

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – April 8, 2015**

## **HAWAII APPLESEED PROMOTES GAVIN THORNTON TO CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**Honolulu** - Hawaii Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice President and Board Chair David Reber announced today that the organization's current Deputy Director, Gavin Thornton, has been promoted to join Victor Geminiani as a Co-Executive Director of the social and economic justice center. Hawaii Appleseed is a nonprofit social justice organization that seeks to help low-income people in Hawaii gain access to the resources, services, and fair treatment they need to realize their opportunities for self-achievement and economic security. Hawaii Appleseed's work is principally focused on research and report writing; legislative, judicial and administrative advocacy; and community and coalition building on housing, health, education, tax fairness and immigrant and disability rights issues.

"We are very pleased to announce that Gavin will serve as a co-executive director of Hawaii Appleseed," said Reber. "He has been an instrumental force in our work for a long time and he richly deserves this acknowledgement. The promotion formally recognizes what has been occurring in the organization as Gavin has progressively assumed more responsibility for the leadership and operation of the organization. This has been a planned process to allow Victor to phase down the time demands of his commitment to the organization while continuing to play an integral role in its important work."

Geminiani will remain at Hawaii Appleseed, sharing with Thornton the key responsibilities of providing a vision for program activities, identifying opportunities for reform, and developing advocacy and funding strategies. Thornton will in addition have primary responsibility in overseeing the day-to-day operations of Hawaii Appleseed and ensuring that the organization continues to expand its positive impact for low-income and marginalized people in Hawaii.

In 2004, Thornton helped launch the organization that is now Hawaii Appleseed by serving as its first staff attorney. Not long after graduating from law school at the University of Virginia, while helping a public housing tenant with a rent dispute, Thornton discovered that the state of Hawaii had been overcharging thousands of public housing residents for over a decade. The issue became Hawaii Appleseed's first case, and Thornton helped recover \$2.3 million on behalf of low-income tenants. Over the years, he has continued to be a driving force behind Appleseed's work to obtain fairness and opportunity for low-income people. His work with the organization has included ensuring that children who become homeless are not displaced from their schools, obtaining repairs and improvements for hundreds of families in the Mayor Wright Homes public housing projects where residents endured years of unsafe and unhealthy conditions, and advocating to ensure that children in foster care have the resources they need to provide a foundation for a successful future.

"Gavin has been my partner since we founded the organization more than 10 years ago and it is wonderful that he is receiving this recognition for his invaluable leadership in our program," said Geminiani. "He is the future of this program, and I am grateful that when I step down in the years ahead, he will be here to build on our vision of equal justice for everyone in Hawaii."

"I am incredibly fortunate to be a part of this organization and to work alongside people like Victor and others who care so deeply about social justice," said Thornton. "Looking back on our relatively short past, it is hard to believe that Hawaii Appleseed has been able to accomplish so much. With the tremendous

support we have been receiving from the community and our partners, I am excited about what the future holds for Appleseed and those we serve.”

#### **MEDIA CONTACT INFORMATION**

*Hawaii Appleseed is part of the Appleseed Network of 17 public interest justice centers in the United States and Mexico and recently became a member of the Shriver National Center on Poverty Law’s Legal Impact Network. For additional information, contact any of the follow people:*

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