifying as a private citizen.

Resolution No. 93-36(LS) comes from much negotiation between the Legislature and the Governor. 16 elected officials who were elected to serve the interest of the people of Guam. I am in support of the resolution, however, there were about 20 elected officials who were not a part of the discussion in deciding how the money would be spent. Those are the members of the Guam Youth Congress.

As a youth organizer and leader myself, it has always been a passion of mine to amplify the youth voice in public service. It's important to do so because while the average age of the Guam Legislature is about 55 years old, the average age of the people of Guam is only 31 years old. Why is there a 24-year disparity in these ages? A lot of it has to do with economic situations for young people today. Many young people, myself included, are leaving the island for better opportunity. I don't want it to be this way, but the only way to minimize the number of youth leaving is by getting them involved. We must listen to youth's concerns and ideas on how to develop our economy in the way they would like to live it.

The Youth Congress is a powerful resource with invaluable insight that I know they are happy to share to shape policies for their future. These youth leaders represent a cross-section of our island, as they come from various socio-economic backgrounds. The Youth Congress should be engaged in these budgetary discussions because the economic development policies that the ARP funds today will shape the economy that the next youth leaders will inherit tomorrow. Please include the Guam Youth Congress in this resolution and in ARP discussions. As a youth leader myself, we do not want to be left feeling jaded with our voices left unheard. Our government must support the youth and the rest of the people of Guam equally.

When it comes to how the funding is being used, I would like to see additional allocations go towards public transportation. I will admit that I was fortunate enough to have my own personal vehicle throughout college and even today, which allowed me to access more opportunities easily – better myself civically, academically, and economically with job opportunities. This is not the case for many youth in Guam whom the government has **deprived** of adequate and reliable transportation. Many have had to give up internship opportunities, drop out of the Guam Youth Congress, and even prolong their education because of no access to transportation. Of all the challenges facing our Youth, reliable transportation should never be one of them. I willingly drove many of my Youth colleagues just so that they stay committed to the Youth Congress.

In the Guam Youth Congress, public transportation was a huge part of my platform. In Guam, the youth, myself included, have been plagued by the situation of needing a car to get a job and needing a job to get a car. Our jobs are basically funding our cars, which is the only way to get around in Guam. If public transportation were more robust, the youth of Guam would have one less obstacle from financial autonomy. They will have more disposable income to contribute to

our economy, be able to save for the future, and hopefully invest in new homes or even business ventures.

More funding allocated for public transportation is CRITICAL and is the only way to truly improve our economy and our standard of living – making it just a little bit easier and affordable to live on Guam. There is no powerful, wealthy, and industrious city that does not have public transportation, whether it's the trains of Tokyo, NYC's subways, or the MRT of Singapore. As an intern in DC, I relied solely on the bus, the metro, and rideshares. If asked where the funding should be taken from, my suggestion would be to take from anything funding infrastructure such as Chamorro Land Trust's infrastructure funds. I suggest this because President Biden's infrastructure proposal could be coming down any day now, meaning that we could be setting aside too much money for infrastructure at a time when more money could be coming.

The last thing I would propose is a way to restore the people of Guam's trust in the government through participatory budgeting. There are many people who are skeptical of the government's capacity to be held accountable for these large sums coming down from the feds. I would suggest that some of these funds be set aside for the people of Guam to directly decide where the funds go, through a participatory budgeting model.

The Government of Guam should set aside a fraction of the ARP funds, perhaps a million or two, and allow nonprofits or government agencies to propose projects that will be voted on by the people of Guam. This would allow the people of Guam to directly impact how their government operates and what the government should prioritize. Agencies would have to campaign to the people of Guam to vote for their projects, leading to more civic engagement within our community, and restoring the people's confidence in their government. I think it's a good thing for our community when we are able to say that a project they voted for became a reality. It could be anything from a CCTV initiative to improve safety on our island or developing makerspaces and studios to foster entrepreneurship and an Arts and Culture industry.

Enacting participatory budgeting, as well as allowing youth to vote in the participatory budgeting election, will boost morale for GovGuam employees and boost taxpayer confidence in the government. This concept is not new; it's implemented in many countries and cities around the world including Los Angeles, New York City, and Chicago among many other cities.

With this amount of funding available from the federal government, we must fund priorities that will benefit future generations and instill confidence in our government. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on Resolution No. 93-36(LS) and I hope that the Legislature and the government remember that the Youth are an invaluable asset, especially for guiding policies. I am appreciative of the Legislature for introducing GYC bills in the Guam Legislature. I'd specifically like to give a shoutout to Speaker Terlaje, Senator Shelton and Speaker Stephanie Lorenzo, and Representative Nolan Flores from the Guam Youth Congress for implementing the process for introducing Youth Congress bills this term. Many of them have painstakingly crafted these bills hoping that the legislature understands and values their desires for the Guam that we as youth hope to live in. si Yu'os ma'åse'