

FROM THE OFFICE OF
SENATOR DRU MAMO KANUHA

Senate District 3 – Kona, Ka‘ū, Volcano

Summer 2025

‘A‘OHE HANA NUI KE ALU ‘IA

“No task is too big when done together”

-Mary Kawena Pukui

Aloha Senate District 3 ‘Ohana ,

I hope this message finds you well. As we began the 2025 Legislative Session, our work was shaped by the transition to a new federal administration and uncertainty around changes to federal funding that many in the State of Hawai‘i rely on. As such, the Hawai‘i State Senate focused on protecting essential services, strengthening our budget reserves, and preparing our state to adapt.

When we adjourned on May 2, we closed a session that built on last year’s progress while advancing new priorities. We supported wildfire recovery and housing relief, passed Hawai‘i’s first “Green Fee” to fund climate resilience, worked to improve conditions at public schools, stabilized rising insurance costs, improved public safety standards, and invested in workforce development.

In this newsletter, you’ll find highlights from this year’s session, key legislation updates, and funding secured for Kona, Ka‘ū, and Volcano, along with progress on District 3 projects to strengthen education, healthcare, and economic opportunity. As always, please feel free to contact my office with any questions or to talk story about how these efforts may impact our community.

It remains an honor to serve as your voice at the State Capitol. Mahalo nui loa for your continued support as we work together to build a stronger, more resilient Hawai‘i for generations to come.

Me ka ha‘aha‘a



Senator Dru Mamo Kanuha
Majority Leader, Hawai‘i State Senate
District 3 (Kona, Ka‘ū, Volcano)



Senator Kanuha and legislative colleagues during Adjournment Sine Die on May 2, 2025



MEMBER OF THE FOLLOWING

SENATE COMMITTEES:

Education (EDU)

Housing (HOU)

Transportation, Culture, and the
Arts (TCA)

Ways and Means (WAM)

District 3 Priorities:

Improving Public Schools

Expanding Human Services

Advocating for District 3

Strengthening Healthcare

Affordable Housing

Enhancing Public Safety

CONTACT ME:

415 South Beretania Street,
Room 206

Honolulu, HI 96813

PH: (808) 586-9385

EM:

senkanuha@capitol.hawaii.gov

Social Media:



@SenatorKanuha

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Funds Secured for Kona, Ka‘ū, Volcano

Hawai‘i Health Systems Corporation (HHSC) received \$13,248,000 for improvements to Kona Community Hospital to fund the reconfiguration and renovation of the emergency room.

Hawai‘i Health Systems Corporation (HHSC) received \$50 million to fund the construction of a new ambulatory care center in Kea‘au, expanding outpatient services and improving healthcare access for residents in Volcano and other areas of District 3.

The Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) received \$1 million to replace the fish hoist at Miloli‘i Landing, ensuring safety and reliability for local fishermen. The project will also repair and repave the surrounding area, improving access.



Sen. Kanuha and Governor Josh Green catch up during Opening Day festivities at the Hawai‘i State Legislature, 2025

The Commission on Water Resources Management (CWRM) received \$4.225 million to establish a well monitoring pilot program in the Keauhou Aquifer System to identify impacts to natural resources and empower the development of affordable housing in North Kona to accommodate population growth.

The Department of Transportation (HDOT) received \$147,045,000 to fund improvements of terminals and facilities at Ellison Onizuka Kona International Airport at Keāhole.

The Department of Education (HIDOE) was awarded prioritized lump sum funding for Kealakehe High School to fund A.C. replacement, exterior repainting for buildings A, BB, D, E, F, I, J, and Q, and interior/exterior painting throughout other areas of the campus.

The County of Hawai‘i (COH) received \$3.5 million to fund long-overdue ambulance services at the Makalei Fire Station. This critical investment will help ensure faster emergency response times for West Hawai‘i residents and improve access to life-saving care for the surrounding communities.



Sen. Kanuha and Lieutenant Governor Sylvia Luke reading to students at Ho‘okena Elementary School, celebrating the launch of the LG’s “Ready Keiki” program.

