



# Ke Ala Hou

*A New Path Forward*

*Ke Ke'ena O Ke Kia'aina | Office of the Governor • January 2024*

## GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE



Governor Josh Green, M.D.

Happy New Year! In preparation for the 2024 legislative session, I submitted an Executive Supplemental Budget for the fiscal biennium 2023-2025 to the House and Senate last month. The proposal allocates funds for addressing Maui's recovery from the August 2023 wildfires and reducing the risk of future wildfire disasters across the state. While supporting Maui is top of mind, I remain dedicated

to pursuing all my key initiatives to help our financially struggling families through tax breaks, creating more housing, easing homelessness, expanding access to health care, improving education, and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Our state departments were busy in December. Several either orchestrated or participated in heartwarming events to bring holiday joy to our keiki.

From uniting foster children with their forever families to assisting children in choosing Christmas gifts, I'm grateful for the dedication of our employees who work tirelessly to protect and uplift our communities.

During the last few months of 2023, the Office of Wellness and Resilience continued its efforts on Maui with its weekend wellness events and mental health support. In addition, the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency shared one of many touching stories about helping support those in our communities.

As we kick off the new year, I know that we have a lot more work to do. My administration is committed to facilitating innovative solutions and creating concerted change to make a safer and healthier Hawai'i for our future generations.

Mahalo,

## Keiki Join Their Forever Families on National Adoption Day



Photo courtesy: Hawai'i State Judiciary

Above photo: From left, Guardian ad litem Jessica "Jaycee" Uchida, Judge Darien Ching Nagata, the Delimont 'Ohana, and social worker Albert Pacheco.

The Hilo and Waimea Family Courts conducted a ceremony to unite 22 Hawai'i island keiki with their "Forever Families." The annual "Forever Families" event occurs on the Friday before Thanksgiving. To celebrate the keiki and families, courtrooms were turned into magical winter wonderlands, adorned with blue, silver and white balloon arches and displays, and shimmering backdrops.

The celebration also marked National Adoption Day. The court finalized adoptions and guardianships on November 17.

"We affectionately recognize this day as our 'Ohana Day to celebrate youth and families in our community," said Family Court Judge Darien Ching Nagata. "This was our sixth annual celebration in Hilo and our first in Waimea."

The event had a photo booth for the families to commemorate the special day, courtesy of Anna Madrid of Lady Q's Big Island Event Services.

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## Keiki Join Their Forever Families on National Adoption Day Continued from page 1

The keiki received individually monogrammed backpacks filled with blankets, teddy bears, and books thanks to The Jockey Foundation; family board games from the Children’s Law Project of Hawai’i; gift cards from the Geist Foundation; gifts from the Hawai’i Department of Human Services; books from the Clinton Foundation and Kamehameha Press; diapers, wipes and other personal hygiene items from Hawai’i Diaper Bank; gifts from attorney Jacky Mena, and certificates from the Hawai’i State Judiciary. Before leaving, children and families were treated to light refreshments compliments of KTA Super Stores.

“Many times in Family Court we are faced with tough decisions, conflict, and adversity,” said Judge Nagata. “Today, the courtroom was filled with pure hope and love.”

“When we first proposed holding ‘Ohana Day we never imagined it would grow into the event it is today,” said Valerie Grab co-founder and executive director of the Children’s Law Project of Hawai’i. “Thanks to our amazing community sponsors and collaboration with the public agencies that serve our foster children, ‘Ohana Day has become an incredible occasion that celebrates and honors loving families who care for our keiki.”

## State of Hawai’i ETS Cybersecurity System Gains National Recognition

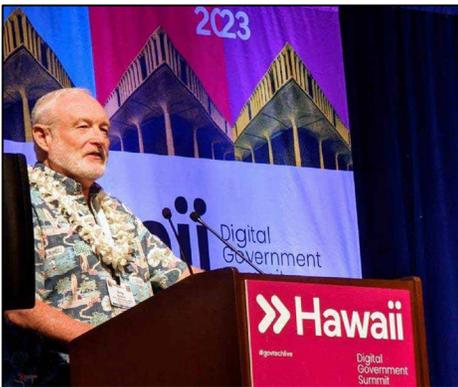


Photo courtesy: DAGS

The Hawai’i Office of Enterprise Technology Services (ETS) received the Top Cybersecurity category award from the National Association of State Chief Information Officers at its 2023 State IT Recognition Awards this past October in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Selected from nearly 100 submissions, the award recognizes the ETS project named “Surfing the Cyber Risk Monster Wave,”

which presents the state of Hawai’i Cyber Risk Scoring System (CRSS).

