



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

# community bulletin

Volume 38, No. 1  
Spring 2021



## Aloha, Friends and Neighbors

The 31st Hawaii Legislature began its deliberations on January 20, during a prolonged pandemic that is now approaching a year in the islands.

The State Capitol will remain closed for the foreseeable future but legislators will be able to meet and conduct the people's business, albeit virtually.

The weeks ahead are likely to be very difficult as we continue to fight the COVID crisis and deal with its severe economic and social consequences. Rest assured I will do everything possible and necessary to represent you during this challenging period for our state and nation.

### Mahalo

I was unopposed in my reelection bid last year and so was reelected to the Senate in the Primary Election, representing you and District 14 for what will be a sixth consecutive term.

I am deeply honored to serve you and am very grateful for your support throughout the years.

### Election Turnout

The past election was a banner year for voter participation in Hawaii.

It was a Presidential election year, which has traditionally drawn a higher turnout. But this election set a record for voter registration, with 832,466 citizens signing up to cast their ballots. That's compared to the 749,917 who were registered four years ago and an increase of over 82,000 new voters. Furthermore, a remarkable 69.6 percent cast their ballots on November 3, up from the 58.4 percent who voted in 2016.

I attribute the high numbers to a lively election season as well as our all-mail voting that went statewide this year because of the pandemic. While nearly 29,000 citizens chose to vote in-person, the popularity of mail voting and the outstanding results tell me it will only grow in popularity.

### Congratulations

We welcomed three newcomers to the Senate this session: Chris Lee, Bennette Misalucha, and Joy San Buenaventura. Chris represents the area from Kailua to Hawaii Kai, Bennette the Halawa to Pearl City district, and Joy the Puna to Kau region.

### Committees

I remain chair of the Committee on Higher Education, with jurisdiction and oversight of the University of Hawaii system, private higher education bond financing, and other legislative matters involving higher education.

I am also vice chair of the Committee on Education and a member of the Judiciary Committee.

### COVID Committee

The Senate Special Committee on COVID-19, of which I am a member, convened regularly during the interim.



Senator Kim on the Senate floor at the opening day of the 31st Legislature in January.

We have been exercising our oversight responsibilities by monitoring and assessing the performance of state agencies assigned to respond to the pandemic. We are keeping an eye on travel safety, unemployment insurance claim processing, public health services, CARES Act and other federal spending, and a host of other issues.

We've prodded the administration and state agencies to act more expeditiously in executing their duties, proposed rules and standards that have since been adopted, and shared our findings with the public. While there's much more work to be done, even with the introduction of the COVID vaccines, there's reason for hope.

### State Budget

The impact of the pandemic on our economy has been disastrous. Travel restrictions have devastated tourism and related industries, leading to layoffs, business closures, and plummeting tax revenues.

Governor David Ige has indicated that the state will be experiencing a \$1.4-billion budget shortfall for each of the next four years. This will have a ripple effect as falling tax revenues directly affect the counties, which depend on a share of hotel room tax revenues for their operations.

The governor announced in December that more than 10,000 state employees will be furloughed for undetermined periods, saving about \$300 million a year. Congressional passage of additional relief funding in December has postponed the furloughs for the time being. Other proposals included in the governor's budget include cuts in executive spending requests, temporarily suspending state pension funding, and restricting other expenditures.

The Legislature previously approved transferring \$345 million in rainy-day fund reserves and

\$303 million from other sources to the general fund. The state also sold \$750 million in bonds to cover current operating costs.

You can expect to hear about more developments as our session progresses.

This is a new budget session for the Legislature, meaning state agencies will be submitting for review their budgets for the next two years. The demands of the pandemic, the budget problems, and the urgency of restarting our economy will all weigh heavily in our deliberations.

### Looking Ahead

COVID-19 has changed our lives and forced us to adapt to a new norm. Despite the State Capitol being closed for most of the 2020 session, my staff and I continued to work remotely to represent you.

I have responded to the countless calls and emails from the public expressing concerns, frustration, and gratitude, sharing heartbreaking stories, and everything in-between. Please know that I hear your voices, and although the Senate serves only in an advisory and oversight role in the emergency response efforts, I will continue to be your advocate at the State Capitol and the community.

Mahalo for continuing to do your part in protecting yourself and your family. During these difficult times, it is important that we care for one another, stay positive, and exercise common sense protections.

