



Ke Ala Hou

A New Path Forward

Ke Ke'ena O Ke Kia'aina | Office of the Governor • February 2025



GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE

I had the honor of delivering my third State of the State address last month as the 2025 Legislative Session began. In my speech, I reaffirmed my commitment to priorities that will guide us in the year ahead: making Hawai'i more affordable, addressing homelessness, reducing the cost of living, improving healthcare, supporting Maui's recovery and tackling climate change.

Looking forward, my administration will take bold, innovative action on:

- **Affordable Housing and Cost of Living:** Our goal is to reduce the cost of living and provide more affordable housing options for everyone. We signed HB2404, the largest tax cut for working families in the state's history, and we will continue working to make Hawai'i a place where local families can live and thrive.
- **Homelessness:** By 2026, we will complete 30 kauhale villages, offering more than 1,500 housing units for those experiencing homelessness. This effort will reduce homelessness by half and save millions for taxpayers.
- **Healthcare Access:** We'll secure funding to improve healthcare access, expand hospital capacity and raise Medicaid rates to ensure better care for 450,000 vulnerable residents.

- **Public Safety:** We are committed to reducing illegal fireworks, combating gun violence and ensuring safer neighborhoods for all.
- **Climate Action:** We will act on science-based recommendations from the Climate Advisory Team to protect Hawai'i from the advancing climate crisis.
- **Maui Recovery:** As Maui rebuilds from the August 2023 wildfires, we will continue to provide support and resources to accelerate recovery.

While we've made progress, there is still much work to do. Too many families still struggle to find affordable housing, and too many people are homeless. But by standing together as one 'ohana, just as we have over the past two years, we will build a Hawai'i where our children and grandchildren can thrive.

Let's continue working together toward a safer, healthier and better Hawai'i.

Mahalo,

Ke Ala Hou intends to elevate, recognize, and celebrate the hard work done by our state departments. Our goal is to share top achievements from our state employees, emphasize aloha and kindness in action and demonstrate caring leadership at the state level. It is our hope that by sharing these stories, we build trust and understanding in what we do everyday in service to you.



Scan the QR code to view our digital newsletter.



DOH Reaches Out to Residents Affected by Fireworks Explosion

Counselors from the Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) reached out to residents affected by the tragic fireworks explosion on Keaka Drive in Āliamanu on Jan. 1.

Healthcare professionals and social workers from the DOH Behavioral Health Administration visited the neighborhood beginning on Jan. 2, providing counseling, post-trauma interventions and debriefing. They also brought water bottles and cards with information about Hawai'i Cares 988.

"People were clearly traumatized and still in shock," said Kathleen Merriam, a mental health supervisor with the DOH Adult Mental Health Division. "As the days go by, family members and neighbors are eager to share their stories."

Residents shared with staff their personal experiences and showed them the damage to their homes, vehicles, as well as their personal injuries.

DOH staff visited the neighborhood again on Jan. 8, conducting eight post-crisis interventions/conversations.

"I found the community very responsive and grateful," Merriam said. "Folks were very receptive to hearing about the 988 phone number as a resource."



Kathleen Merriam, Hawai'i State Department of Health Mental Supervisor - Adult Mental Health Division. Photo courtesy: DOH.

Learn more at Hawai'i Cares 988 at <https://hicares.hawaii.gov/>. To reach a counselor, call 808-832-3100, 800-753-6879 or 988.

For information on coping with trauma, visit the DOH Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division website at <https://health.hawaii.gov/camhd/brochures-factsheets/>.

Resilient Retrofit Project Strengthens Lanakila Pacific to Serve During Disasters

Lanakila Pacific recently completed a major phase of a hazard-mitigation construction project, utilizing a \$1.6-million grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, administered by the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA). The retrofitting and strengthening of Lanakila's main facility in Honolulu is a crucial project to fortify our facilities against natural hazards, and aims to ensure the safety and continuity of our vital services.

Lanakila Pacific is a busy and versatile nonprofit that serves individuals with cognitive, physical, social, or age-related challenges. Its Meals on Wheels program, O'ahu's largest and only islandwide delivery service for seniors, has been active since 1971.

"The health and safety of our Lanakila Meals on Wheels seniors are a priority during a major disaster, and the FEMA mitigation grant enables us to minimize the impact on those we serve," said Lanakila President and CEO Rona Yagi Fukumoto.

The mitigation retrofit allows Lanakila Pacific to remain operational to prepare meals for distribution and to assist in recovery efforts. Its kitchen operation currently has the capacity to produce and store up to 5,000 meals per day.

Fukumoto says the project also positions Lanakila as a resource during disaster recovery, to "assist in preparing meals for distribution to survivors, first responders,



From left to right: HI-EMA Administrator James Barros, former U.S. FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell and Lanakila Pacific President and CEO Rona Yagi Fukumoto. Photo courtesy: HI-EMA.

volunteers and other vulnerable communities impacted."

Improvements to the Lanakila main building on Bachelot Street in Liliha include installing impact-resistant glass doors and windows, retrofitting building envelopes, roofs and windows, and installing flood barriers.

"We're not 100% there, but we could operate if a flood or hurricane were to hit," Fukumoto said. Lanakila's kitchen operation relies on a 20-year-old generator and air conditioning system that could pose problems. Fukumoto says the group is securing funds to replace the aging equipment in the next three to five years.



Hawai'i Green Business Program Hosts National Green Business Engagement Summit

The Hawai'i Green Business Program (HGBP) ended 2024 by hosting the Green Business Engagement National Network (GBENN) Summit at the Ala Moana Hotel. The GBENN Summit brings together a consortium of unique local, statewide and national green business programs committed to serving businesses in environmental justice communities by strengthening dialogue, advancing collaborative opportunities and sharing best practice information to foster collaboration in the public and private sectors.

