



Ke Ala Hou

A New Path Forward

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



GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE

Aloha,

As we started the 2024 legislative session, I delivered my second annual State of the State address on January 22. The address proposed legislative and executive action to support further recovery for the people of Maui; to make housing more available and affordable for Hawai'i residents; to reduce homelessness, and to lower the cost of living in our state.

I also highlighted a few of my administration's successes:

- We started phase one of the Green Affordability Plan;
- My team negotiated a new four-year contract with the Hawai'i State Teachers Association;
- I signed the Emergency Proclamation on Housing to immediately approve approximately 10,800 units of low-income income housing for struggling families;
- We created the Maui Recovery Fund to rapidly provide funds to families who lost loved ones or who suffered serious injuries in the fires;

- We initiated Pūlama Ola, the first medical respite kauhale that provided invaluable lessons which will be used at additional kauhale set to open across the state to address homelessness;
- We conducted the first significant gun buyback initiative in the state and removed some 500 firearms from O'ahu's streets.

Looking forward, I plan to continue taking bold action to address my main priorities — Maui's recovery, affordable housing, homelessness, health care, and climate change.

Although we have faced great challenges and suffered even greater loss over the past year — we must continue to come together as one 'ohana so we can recover and heal.



I know that if we continue to support each other, we can build a better tomorrow for our next generation.

Mahalo,

Josh Green M.D.

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.



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Native Species Survival Highlighted Locally and Nationally

Submitted by DLNR



Photo courtesy: Graham Talaber

The national nonprofit Endangered Species Coalition chose Hawai'i's Plant Extinction Prevention Program (PEPP) as one of 10 outstanding efforts to recognize, when the 50th anniversary of the federal Endangered Species Act was celebrated in December 2023. This was based on the discovery of a rare plant, *Silene lanceolata*, by PEPP technician Susan Deans last year, while rappelling on a remote cliffside.

The DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife PEPP celebrated its 20th anniversary last year and has focused on fostering the continued existence of more than 260 rare and endangered Hawaiian plants.

"We have almost half of all endangered plants in the United States. So, the level of rarity in Hawai'i is unsurpassed anywhere else in the world," said Matt Keir, PEPP lead. "After two decades of work, we saved about 30 different species from extinction through cultivation and that's been our biggest success." Plants make the extinction list when fewer than 50 individuals remain in the wild.

Cyanea rivularis is a rare plant in the mountains of Kaua'i that produces conical-shaped lavender and white flowers. It is a key component to a fully functioning and healthy native ecosystem, similar to many endangered plant species, but only three wild plants remained at the time of PEPP's discovery. The team is now supplementing the population with 2,500 cultivated plants at five different sites.

"Plants in the sites we've covered so far are doing great," said PEPP Field Coordinator Scott Heintzman. "Already, native honeycreeper birds are interacting with the plants and cross-pollinating individuals so we're really seeing a rebound of this species."

The connection between endangered native plants and endangered forest birds, primarily honeycreepers, received local attention in January, when Governor Josh Green, M.D., declared 2024 as "Makahiki O Nā Manu Nahele: The Year of the Forest Bird," via proclamation.



Charting the Course for Maui's Economic Recovery

The Hawai'i Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) and the County of Maui Office of Economic Development (OED) convened the first meeting of the Maui Economic Recovery Commission (ERC) in January at the University of Hawai'i Maui College. Governor Josh Green, M.D., and Mayor Richard Bissen were in attendance to kick off the meeting with nearly 90 members.

The Maui ERC is led by co-chairs, DBEDT Director James Kunane Tokioka, and OED Director Luana Mahi. It is a collaborative effort that includes subject matter experts, community members, cultural advisers, union and business leaders, and representatives from the government at the county, state, and federal levels. Many ERC members live and work on Maui or work with teams there.

Maui ERC members will provide guidance and feedback that will support local recovery priorities in sustaining and rebuilding businesses and employment, and developing economic opportunities that align with the community's vision.

The initial phase involves learning, listening, and exchanging insights to chart the best course forward for Maui.

The Maui ERC will continue to convene as learning groups and focus on the following priority areas, which were identified through collaborative discussions at the January meeting: housing, workforce development, community interests, healing, 'āina, and wai.



Kids' Day Event Returns to the Women's Community Correctional Center

The Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC) celebrated the return of Kids' Day in December for the first time since 2019. The event gives moms a chance to reconnect with their children over sweet treats and fun games. Prior to the pandemic, WCCC conducted the event several times a year, partnering with community organizations such as Keiki O Ka 'Āina, Wellspring Covenant Church, Pū'ā Foundation, and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Honolulu.

"Events like these are critically important as they help incarcerated mothers maintain crucial bonds with their children," said Hawai'i Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) Director Tommy Johnson. "It also reinforces the message to mothers to stay the course and complete evidence-based programs so they can reunite with their children."

On December 9, 12 mothers and 18 children enjoyed hot dogs, burgers, and cupcakes donated by the Pū'ā Foundation. The WCCC Maunawili Cottage courtyard was lovingly decorated by volunteers with holiday-themed balloons, and the keiki also enjoyed shave ice, face painting, a puppet show, and games.

The Pū'ā Foundation partnered with the Office for Social Ministry – Roman Catholic Diocese of Honolulu and the O'ahu Going Home Consortium to volunteer and raise funds for Kids' Day.

WCCC Warden Ione "Noni" Guillonta said, "Research has shown the importance of the parent-child relationship and the traumatic effect the loss of a parent through incarceration can have on a child. Maintaining contact and continuing to build their relationship with their children is crucial for the incarcerated parent and child as they prepare for their release and return to the community."