Please stay safe and healthy.

Aloha,

Donna Mercado Kim  
Senator, District 14

# community survey 2021

LEGISLATURE  
**2021**



## Community Survey

Senator Kim is seeking your input on 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.

### COVID VACCINE

An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll revealed that about half of Americans are ready to be vaccinated against the COVID virus. Another quarter are unsure and the last quarter claim they won't get vaccinated. Public health experts estimate at least 70 percent of the U.S. population needs to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity, or the point at which enough people are protected so the virus can be held in check.

Have you received the vaccine?

Yes  
 No

Will you be taking the COVID vaccine when it becomes available to you?

Yes  
 No

If not, why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you think the state should mandate that all Hawaii residents take the COVID vaccine?

Yes  
 No

### MASK MANDATE

The governor has issued a statewide mask mandate, following criticism that existing rules set by each county were confusing. This latest proclamation requires people to "wear a face covering over their nose and mouth in public," but allows exemptions for people with medical conditions and children under five.

Are you in favor of this statewide mandate to wear masks?

Yes  
 No

### STATE BUDGET

Governor Ige has announced furloughs of roughly 10,000 state employees for two days a month beginning sometime this year to balance the budget. The

furloughs will not apply to employees who perform round-the-clock duties, first-responders, medical and public safety personnel, and certain other employees.

Do you support the governor's plan to furlough employees to help account for the state's budget shortfall?

Yes  
 No

### CRIMES AGAINST SENIORS

There has been an alarming increase in crimes against seniors. Crimes committed against our most vulnerable, the growing elderly population, are especially traumatic experiences for these victims, causing devastating financial and physical consequences.

Should we increase the penalty for those who commit crimes against seniors, particularly those who knowingly target persons because of their age?

Yes  
 No

### SAFETY CHECK DURATION

Should motor vehicle safety checks be required once every two years instead of annually?

Yes  
 No

### DRIVER'S LICENSE RENEWALS

Would you support extending the renewal period from two years to four years for licensees who are 72 years of age or older but younger than 80 years, provided their driving record does not include two or more moving traffic violation convictions after the licensee attained the age of 72 years?

Yes  
 No

### VOTING AGE

Should 15-17 year-olds be allowed to vote, provided they pass the equivalent of a citizenship test?

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 \_\_\_\_\_

The first 400 readers who return their completed Community Surveys will be mailed a certificate for Jamba Hawaii.



Please be sure to include your mailing address.

## Public Can Still Participate Despite Pandemic

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and closure of the State Capitol for the foreseeable future, the legislative process will continue to encourage and involve citizen participation.

Here are some details:

**Livestreams.** All Senate and House committee hearings and floor sessions will be streamed live on YouTube ([capitol.hawaii.gov/livevideo.aspx](http://capitol.hawaii.gov/livevideo.aspx)).

**Cable TV.** Selected hearings and floor sessions will be broadcast on public access cable channels ([capitol.hawaii.gov/broadcasts.aspx](http://capitol.hawaii.gov/broadcasts.aspx)).

**Testimony.** Standing committees will accept

written testimony as well as remote testimony via Zoom. Anyone desiring to submit written testimony or testify remotely should create an account on the Legislature's website and use the online testimony form.

The Public Access Room can assist citizens with this process, at (808) 587-0478, [par@capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:par@capitol.hawaii.gov), or [lrb.hawaii.gov/par/](http://lrb.hawaii.gov/par/). Its services include video tutorials, step-by-step instructions, and reference information.

There are a number of procedures that must be followed in offering video testimony, including

filing a timely request, providing accompanying written testimony, and fulfilling other requirements. Find information at [capitol.hawaii.gov](http://capitol.hawaii.gov).

While committee chairs hope to accommodate as many video testifiers as possible, they have the authority to limit the number of testifiers and time allotted per person to fit the hearing schedule. In other words, the Legislature cannot guarantee that everyone who requests to testify remotely will be given that opportunity.

Committee hearing schedules are posted on the Legislature's website.



# Senator Kim on the **hotseat**



In this edition, Senator Kim discusses the governor's budget proposals to cope with the shortfalls generated by the pandemic and the work of the Senate COVID Committee.

