



Alewa Heights
Kalihi
Kalihi Valley
Moanalua Gardens
Moanalua Valley
Kapalama
Red Hill
Halawa Heights
Aiea

community bulletin

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Aloha, Friends and Neighbors

The Legislature's 2019 session promises to be a busy one as legislators scrutinize the executive and judiciary budget requests for the next two fiscal years.

With the state's economy growing at a steady pace, we don't foresee any major surprises in tax revenue collections, nor do we anticipate government agencies submitting requests for large, unexpected appropriations.

SENATE ASSIGNMENTS

For the first time, I will be chairing the Senate Committee on Higher Education, which reviews legislation and exercises oversight involving the entire University of Hawaii system. The university has a critical role in educating students and providing the skills required of a trained and ready workforce. That's why I have always been very vocal about how the university is run and how it benefits our citizens.

Our public schools, K-12, are equally important and so I'm happy to be vice chair of the Education Committee, which has responsibility for public schools, charter schools, and public libraries. I will retain my membership on the Judiciary Committee.

During the interim, I continued to fulfill my responsibilities as your representative, which included joining Ways and Means Committee colleagues on visits to the University of Hawaii at West Oahu, sites for Honolulu's rail project, and other places involving public investment.

The Senate welcomes four new members this year: Kurt Fevella, representing the Ewa Beach district, Dru Mamo Kanuha of Kona-Ka'u, Jarrett Keohokalole of Kailua-Kaneohe, and Sharon Moriwaki, who is from the Moiliili-Waikiki-Ala Moana area. I look forward to working with them and my fellow senators to address the many needs of our state.

MAJORITY GOALS

The Senate Democratic Majority's agenda for this session prioritizes legislation to achieve several of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Hawaii has been recognized as a global leader in sustainability and climate change initiatives, and so the UN's goals dovetail with many of our local legislative priorities.

In keeping with the UN's agenda, for example, the Senate Majority's agenda includes affordable housing, transit-oriented development, and airport modernization; sound waste management practices, to include the conversion of cesspools; and ensuring accountability and justice in an inclusive society.

Also, we look forward to promoting economic growth and generating tax revenue; guaranteeing children access to education, including facilities and equipment; providing health care and mental health services, controlling drug abuse, and improving traffic safety; and encouraging partnerships between government, business, and other entities in furtherance of sustainable development.

LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

The state has decided to relocate the Oahu Community Correctional Center, which has been based in the heart of Kalihi for decades, to the site of

the animal quarantine station in Halawa Valley, near the Halawa Correctional Facility.

A clear majority of constituents, 66 percent judging by the results of our recent Community Survey, favored the relocation.

The next step will be for the Legislature to appropriate money to begin the project, including an environmental impact study, preliminary designs, and so forth. The Department of Public Safety is requesting \$5 million for starters.

On another long-standing issue, we experienced low voter turnout during the 2018 primary and general elections, an all-too-familiar problem in our state. Only 52.7 percent of citizens voted in the general election, this despite the availability of same-day registration. It was the second-lowest turnout since 2014's 52.3 percent.

But we hope to reverse that trend during the 2020 elections when voters on Kauai will test exclusively mail-in voting. This was a proposal I made several years ago and it has finally become a reality. Mail-in voting has seen a major upsurge in popularity in Hawaii and this new method may increase the turnout.



On the topic of voting, this past election voters were given choices on two proposed constitutional amendments, the first to allow the state government to tax investment real property to fund public education, and the second to convene a Constitutional Convention. Neither was approved, although the taxation proposal was invalidated by the Hawaii Supreme Court before the general election.

These matters may be reassessed during the upcoming session, particularly ways to fund public education.

MONEY REQUESTS

While we do not expect major funding proposals this year, there are some requests worthy of mention.

The University of Hawaii has requested \$38 million for the next two fiscal years to expand Hawaii Promise to its four-year campuses, including Manoa and Hilo. This is a scholarship program that provides free in-state tuition for Community College students with financial needs. It covers those needs not met by federal grants and other awards. About 1,500 students received scholarships last academic year.

The UH is also requesting \$300 million for repair and maintenance projects for its many campuses.

The Department of Taxation is seeking \$8.4 million to continue its modernization project, specifically for software updates and vendor support.

The Aloha Stadium needs another \$30 million for work related to health and safety.

