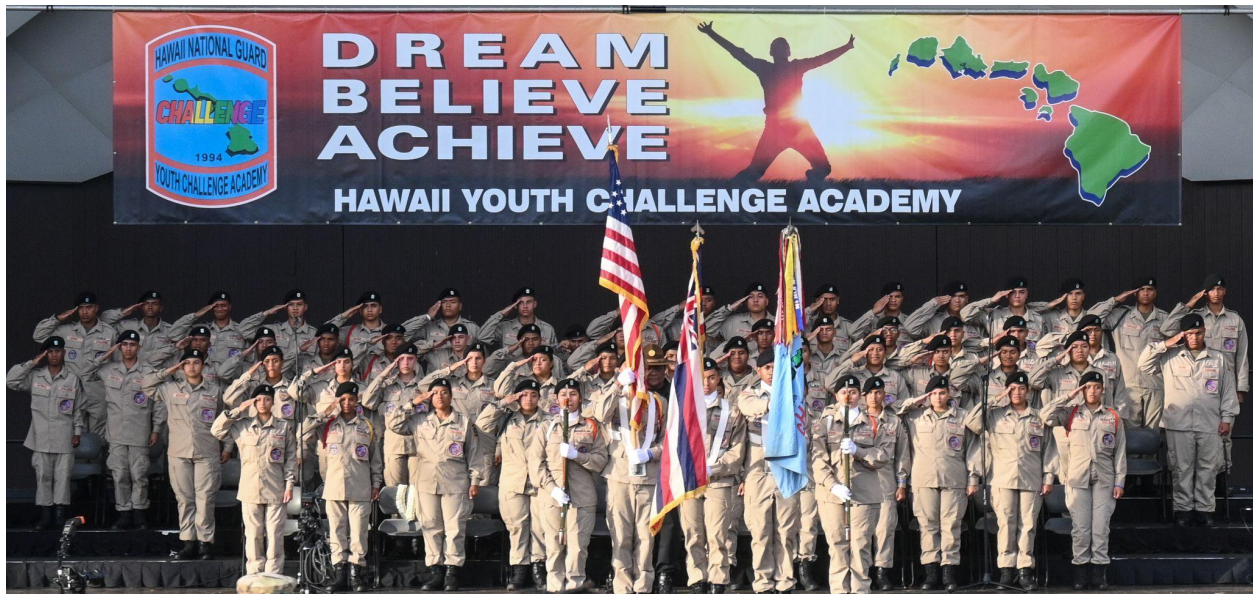


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## **American Samoa Students Graduate From the Hawaii National Army Guard Youth Challenge Academy**

*Empowering 16-18 year old 'At Promise' youth to learn life skills to be successful, responsible and productive citizens.*



*Pictured: Hawaii National Guard Youth Challenge Academy Graduating Class 22-02 (58).*

[Honolulu, Hawaii]: On Thursday, June 15, 2023 the Hawaii National Guard Youth Challenge Academy hosted a graduation ceremony at the Tom Moffatt Waikiki Shell, Honolulu, Hawaii, where sixty-five cadets were recognized for their achievements. Twenty five students departed American Samoa in January 2023 to attend this Academy.

Honorable Josh Green, M.D., Governor of the State of Hawaii delivered special remarks to Class 58 at the ceremony. During his remarks, Governor Green expressed his appreciation for the cadets from American Samoa, “Another reason why I chose to be here today, and why I am so honored, is because of the number of students here from American Samoa,” remarked Governor Green. He continued, “My team and our State have a special relationship with (American)

Samoa. They are an extension of us and they have gone through struggles as well: They have undergone the Measles pandemic in which we endured with them; and they bravely faced the COVID crisis. Now these young individuals that have come here to grow with our young people in Hawaii, it was important for me to see this,” stated Governor Green.

The Commander of Troops Cadet August Tasi, from the village of Lauuli’i, represented Class 58 during the ceremony, and shared about the arduous journey of the 24 students who departed American Samoa to join the academy program. He also conveyed his deepest appreciation to Governor Green for allowing American Samoa to participate in the program, and requested an inclusive opportunity for more youth of our territory to join.

The award ceremony revealed a host of additional accomplishments for American Samoa cadets. The Senator Gabbard Scholarship Program for Leadership and Community Building Studies Award was presented to Cadet Posiano Penitito, who will be attending Leeward Community College to pursue a degree in Teaching. The Military Order of Foreign Wars Bronze Medal for Leadership was presented to Cadet Usugafono Simiti. Cadet August Tasi was honored as the male recipient of the Commandant's Presidential Physical Fitness Award. The Adjutant General’s Leadership Award was presented to Charles Satele, who achieved four awards of recognition for good conduct, academic achievement, and discipline. Following graduation, Mr. Satele will enlist in the United States Army.

Earlier this year, on February 16, 2023, Governor Lemanu P. S. Mauga appealed to the United States Department of Defense(DoD) for the recruiters’ decision to reject the students who were U. S. Nationals from the program. The Governor’s request was approved and a memorandum was later issued by the DoD to overturn their decision regarding U.S. Nationals and changing the eligibility requirements for the program. The 13 students who were forced to travel home were arranged to return to the academy to continue the program.

The Hawaii Youth Challenge Academy is a voluntary, residential, military-style program aimed at providing youth between the ages of 16 to 18, who have dropped out of high school or are at risk with a second chance to complete their education. The program provides a structured, disciplined, and peer-oriented environment that encourages positive behavior and includes academic classes, physical training, counseling, and community service projects. The Academy was founded in August 1994 and is administered by the Hawai’i Army National Guard, with campuses in Kalaeloa here on O’ahu and in Hilo on the Big Island.

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