2025 GRANTS-IN-AID (GIA) SECURED FOR KONA, KA‘U AND VOLCANO NONPROFITS:

- \$100,000 to **Hawai‘i Island Humane Society, S.P.C.A.**, to increase access to low-cost and free spay and neuter services throughout Hawai‘i Island.
- \$150,000 to **Innovations Public Charter School Foundation** to acquire essential furniture, fixtures, and equipment to enhance educational experiences.
- \$300,000 to **La‘i‘ōpua 2020** to complete the final two quadrants of its community complex, which will feature four fully equipped preschool classrooms designed to expand early learning opportunities for local families, as well as open spaces that will serve as flexible gathering areas for educational activities, cultural programs, and community events.
- \$500,000 to **West Hawai‘i Community Health Center, Inc.** to support the planning and development of workforce housing in the Ka‘ū district.
- \$120,000 for **Hilo Bayfront Trails, Inc.** to implement a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian safety educational campaign across Hawai‘i Island.
- \$300,000 for **Hōlualoa Foundation for Arts & Culture** to develop a comprehensive master plan that will guide future improvements, renovations, and expansion efforts at the Donkey Mill Art Center.

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Senate District 3: **Legislative Highlights**

Improving Public Schools

As a Member of EDU, our committee prioritized improving conditions across Hawai‘i’s public schools to ensure our keiki have the resources they need to thrive. Notably, the passage of **SB1300** secured more than \$4 million to expand free school meal coverage to thousands of additional families statewide. We also took meaningful steps towards addressing the state’s school bus driver shortage by passing **HB862**, which paves the way for alternative vehicles to be used for student transportation. The Senate’s commitment to expanding opportunities for learners of all ages was clear in our strong support for **HB133**, establishing surfing as an interscholastic sport, and **HB692**, which broadened eligibility for the Preschool Open Doors Program.

Protecting Human Services

Amid uncertainty over federal funding, the Senate reaffirmed its commitment to Hawai‘i’s most vulnerable families by passing **SB960**, empowering the Department of Human Services to expand SNAP access.

This year, the Legislature also passed **HB705**, creating the MediMedi Project to help kūpuna, Medicare beneficiaries, & underserved communities more easily access low-income subsidy programs.

District 3 Priorities

This year, I was proud to support measures benefiting Hawai‘i Island. Working with Rep. Nicole Lowen, we passed **HB341** to fund land acquisition and expansion of Hawai‘i Island Community Health Center’s facilities.

I was also proud to support **HB401**, which adds an additional District Court judge, and **HB727** establishes a three-year Women’s Court Pilot Program in the Third Circuit Court to better address the island’s evolving legal needs. I also introduced **SB865**, creating a permanent Extension Agent position at UH-CTAHR’s Kona Cooperative Extension to support Hawai‘i Island farmers and strengthen our agricultural future.

Strengthening Healthcare

The Senate continued to focus on strengthening Hawai‘i’s capacity to deliver high-quality health care statewide. I was proud to support **SB119**, which establishes a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program at UH-Maui College, creating new opportunities for aspiring nurses. **HB799** allows physicians to provide care at organized ambulatory health care facilities without needing separate privileges, improving access and efficiency. **SB1245** advances health equity by requiring reimbursement for licensed pharmacists, helping ensure rural and underserved areas get the care they deserve.



Hawai‘i Island’s 2025 Senate Legislative Delegation

L-R: **Sen. Herbert M. “Tim” Richards, III** (North Hilo, Hāmākua, Kohala, Waimea, Waikoloa, North Kona), **Sen. Lorraine R. Inouye** (Hilo, Pauka‘a, Papaikou, Pepe‘ekee), **Sen. Kanuha** (Kona, Ka‘ū, Volcano), **Sen. Joy A. San Buenaventura** (Puna)

Affordable Housing

As a member of HOU, I was proud to support **SB65**, which provides Hawai‘i Public Housing Authority with \$10 million to rehabilitate existing public housing & quickly increase rental availability.

In West Hawai‘i, **SB1602**—which I worked closely with Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa—establishes a well-monitoring pilot project in the Keauhou Aquifer System, paving the way for much-needed water for affordable housing development in North Kona.

