



HAWAII STATE LEGISLATURE

STATE CAPITOL
415 SOUTH BERETANIA STREET
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

March 22, 2020

The Honorable David Ige
Executive Chambers

Dear Governor Ige:

Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi and House Speaker Scott K. Saiki sent you letters on March 19 and 20, 2020, asking you to take aggressive action to contain COVID-19. We are extremely disappointed that you and your administration continue to fail to realize the gravity of the situation Hawaii faces and have not led our state with one decisive voice. The statement you made at your press conference on March 21 calling for the quarantine of arriving persons entering the State completely contradicts the Department of Health's (DOH) statement:

"There are residents of Hawaii who believe the COVID-19 positive cases here are all visitors to the state, and unfortunately, there is stigma developing against visitors in Hawaii. I am asking the media to help the public understand that of the 37 positive test results to date, 32 of them are the result of traveling residents. The majority of cases are residents who returned home after traveling."

The underlying fact is that all the early COVID-19 cases came from travel related circumstances and it is because of this unimpeded travel that community spread is occurring.

Your March 21 call for quarantine of all arriving persons entering the State should have been instituted earlier and at this point in time, falls short of what is needed to comprehensively address this pandemic and will jeopardize the health and well-being of the residents and the economy of Hawaii as community spread is here. The only question is the extent and harm the spread will cause.

The only way to contain community spread of the virus is to impose a shelter-in-place directive upon all persons in Hawaii. Exceptions can be made for the continuity of essential services such as food (including food transportation, hubs, and farmers' markets), medical, water, communications, gasoline, cargo, financial transactions, public safety, and federal critical infrastructure sectors.

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This is a medical crisis and it calls on all of us to heed the advice of the medical community. Hundreds of local healthcare providers have already signed a letter pleading that you take such extreme measures, e.g., closure of non-essential businesses. Thousands of residents have signed on-line petitions asking you to mandate all the people in Hawaii to shelter in place. The four county councils have also demanded stronger action to protect their islands.

Jurisdictions and nations that have not implemented severe restrictions have seen staggering and uncontrollable infection rates. Our kupuna and frontline medical workers are also at higher risk. Their exposure, coupled with a lack of beds and ventilators, should be reason enough to take decisive action to prevent community spread and to prevent limited medical resources to be redirected from other daily medical emergencies that residents will encounter.

The Administration's attempt to quarantine arriving passengers will only be effective if coupled with an aggressive shelter-in-place protocol for all residents. General Hara admitted at the March 21 press conference that a quarantining process will be difficult to enforce. General Hara's statement further underscores the need for a directed shelter-in-place order for all residents in conjunction with quarantining of arriving passengers.

The DOH has already publicly stated that community spread is here. Your Administration lacks clear information and consistent testing protocols that leads to confusion and chaos amongst medical professionals. Your statement that there is no large community spread can only be made if your administration has tested every individual who requested testing and as DOH has repeatedly stated, we lack the resources to do that. While there have been some large group screenings, many residents who requested testing were refused and told to self-quarantine until symptoms arise, then and only then to inform their personal physician or urgent care. That means that at this time, we do not know whether there is a large community spread, and the Administration's refusal to take appropriate further aggressive action until we see widespread community outbreak is irresponsible.

The Administration's attempt to institute a voluntary shelter-in-place approach is not working. This has resulted in various counties using different approaches, i.e., restaurant restrictions on Oahu and Maui, curfew on Kauai, and none on the Big Island. Also, responsible citizens have taken steps to shut down their places of work while others have not. Lack of consistency and uniformity will not contain the virus but result in overtaxing the medical professionals and bring uncertainty to when the voluntary shelter-in-place will end. This will result in delay in any recovery attempt.

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Governor, please take every preventative action possible to keep this from escalating into a full-blown public health crisis.

Sincerely,

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