The administration is asking for \$150 million for the redevelopment of Mayor Wright Homes. In 2017, the state signed a \$1.3-billion agreement with Hunt Companies to replace the existing 364 units and add roughly 2,000 more to create a mix of affordable, workforce, and market-rate homes. Four high-rise towers and commercial space are part of the plans.

The Department of Defense, which also administers veterans programs, will seek \$35.5 million for a long-term care facility for veterans. (See "Hot Seat" for more on this matter.)

The administration, through the Department of Human Services, is asking for \$55 million for assorted services for the homeless, such as Housing First and outreach and legal services.

MY PROPOSALS

Thousands of bills will be introduced in the Senate this year, varying widely in subject matter. Bills that I intend to introduce will include practical measures – some of them new ideas and some from past sessions.

These include proposals regarding the University of Hawaii's Board of Regents, the appointed panel that oversees the governance of the UH system, and the UH's budget to support more sustainability.

I am also proposing a closer examination of the lieutenant governor's office, an underutilized office now that elections are administered by a stand-alone agency rather than that office. The office's duties could be expanded to include constituent services and tours of the State Capitol.

Eliminating the annual motor vehicle safety check requirement is another proposal I am supporting. While I have introduced this measure in the past, the bill did not garner enough support. However, there seems to be no clear evidence proving that annual vehicle inspections result in safer streets and fewer accidents. Additionally, car manufacturers these days are making much more reliable cars.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG PRICES

Last session, I introduced a measure to improve transparency in the prices of prescription drugs and regulate or limit the cost of these medications. Experts tell us that drug prices rise dramatically in price between the manufacturer and the user.

Unfortunately, the bill did not advance far enough in the legislative process to become law, and I intend to reintroduce the measure this session with, hopefully, more success. There should be ways to make medications affordable to all.

The legislative session will be interesting and productive. I urge you to keep apprised of our progress and not to hesitate to share your concerns and ideas with me in the coming weeks.

Mahalo for your support,

Donna Mercado Kim
Senator, 14th District

community survey 2019



LEGISLATURE
2019



Community Survey

Senator Kim is seeking your input on prospective legislation that may be considered during this session of the Legislature, as well as on other issues. The results will be published in the next edition of the *Community Bulletin*.

ALLOCATING MONEY

This is a biennium budget year and so the executive and judicial branches have submitted their requests for money to cover the next two fiscal years. The challenge facing the Legislature is allocating the state's two-year, \$40-billion budget among the many demands for public services and other needs. About 80 percent of that budget is committed to employee payroll, interest payments, welfare, and fixed costs, leaving 20 percent to apportion for new requests and priorities.

How would you rank and prioritize our spending? Listed below are some of the more prominent requests before the Legislature. Simply place a figure (with 1 being the most important and 12 being the least) on the appropriate line to reflect how you think how your money should be spent.

- _____ K-12 public schools, repair and maintenance on existing buildings
- _____ Higher public school teacher salaries
- _____ Early childhood education (under four years old)
- _____ University of Hawaii, repair and maintenance on existing buildings
- _____ Free college tuition
- _____ Infrastructure maintenance (roads, bridges, facilities, etc.)
- _____ Affordable housing programs
- _____ Senior citizen services
- _____ Homelessness services
- _____ Tax incentives for job creation
- _____ Veterans services
- _____ Other: _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

HAWAII PROMISE

Two years ago, the Legislature appropriated money for Hawaii Promise, a University of Hawaii scholarship program that provides free

in-state tuition for qualified Community College students with financial needs. Hawaii Promise covers direct educational costs (tuition, fees, books, supplies, and transportation). It is a "last dollar" award, meaning it covers needs not met by other forms of financial aid, such as federal grants and money from other scholarships, employers, and private sources.

The University of Hawaii is requesting \$38 million this year to continue and expand the awards to its four-year campuses. Should we grant this request?

_____ Yes
_____ No

RETAINING OUR TEACHERS

The number of public school teachers leaving the state is alarming. The Department of Education reports that Hawaii's high cost of living and low teacher salaries are among the factors driving away our educators. A constitutional amendment, which was aimed at providing additional funding for public education, was struck down by the Hawaii Supreme Court. The Legislature is likely to revisit options this session.

What can be done to attract and retain teachers?

Your ideas: _____

LOTTERY

Finding money to fund government services, like public education, is always difficult and controversial. This past election, a proposal to use property taxes for education was struck down by the courts and did not garner much support from voters (votes were counted even though the question had been invalidated). As one revenue-

generator, many mainland jurisdictions have introduced lotteries to underwrite government services.