ETS created this system to deliver real-time visibility around cybersecurity controls and risk posture across all state departments in the executive branch. The CRSS collects risk data from every endpoint in the executive branch into an easily digestible risk score that is updated for state leadership as frequently as every two minutes.

By effectively identifying and mitigating risks before they escalate, the system further protects the state’s information systems against cyber threats. As a result, the state saves money by avoiding costly problems.

“This system allows the state of Hawai’i and our department to identify and prioritize risks intelligently, and in lockstep with one another,” said Steve

Sakamoto, chief of the Health Information Systems Office, Hawai’i Department of Health. With the CRSS we are able to be more effective, make better-informed decisions, and advise state entities by building a roadmap to improve cyber security readiness.”

To read more about the ETS project, visit [https://www.nascio.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/HI\\_Cybersecurity.pdf](https://www.nascio.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/HI_Cybersecurity.pdf).

The State IT Recognition Awards honors transformational projects and initiatives that address critical business problems, improve business processes, and elevate the citizen experience. The award showcases the use of information technology to address critical business problems, more easily connect citizens to their government, improve business processes, and create new opportunities that improve the lives of citizens.

## DHS Medicaid/Med-QUEST Division Honored with 2023 NAMD Award



Photo courtesy: DHS

“Doing the right things in the right way at the right time.” This is what Hawai’i Medicaid Director Judy Mohr Peterson said when she used the word “pono” to describe her team as it received the annual Spotlight Award given by the National Association of Medicaid Directors (NAMD). This distinction is awarded to states that demonstrate the best of Medicaid leadership and illuminate the path forward toward continuous improvement for the program.

NAMD recognized the Hawai’i Medicaid/Med-QUEST (MQD) team for its dedication and selflessness in response to the Maui Wildfires with powerful intention to help the community. The team mobilized immediately and responded on both a human level, by volunteering, donating, and organizing relief efforts, with values rooted deeply in the community.

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## DHS Medicaid/Med-QUEST Division 2023 NAMD Award Continued from page 2

At the Medicaid program level, the team immediately suspended eligibility renewal efforts on Maui and assured distraught community members that they hadn't lost their health insurance to the fires. In addition to suspending the renewal process, while in Lahaina, the MQD team members also asked each person they served if they had health insurance and in many instances, they were able to sign up individuals and families on-site.

All of this was done while several Med-QUEST staff members had to deal with personal impacts from the fire, both mentally and emotionally, while managing services for other survivors. Tragically, some members of the team were also dealing with the loss of family members and property. Even though team

members faced many challenges, they were grounded by their mission and vision to embrace health and wellness for the people of Hawai'i.

The MQD team was selected for the Spotlight Award because of its intentionality and teamwork. Members spent years cultivating relationships with each other and other key partners, such as community-based organizations. These long-lasting relationships allowed the team to form a high-functioning, cross-disciplinary leadership team and without asking, the community-based organizations joined the effort with the MQD team to respond to the wildfires on Maui. The state is grateful to all the hardworking MQD staff members for doing what is pono for our Maui community.

## OWR Aids Maui's Healing Journey



Above photo: OWR staff and Hui Ho'omaluu volunteers

In partnership with Hui Ho'omaluu and Laukanaka, Kamehameha Schools, Maui Arts & Cultural Center (MACC), and the hotel shelters, the Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) has been coordinating weekend gatherings at the Hyatt Regency Maui and Royal Lahaina Hotel since early October, including music, cultural, and family activities. Kūkākūkā (talk story) and mental health support are also available for individuals and in group settings from local licensed mental health professionals who have had both specialized post-disaster mental health and cultural training.

Both Hui Ho'omaluu and Laukanaka consist of diverse cultural practitioners with a collective commitment to uplift the Maui community through traditional Hawaiian healing practices. They offer free lomilomi (massage) and bodywork to help survivors in the grieving process and healing journey.

Government staff and volunteers have also offered arts and crafts classes to families at wellness events at the hotel shelters in West Maui.