**My spouse works for the state and I'm very concerned about Governor Ige's plans to furlough public employees, possibly for many months. There seems to be so much uncertainty about who will be affected, for how long, and so on. Can you tell us what you know?**

Governor Ige's initial budget proposal, which was floated last April and included cutting salaries for public employees, took me and my Senate colleagues by surprise. Neither the governor nor any of his representatives had ever mentioned, let alone discussed, these ideas with us before announcing them to the public in December.

While these plans have been put on hold because Congress just approved an infusion of relief money to cope with the pandemic, that money will provide only temporary relief, delaying the furloughs for the near term.

That noted, since we adjourned after the last session, legislators had been scrutinizing the state budget, looking at money in special funds and searching for any sources of money that could be used to offset the budget shortfall caused by the pandemic and associated economic problems. We were also considering cutting or reducing non-essential programs and streamlining government before cutting salaries.

On October 8, the Senate Special Committee on COVID-19, of which I am a member, sent the governor a letter expressing our concern about his plan to implement a 10-percent, across-the-board furlough for most state employees.

As an alternative, we suggested two, tiered, furlough approaches. One would consist of a 20-percent cut for employees earning over \$100,000 a year and 10 percent for employees making between \$50,000 and \$100,000. We would avoid furloughing any employee making less than \$50,000 annually. This scenario would save the state \$336.1 million a year and apply the furloughs to those who might be in a better position to absorb the reduction.

The other scenario would consist of a 20-percent furlough of employees making over \$100,000, a 10-percent cut for employees making \$73,000 to \$100,000, and a 5-percent cut for employees making between \$30,000 and \$60,000. There would be no furloughs for employees making under \$30,000. This plan would save the state \$333.8 million per year.

However, the decision to impose pay cuts or furloughs ultimately rests with the governor. He does not need the Legislature's approval, and on December 9, he announced that a portion of state employees would be furloughed beginning in January for two days a month, in an attempt to balance the budget estimated to face a shortfall of \$1.4 billion each of the next four years. Again, the passage of the federal relief package delayed the furloughs for the time being.

Meanwhile, the University of Hawaii was the first state agency to implement a 9.2-percent pay cut for executives and managers making up to

\$200,000 a year. Those earning more than that amount would be subject to an 11-percent cut.

Even we state legislators are not immune to pay cuts. We've deferred raises that were approved by the Salary Commission in 2019 that would have given us raises of 10 percent effective this January, followed by 2.5-percent increases at the beginning of each of the following three years. We would also be subject to 10-percent furlough cuts as well.

The road ahead looks long and difficult. With the visitor industry still a long way from a full recovery and related businesses lagging, we can't expect our tax revenue and employment prospects to look promising for some time to come.

I ask that you have confidence in our willingness to listen to you, our ability to work together, to adopt the best ideas among us, and to have the courage to take the bold and necessary measures to restart our economy and provide vital public services.

**What's going on with the pandemic response efforts? Your Senate COVID-19 Committee seemed to be very active during the summer months but I haven't heard much since then. Can you tell us what's happening from your point of view?**

With the start of session, expect the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 to convene less or even not at all during the next few months, as compared to the regular meetings we had during the course of last year.

However, that doesn't mean that work on the pandemic response efforts has stopped. In fact, many of the standing subject committees could still take up COVID-19-related issues during this session and our committee could resume meeting during the session and even in the interim after we adjourn.

As you know, our work on the COVID-19 Committee included monitoring the performance of state agencies charged with various pandemic responses, such as unemployment insurance processing, contact tracing, traveler screening, and so on. Rest assured that we'll continue our efforts to protect public health and safety and ensure that public officials are doing their jobs.

Last December, Congress approved a \$900-billion relief package. That sum included additional unemployment insurance, one-time payments to taxpayers, rent relief, small business aid, nutrition program funding, money for schools and child care providers, and support for transportation and airport safety services.

Hawaii's allocation was \$1.7 billion, plus a share of the money designated for nationwide programs. We also received \$150 million for testing and contact tracing and \$35 million to distribute and administer vaccines.

President Joe Biden is now proposing a \$1.9-trillion relief proposal that calls for up to \$1,400 payments to certain taxpayers; extended unemployment benefits of \$400 a week; \$170 billion for schools to reopen; \$440 billion in grants



Senator Kim and members of the COVID-19 Committee visited Oahu's Pier 2 vaccination site to witness the operations. Said the Senator, "We're confident that Hawaii Pacific Health, which is operating this center, will be able to dispense the vaccines smoothly and efficiently." Similar centers are now operating across the state.

and loans for small businesses; higher family tax credits; and \$160 billion for vaccines and testing. The plan includes raising the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$15 an hour.