Should Hawaii consider establishing a lottery to raise money?

_____ Yes
_____ No

If so, what services should receive revenue from a lottery? Please select your first and second choices.

- _____ Public education, including teacher salaries
- _____ Rail transit
- _____ Homelessness services
- _____ Continuing and expanding Hawaii Promise
- _____ Other: _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Should voters decide through a ballot question in the next election if a lottery is to be established?

_____ Yes
_____ No

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

The lieutenant governor's office has been underutilized, except when the governor has become ill, as was the case with Governor John Burns, or is out of town. Our elections were once administered by this office, but that responsibility is now an independent agency attached to the executive branch.

Should the office of the lieutenant governor be eliminated?

_____ Yes
_____ No

If yes, who should be acting governor in the governor's absence?

_____ Governor's administrative director

_____ Speaker of the House
_____ Senate president

If not, should the lieutenant governor's responsibilities be expanded?

_____ Yes
_____ No

If not, what suggestions do you have (e.g., State Capitol tours, centralized information and complaints service, etc.)

STATE DECLARATION FORMS

Senator Kim is introducing a measure this year calling for an evaluation of the effectiveness of the plant and animal declaration forms that travelers entering Hawaii must complete before disembarking.

State law requires passengers to declare if they are carrying plants and animals, as well as provide statistical information on the purpose of their travel. These forms are supposed to be used by the Department of Agriculture and Hawaii Tourism Authority, respectively.

Do you always complete and submit the form when returning to Hawaii?

_____ Yes
_____ No

Should these forms be continued?

_____ Yes
_____ No

Have you ever used the amnesty bins located at the bottom of the escalators to the baggage claim to discard agricultural items you did not declare?

_____ Yes
_____ No

Mahalo for taking the time to respond. Please send your completed survey to:
Donna Mercado Kim
Senator, 14th District
Hawaii State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

OPTIONAL:

Name _____

Address _____ E-mail _____

Comments _____



Senator Kim on the **hotseat**



In this edition, Senator Kim responds to constituents who inquired about the critical audit of adult care home licensing and the proposed veterans care home in Aiea



My mother is in an adult care home and she seems to be receiving good care. But I read that the Legislative Auditor was very critical of the Department of Health’s inspections and relicensing of these homes. How do I know if my mom’s care home is properly licensed and meeting all the necessary requirements?

I was very disappointed in the results released by the Legislative Auditor. I’m a caregiver myself so I certainly understand and empathize with your concerns.

Statewide, there are almost 480 licensed care homes, with 2,700 beds. Our district, the 14th Senatorial District, has many of these homes. I’ve been a vocal advocate for those constituents who own and operate legitimate, licensed homes and have also called for a crackdown on illegal operations.

The two main conclusions of the audit were alarming. The auditor stated the agency’s “license renewal process is unorganized and undisciplined, resulting in a large number of care homes operating with an expired license, or ... [the agency] relicensing care homes before completing the statutorily required relicensing process.”

The auditor also noted that the agency “does not consistently enforce care homes’ compliance with quality of care standards and plans to correct deficiencies and, therefore, does not ensure the health, safety, and welfare of care home residents as the Legislature intended and the law clearly requires.”

What I found particularly disturbing was just this past year, the Legislature approved a measure (House Bill 1911, H.D. 2) that granted the Department of Health very strong tools to enforce laws against unlicensed care facilities and allowed fines to be imposed on law-breakers.

We passed the legislation at the request of the department, which claimed it needed stronger enforcement authority over unlicensed homes.

But the auditor found that the department has been “unable to complete annual inspections of care homes before their licenses expire. It also only rarely conducts follow-up visits to confirm that corrective actions are being implemented by the operator.... [The agency] did not sanction or fine a single care home nor did it completely terminate a single care home license in the 10-year period from 2007 to 2017. If [it] is unable to adequately oversee its licensed care homes, how can it be expected to police unlicensed ones?”

Rest assured that the Legislature will be revisiting this matter in the coming weeks to resolve the outstanding problems and restore public confidence in the state’s care home inspection and licensing process.

What’s the situation with the state planning to ask for \$35 million to build a long-term care home for veterans on the site of the old Aiea sugar mill? I thought that land was for a variety of community activities.

I am a staunch supporter of our veterans. My brother is a veteran who fought in the Vietnam War and I’m very grateful to our veterans for their service and sacrifices on our behalf.