The MACC has brought in renowned hula practitioners from Maui to teach keiki classes, while volunteers from the Kanikapila Project have delighted those staying in the hotel shelter common areas with music, and provided numerous ukulele lessons to families, as well as free ukuleles to those in need.

In December, staff from the Kōkua Lahaina Rising initiative within the Department of Health Behavioral Health Administration's Maui District Health Office offered a popular Christmas párol-making workshop. Párol is a Filipino word derived from the Spanish farol, which means lantern.

Weekend wellness events are expected to continue through January 2024.

OWR also collaborated with the Hawai'i Tourism Authority on healing-centered visitor messaging as West Maui re-opened to tourism. To download the materials for business use and for more information on this effort, visit <https://www.hawaiitourismauthority.org/maui-recovery/for-businesses/>.



Above photo: OWR's Maui-based project manager Keala Kaopuiki-Santos and Jason Jerome from Lahaina Music and the Kanikapila Project



## Heroes and Helpers Event Brings Joy to 100 Keiki



Photo courtesy: DLNR

Amid the holiday shopping season, 100 keiki visited the Hilo Target store early in the morning on December 9 for the Heroes and Helpers event. Catholic Charities Hawai'i, Target, and first responders partnered to bring joy to the local community. Target stores across the country and in Hawai'i have hosted 'Heroes and Helpers' events for more than a decade.

The heroes were law enforcement officers, firefighters, and members of the military. Among the heroes were 12 officers and staff from the Hawai'i Island Branch of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement (DOCARE). Each keiki was matched up with a volunteer hero or elf to choose \$100 worth of toys or clothing.

Standing in the checkout line with his assigned keiki, Hawai'i Island Branch Chief Lawrence Terlep commented, "This is the second year we've participated in the program and our officers are so happy to be here. They like connecting with the community. You can see their smiles when they help the children. It's a great program."

Many keiki chose toys to fill their shopping baskets, however, some older keiki chose practical items such as clothes and books. Some keiki even used their gift cards to buy Christmas gifts for their families. DOCARE Lieutenant Daniel Elvenia said, "It gives us a chance to get out in the community. It's all about the kids and we really enjoy spending time with them and getting to know them."

DOCARE Officer Shamma Nakama reiterated that the event is a way to talk story with young people and to build relationships with them. Once the children finished checking out their items, volunteers at gift-wrapping stations deftly wrapped and tied everything up in bows.

Derrick Brown, one of the organizers for the Target event commented, "The keiki are leaving with big smiles and full bellies, so they're having a great day. They got up early to be here, so they're really troopers to come out here and have fun and hopefully this is making their holiday season a little bit nicer."

## A Story of Service from the Heart

Submitted by HIEMA

When Aunty stopped by Emergency Management Reserve Corps Specialist Randall Duldulao's station at the Lahaina Disaster Recovery Center, he didn't know he would be profoundly affected by the experience. All he saw was a person who needed help, and he was there to provide it.

Aunty's biggest challenge was finding someone with whom she could communicate, since she spoke little English. She found Randall and somehow, they managed to converse.

Randall issued her a pass so that she could return to her former home, but she also needed transportation. Randall told her a ride could be arranged from the center.

However, due to a misunderstanding, the next morning, Randall received a call from Aunty, who was still waiting to be picked up from her hotel. After unsuccessfully trying to find her a ride because the shuttle wasn't operating that day, he requested an interpreter's assistance and picked up Aunty with his own rental car to drive her to her home. They donned protective gear and began walking the perimeter of the home. Aunty focused on two locations, digging and searching.

Randall asked the interpreter, "What was so important to Aunty? What was she searching for?" The interpreter translated, "Her husband's urn. It should be right here."

Randall was stunned. He became determined to find the urn. Both he and the interpreter began digging and helping Aunty search, but they couldn't locate the urn. Finally, Aunty insisted they leave.

Randall dropped Aunty back at her hotel but couldn't stop thinking about her plight. Over the next few days, he connected with volunteer organizations who assisted with sifting through larger amounts of fire debris, and sharing Aunty's story with them.

Those volunteers who went to the site and searched located the urn. Aunty was finally reunited with the urn and its precious contents. Randall was grateful for the help of everyone who helped with the effort.



**Ke Ala Hou** is a monthly publication of the Office of Governor Josh Green, M.D.

**We invite you to stay connected with us!**

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