Enhancing Public Safety

The Senate took action to close critical public safety gaps. **HB277** establishes consistent statewide standards for high-speed pursuits. As fentanyl devastates communities, **HB386** aligns fentanyl possession & distribution thresholds with those for other dangerous drugs, strengthening enforcement. **HB1483** & **HB806** also provide stronger tools to deter illegal fireworks.

2025 Kanuha Resolutions:

- HCR191 HD1 requests the Department of Land and Natural Resources to convene a Kailua Bay Advisory Working Group to address interjurisdictional issues at the Pier as they arise.
- SCR16 SD1 requests the Department of Health to convene a task force to identify & develop minimum professional standards for Community Health Worker (CHW) training programs. This marks an important first step toward establishing a regulated profession that will allow CHWs to be reimbursed for their services.
- SCR54 SD1 HD1 requests the Department of Land & Natural Resources to convene and provide administrative support to a Desalination Planning Task Force to determine whether the use of desalination for large-scale water consumption in the state is feasible.

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SENATE DISTRICT 3 ONGOING PROJECTS



Sen. Kanuha, Lieutenant Governor Luke, Rep. Kahaloa, and Rep. Kapela visiting with Kahakai Elementary School students and administrators at the LG’s office at the Hawai‘i State Capitol.

HDOT is conducting a **comprehensive master plan for the Ellison Onizuka Kona International Airport at Keāhole (KOA)**, initiated in Jan. 2025 and expected through Summer 2026. The master plan will address airfield safety, terminal modernization, necessary infrastructure upgrades & operational enhancements, adding a potential second runway, commercial opportunities, congestion relief, and disaster-readiness, guided by community input.

Funding has been released for **Hōlualoa Elementary School’s (HES) installation of new fans and ongoing mold mitigation** efforts to improve air quality and safety. HDOE will begin improvements at HES on July 21.

The ***Kahale I Ke Kula Uka* affordable housing project** was completed in October 2024. A part of ongoing housing efforts in the Kona region, this project **developed 99 affordable rental units** in Kailua-Kona aimed at households earning up to 60% AMI.

Ka‘ū is undertaking a ~\$31M wastewater project funded by ARPA & county bonds. The **Pāhala Sewer Collection System & WWTP Phases I & II** will add sewer lines along Pikake, Huapala, Maile Streets, etc., & a treatment plant. Construction recently began; expected to take 18 months; work limited to weekday hours.

The County recently issued an RFP for Phase 1 construction of a 16-bed facility for the **Kukuiole Emergency Shelter & Assessment Center**. This project is on State land leased to the County and includes an emergency shelter, assessment center, community kitchen & restroom, plus office space and parking for unsheltered vehicles. Site prep and grading was completed in late 2024, with developers now being sought to build the facility.

Ongoing upgrades at Konawaena High School continue to enhance athletic facilities for students and the community. Softball field improvements were completed on **July 1**, and **work on Konawaena’s track & field facility** is also progressing, with full completion set for **September 1**. While the track and field was previously approved for use on a preliminary basis for the football season, the final touches will deliver a high quality venue for training and competition.

As of Feb. 17, 2025, renovations began at the **Kīlauea Visitor Center** (two-year timeline) covering restrooms, sidewalks, exhibit space, parking, & a pavilion. Related work includes Jaggar Museum removal, Uēkahuna restoration, new restrooms, a new roundabout, HVO field station, & utility line upgrades. **Temporary closures and delays are expected** at the entrance & summit area.

Two major DHHL housing projects are underway in Kona. At **La‘i ‘Ōpua Village 4 Akau Phase 3**, Ikaika ‘Ohana is developing 32 Rent-With-Option-to-Purchase homes for beneficiaries earning up to 60% AMI, with lot awards tentatively set for June 2025. Nearby, **La‘i ‘Ōpua Village 5** will deliver 55 homes by 2026 for households earning up to 140% AMI. Additionally, DHHL will award **390 undivided interest leases across La‘i ‘Ōpua Villages 1 and 2** & subdivisions in Kawaihae.



Sen. Kanuha reviews a proposed draft of the State Budget—HB300—as a Member of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means (WAM)