That said, the Aiea-Halawa community was blindsided by this proposal, which came out of nowhere.

Residents have been attempting to create a community gathering place on the large property ever since the City and County of Honolulu bought it many years ago. While the Aiea Public Library was relocated to the sugar mill, other ideas like a recreation center, a park, and other public works have not come to pass.

But it seems that the state administration decided to act unilaterally and pursue this veterans care home project without even consulting with the Neighborhood Boards, community associations, or area legislators before taking action. The state administration apparently worked directly with the federal government to secure money, with a sizeable portion of the funding coming from the federal budget.

Which is why I was pleased to learn that the administration has decided to relocate the care home to Kapolei. Thanks to the Aiea community and area legislators for their outcry.

The site of the former Aiea sugar mill presently houses the Aiea Public Library (in the background, right). The state had proposed using a portion of this property for a senior housing development for veterans.





Aloha, Malani

Carl James Malani Bilyeu was a musical icon and outstanding songwriter who left us on December 27.

Most people knew Malani through his music with Kalapana. As my cousin growing up with him on the streets of Palama, I knew Malani the boy; I knew back then that he would be a star one day and watched him become one.

We walked to Kalakaua and Farrington schools most mornings. He joined the Kalihi Phantoms band while at Kalakaua, at a time when live band performances were the rage. He also served during the Vietnam War before returning home and cofounding Kalapana.

Malani was a talented composer who wrote many of Kalapana's greatest hits. The group won several Na Hoku awards and Malani, as a man of faith, won a solo Na Hoku for his religious album in 1995. In 2011, Kalapana was honored with a Lifetime Achievement award.

No matter how much fame or popularity he gained, Malani was humble and never forgot where he came from. Free spirited, carefree, always comical, and very gifted, Malani was blessed with an ear for music. He could listen to a song once and sing and then play it on the guitar and harmonica.

He loved his family and together with wife Crystal, raised their children on Kauai.

His loss is devastating but his memory lives on through his music.

Donna

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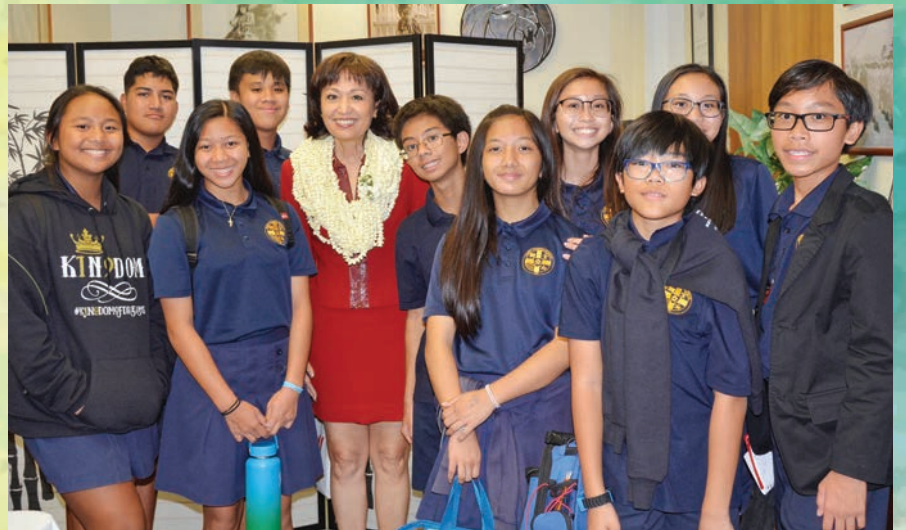
Senator Welcomes AARP



Senator Kim greeted representatives of the AARP at her office a day before the Legislature convened for its 2019 session. The group discussed seniors' concerns and legislation to be considered during the coming weeks for the upcoming year.

Students Visit the Legislature

Students from many schools and grades visited the State Capitol on opening day of the Legislature, January 16. This delegation of students from Saint Theresa Catholic School dropped by Senator Kim's office and she fielded questions from them about the legislative process and ways in which young people can get more involved in government and public affairs.



Community College Students Back Bill

Students from Honolulu Community College came to the State Capitol to attend a bill-signing ceremony for the Hawaii Promise legislation. The program provides tuition and other financial support for students enrolled in the University of Hawaii's Community Colleges. The UH is proposing an expansion of this popular program.