The Hawai'i State Energy Office presented a keynote address on maintaining engagement over time and sustaining programs through economic and staffing challenges. Summit members discussed driving businesses toward electrification with presentations from the Illinois Green Business Program and the California Green Business Network.



Photo courtesy: Hawai'i Convention Center.

The 2024 GBENN Summit concluded with an inspiring tour of the Hawai'i Convention Center (HCC). As a participant in the HGBP since 2016, the HCC completed a significant infrastructure upgrade in October 2024 that underscores its commitment to sustainability, replacing five chillers with state-of-the-art energy-efficient chillers, strategically engineered to enhance system reliability and flexibility. This strategic investment is projected to deliver a 17 percent reduction in electrical costs, demonstrating the tangible financial and environmental benefits of energy-efficient technological improvements and serving as an impressive showcase of business and government leading by example.

DCCA Insurance Division attends 2024 Japan Captive Seminars

The Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs (DCCA) Insurance Division attended the 2024 Japan Captive Seminars hosted by the Hawai'i Captive Insurance Council on Nov. 19 and 20 in Tokyo, Japan. Nearly 400 participants attended the two-day event, including representatives from various Japanese companies and industry service providers. The event featured educational sessions on captive insurance basics and risk management topics, led by professionals from both the U.S. and Japan who have successfully established captives in Hawai'i.

During the seminars, the DCCA Insurance Division made presentations on Hawai'i's captive insurance industry and met individually with both current and prospective captive insurance companies.

Hawai'i remains a top choice for captive insurance domiciles, with 44 licensed captive insurance companies owned by Japanese firms. In 2023, Japanese-owned captive insurance companies domiciled in Hawai'i wrote over \$1.1 billion in premiums, generated more than \$1.5 million in direct economic benefits to Hawai'i through professional services and expenses, and contributed over \$209.4 million in capital invested in or managed by Hawai'i-based financial institutions.

Hawai'i and Japan have a deep bond, built on shared cultural elements and close geographical proximity. Hawai'i offers easy access to Japan and features a mix of cultures that enhances cooperation between the two regions. This long-term relationship has led to valuable exchanges in traditions, values and business practices. As a result, Hawai'i is a strategic partner for Japanese companies seeking innovative solutions in captive insurance, providing opportunities for collaboration and growth.



Captive Insurance Administrator Andrew Kurata (left), and Insurance Commissioner Gordon Ito (right). Photo courtesy: Hawai'i Captive Insurance Council.



Progress Update on Wahiawā Civic Center: Enhancing Community Services

Wahiawā residents are closer to having a new civic center, after a decades-long wait. The Department of Accounting and General Services (DAGS) is overseeing the construction of the Wahiawā Civic Center through its Public Works Division. Public Works Administrator Gordon Wood said, “The project is approximately 40 to 45 percent complete and we’re making good progress on a weekly basis.”

The existing Wahiawā Civic Center had become too small for the needs of the community. Crews broke ground to upgrade the complex in the fall of 2023. The \$48 million project on the 2.96-acre Wahiawā Civic Center site, will comprise a two-story Judicial Building, a separate two-story office building for state and city agencies, including a City and County of Honolulu Satellite City Hall and on-site parking.



Photo courtesy: DAGS.

The work will involve redeveloping the existing Wahiawā Public Library, which is right behind the site. It will become a new Resource and Education Center facility.

State Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, a native son of Wahiawā and Chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, has long pushed for a centralized building that would consolidate government service for central O’ahu and the North Shore.

DAGS Director and State Comptroller Keith Regan said, “This is a wonderful example of government collaboration to support citizens. We’re pleased to help bring a project to life that will have such a meaningful impact on the Wahiawā and North Shore communities.”

The estimated completion date is December 2025, with occupancy anticipated in May 2026.

Kolowalu Dog Park Grand Opening

The Kolowalu Improvements Blessing and Dog Park Grand Opening will be on February 8. Dog parks provide a safe environment for dogs to run and play freely and socialize with other dogs. February is Hawaiian language month and the signage at the entrance is in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i with English translation.



Photo courtesy: HCDA.

“We are very excited that this very special dog park can be enjoyed by the residents of and visitors to Kaka’ako,” said Craig Nakamoto, executive director of the Hawai‘i Community Development Authority. “The idea for a dog park was first conceived by the former chairperson of the Ala Moana-Kaka’ako Neighborhood Board, Ryan Tam. The board approved a resolution suggesting a dog park at Kolowalu Park. The current board, other elected officials of the area and Governor Green all helped to make this culturally inspired dog park a reality.”

The Kaka’ako area has a diverse Hawaiian history and the Kolowalu dog park was designed with Hawaiian cultural elements inspired by activities from the area’s past. It features a sturdy, durable fence with a double-gate entry system designed, built and installed by Hawaiian cultural practitioner Thomas Pohaku Stone.

“The gate systems themselves would protect the animals from going in and out, that takes inspiration from the

Hawaiian mākāhā,” said Cultural Practitioner Ramsey Taum, who also worked on the cultural design elements of the dog park. “The fencing system is intended to be reminiscent of that pathway in the mākāhā, creating a safe place for the pets and their families to come in.”

A third practitioner helped with the stone wall design. There are also stone benches, boulders and wood elements locally sourced for the dogs and their owners to enjoy. Dogs can explore the boulders and other features in the park.

For more information on the blessing and grand opening visit <https://dbedt.hawaii.gov/hcda>.



Photo courtesy: HCDA.



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

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