Regarding the vaccine, the Senate COVID-19 Committee will be closely monitoring the distribution and progress of the vaccination program.

The timetable for the vaccinations is as follow:

- Phase 1-A (December 2020 to January 2021): Health care workers and long-term care facility residents, about 50,000 people.
- Phase 1-B (December 2020 to May 2021): Everyone over age 75 not included in 1-A and frontline essential workers (first-responders, corrections officers and staff, emergency service workers, individuals essential for federal, state, and local government operations, public transport workers, teachers, child care workers, education support staff, and postal workers), about 159,000 people.
- Phase 1-C (March to May 2021): Everyone ages 65-74 and those with chronic diseases, and other essential workers not previously included, about 50,000 people.
- Phase 2 (early summer): The remainder of the population, including all persons 16 years old and younger.

Phase 1 will reach 73 percent of Hawaii's population and Phase 2 will cover the balance.

# Budget Woes to Dominate Legislative Agenda

The state government's bleak fiscal picture is expected to draw the lion's share of legislators' attention this session as they search for money, recommend cutbacks, and proffer other ideas to balance the budget, while also seeking to restart the local economy.

As chair of the Higher Education Committee and vice chair of the Education Committee, Senator Kim is focusing her attention on the fiscal, instructional, operational, and other challenges facing the University of Hawaii system and Department of Education.

In the meantime, the senator is also proposing new legislation and reintroducing measures that were not passed last session.

## GET Filing

Senator Kim has introduced a measure that would allow general excise tax filers that have \$100 or less in tax liability to file annually instead of monthly, quarterly, or semiannually.

Senator Kim is also reintroducing bills that were not passed last year.

## Vehicle Safety Inspections

The senator is proposing that safety inspections for certain types of motor vehicles be lengthened from once a year to once every two years.

## Sports Gaming

With the widespread legalization of sports betting across the country, Senator Kim wants to establish a sport gaming task force to examine the economic feasibility of permitting sports gaming in the Hawaiian Islands.

## Senator's Key Themes

In addition to the legislative proposals described above, Senator Kim has designated several major priorities for the session.

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## UH Intern Joins Staff

Annika Nozaki, a junior at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, is interning for Senator Kim this session.

Annika is from a military family. Her father, originally from Waialua, served in the U.S. Army so the Nozaki family moved often—10 times—in her youth. She graduated from Ramstein High School

in Germany before enrolling at Manoa.

She's worked for the summer fun program at Waialua District Park and at the UH Foundation. She is a member of the university's debate team and volunteers with the Legal Clinic, which helps low-income residents with their immigration needs.

## Free Student Meals Extended Through June

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will continue to fund free student meals at local public schools through June 30.

This federal money will enable the Hawaii Department of Education to provide free student meals through the "Grab and Go" program at participating public schools statewide. In October 2020 alone, the program served more than 700,000 free breakfasts and lunches to students, regardless if they attended public or private schools.

Meal distribution will be at lunchtime only. Pickups will include one lunch for that day and one breakfast for the following day, per child. Parents and students should contact their area schools for serving times.

The following schools in Senate District 14 will be participating: Aiea Elementary, Aiea High, Aiea Intermediate, Alvah Scott Elementary, Dole Middle, Farrington High, Fern Elementary, Kaewai Elementary, Kalakaua Middle, Kalihi Elementary, Kalihi Kai Elementary, Kalihi Uka Elementary, Kalihi Waena Elementary, Kapalama Elementary, Lanakila Elementary, Linapuni Elementary, Pearl Ridge Elementary, Puuhale Elementary, Salt Lake Elementary, Waimalu Elementary, and Gus Webling Elementary.

The full list of participating schools and verification documents needed can be found on the DOE website ([hawaiipublicschools.org](http://hawaiipublicschools.org)).



## Senator Joins School Supply Drive

When the Aiea High School PTSO launched a drive to provide supplies to schools in the complex area, Senator Kim was among the first to join. The project, which was named in honor of the late Senator Breene Harimoto, sought to collect not only school supplies for students, but sanitation goods, face masks and shields, gloves, and other items. The November drive was sponsored by school associations, community groups, a church, merchants and businesses, and a number of elected officials representing the area.