WCCC plans to host several more Kids' Day events this year, and Director Johnson said the department is looking into the possibility of expanding the event to other correctional facilities.



*Simone Kamaunu and her 2-year-old child, Ethic-Lee, spend quality time enjoying activities, games and shave ice.
Photo courtesy: Hawai'i DCR*

DCCA Celebrates Blue Zones Worksite

The Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs (DCCA) celebrated its certification as a Blue Zones Worksite on January 10. The event highlighted DCCA's multi-year commitment to developing a healthier and more connected workplace environment, culminating in the significant achievement of being the first government entity to be certified.

The Blue Zones Project is a community-wide initiative by HMSA that seeks to improve the overall well-being of individuals and communities. The project focuses on systematically changing a community's environment through policy, building design, social networks, and the physical environment. Different designations are awarded depending on the organization's undertaking. The certification process DCCA completed is a customized approach that takes years to achieve.

This project started in December 2018 with four focus groups and a department-wide survey assessing current well-being to identify opportunities for improvement. During the four years it took to reach certification, volunteer employees organized and led dedicated worksite wellness initiatives to include activity groups, a regular healthy food policy, team-building opportunities, and weekly lunch-and-learn workshops.

"This certification is not just a milestone; it's a testament to the power of collective well-being," said Sean Kinilau, a driving force behind the DCCA's Blue Zones initiative.

DCCA's commitment to the best practices of the Blue Zones Project resulted in positive outcomes throughout its operations and among its employees. Key HR metrics, including employee turnover, overtime costs, absenteeism, overall employee engagement, and social connectedness, all saw improvements.



*DCCA and the Blue Zones Team pose with the certificate. (Left to Right: DCCA Deputy Director Dean Hazama, DCCA Director Nadine Ando, Sean Kinilau, Tara Murphy, Blue Zones Rep. Joslyn Sato, HMSA Rep. Maricel Blackwell)
Photo courtesy: Hawai'i DCCA*



The Last Public Safety Department Service Awards Ceremony



Congratulations to Luaselau Fesili for his 20 years of service to the people of Hawai'i! (Left to Right: Sheriff Mark Hanohano, Luaselau "Lua" Fesili, PSD Director Tommy Johnson.)

The former Hawai'i Department of Public Safety (PSD) conducted its final service awards ceremony at Washington Place on December 29, honoring 36 employees for their unwavering commitment and loyal service to the people of Hawai'i. These employees had attained notable milestone anniversaries of 10, 20, and 30 years.

The employees were from the Sheriff Division, Narcotics Enforcement Division, Hawai'i Paroling Authority, Crime Victims Compensation Commission, Human Resources Office, Fiscal Office, Mainland Branch, Administrative Services Office, Correctional Industries, Corrections Program Services Division, and Inspections and Investigations Office. Eight of the 36 recipients attended the ceremony to receive their awards in person.

"It is an absolute honor to recognize and work with such an inspiring and dedicated group of professionals," said PSD Director Tommy Johnson. "Their commitment and sacrifices have not gone unnoticed, nor unappreciated."

This award ceremony was the last for PSD as effective January 1, 2024, PSD was renamed the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR), and law enforcement functions were transferred to the newly created Department of Law Enforcement.

"With this upcoming change from the PSD to the DCR, we usher in a new era for the department, our employees, and those in our custody and care. We are shifting from what some may see as a punitive incarceration model to one that is refocused on providing evidence-based, holistic, and when appropriate, cultural programs designed to meet the needs of justice-involved persons in our custody. This includes wraparound reentry services designed to help ensure better outcomes and safer communities," Johnson said.



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DHHL Awards 25 Pastoral Lots in Kahikinui, Maui

The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) awarded 25 pastoral lots on December 2, 2023, as part of its Kuleana Program. Established in 1999, the Kuleana Program was created through beneficiary consultation. It is the department's direct response to fulfilling the community's needs and its desire to be good stewards of the land.

It has been more than two decades since the Kuleana Program awarded the first 75 lots. The Kuleana Program provides an alternative homesteading option for DHHL beneficiaries interested in living on unimproved Hawaiian Home Lands. The program also addresses the department's need to quickly provide homesteads to a growing list of beneficiaries, many of whom lack sufficient funding to acquire a traditional residential lease.

Located on the leeward side of Haleakalā, Kahikinui encompasses 22,860 acres. The area is zoned for 101 lots ranging in size from 10 to 16 acres. As part of the Kuleana Program, lessees must maintain the roadways, their properties, the surrounding landscape, and historical features.

"It is a challenging program, but we do have people on our waitlist that are committed and will take on that challenge," said Hawaiian Homes Commission Chairperson Kali Watson. "The department will be more actively involved in providing financing and also assistance on construction, so it's an exciting time."

The department's pastoral leases provide lands for ranching and allow beneficiaries to build a home. The DHHL pastoral lot awards vary in size on Hawai'i Island, Kaua'i, Maui, and Moloka'i. To learn more about this program, visit <https://dhhl.hawaii.gov/>.

"I'm glad to become a member of that great community," said DHHL beneficiary Harold Rodrigues. "Being in a homestead is a hardship but you persevere, as whoever is there now has persevered and built that community up to what it is now."



Left to right: Pono Asano (Executive Assistant to Mayor Richard Bissen), Harold Rodrigues, Keali'i Reichel, Vania Kanamu (Ka 'Ohana o Kahikinui), Chair Kali Watson (Hawaiian Homes Commission)



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

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