

# WORKING FOR KONA

Office of Representative Kirstin Kahaloa • Summer 2023



## Aloha Kona!

It is an honor to represent you in the Hawai'i State House of Representatives. In my first session, our community's priorities were front and center. I'm proud to share the updates in this newsletter with you!

**Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa**  
State House District 6  
Hōnaunau, Nāpo'opo'o,  
Captain Cook, Kealakekua,  
Keauhou, Hōlualoa, Kailua



L-R, Sen. Tim Richards, Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa, Pharmacy Director Missy Elliott, Hospital CEO Clayton McGhan, Rep. Nicole Lowen, and Mayor Mitch Roth break ground in a ceremony presided over by Kumu Ke'ala Ching.

## Critical Pharmacy, Infrastructure Work Underway At Kona Community Hospital

As we work toward a new hospital for our growing population, it is important that we maintain Kona Community Hospital, a critical health care facility and one of the largest employers in West Hawai'i. Originally founded in 1914, Kona Community Hospital has since grown to a 94-bed full-service acute care hospital that serves the community with a 24-hour emergency department that is designated as a Level III trauma center.

Kona's legislative delegation secured \$18.5 million in capital improvement project funds this session: \$2.3 million for construction and equipment for the pharmacy, and \$16.2 million for infrastructure upgrades to keep the hospital open. Key to securing the funds was the advocacy of the Kona delegation for many years, including this year by Rep. Kahaloa in the House sitting on the Committee on Finance, and her counterpart Sen. Dru Mamo Kanuha sitting on the Committee on Ways & Means.



## Traffic Improvements Coming To Kahakai Elementary School

The Kona legislative delegation secured \$2.5 million to improve traffic flow and safety for the over 600 students of Kahakai Elementary School. The appropriation will fund parking lot improvements, as well as pavement and extension of the access road. Rep. Kahaloa has been advocating for and working on safe ways for keiki to get to and from school since her work with the Blue Zones Project.



Advocacy by Hōlualoa Elementary's teachers, families, neighbors, and community supporters was critical in bringing the school's long-deferred maintenance issues to the forefront. In March, Rep. Kahaloa met with a working group pushing for solutions.

## Work Underway To Address Conditions At Hōlualoa Elementary School

Thanks to the leadership of Hōlualoa Elementary School's teachers, families and community, hazardous mold conditions are well under way to being addressed as students return to school.

First opened in 1897, the age of the school's buildings and climate in Hōlualoa fostered the growth of mold. Hōlualoa's nearly 500 students between pre-K and 5th grade started the new school year with refreshed learning spaces following extensive renovation work over the summer break to address environmental concerns.

Since late 2022 through the 2023 summer break, 16 classrooms and 10 other office and work spaces got extensive cleaning, new mold-inhibiting paint, new flooring chosen to minimize future mold growth, and dehumidifiers to reduce moisture in the air. Covered walkways were also power washed, and furniture that was mold-compromised was replaced.

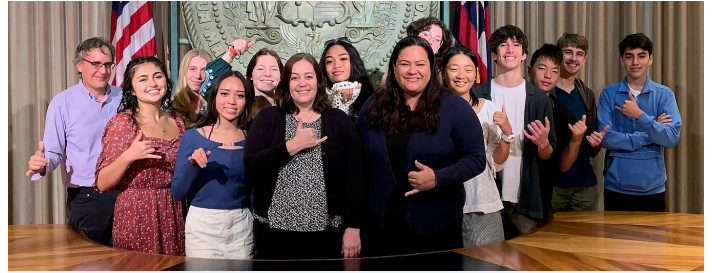
The \$1.2 million in improvements so far were scheduled to minimize impact on learning. Future additions to the work include ceiling fans to further improve air circulation. This session, the Kona legislative delegation secured an additional \$250,000 in capital improvement project funds to complete more deferred maintenance projects.

Rep. Kahaloa also worked closely with the Department of Education as well as the Department of Accounting & General Services to ensure that the Hōlualoa Elementary work remained a priority. A master plan for the school's future needs is also in progress.





Through the legislative process, measures are vetted and heard by committees. Drawing on her professional experience, Rep. Kahaloa serves as Vice Chair of the Committee on Agriculture & Food Systems, and is a member of the Committees on Energy & Environmental Protection, and Finance.



During session, the Kona Reps hosted groups from Makua Lani Christian Academy in Kona, and from Hawaiian culture-focused and Hawaiian language immersion schools on Hawai'i Island and O'ahu. Introducing youth to government is important to growing civic engagement.



## IN MEMORIAM

### Lora Lee Lapenia

1969 - 2023

Lora was a beloved fixture at the Capitol for almost three decades, a role model for her peers and a masterful cultivator of relationships, earning the respect and admiration of her fellow staffers, the elected officials she served with, and the constituents with whom she interacted over the years.

Every week Lora commuted from her home in Pepe'ekeo on Hawai'i Island to the Capitol, serving the public alongside Governors Ben Cayetano and David Ige, Representatives Clift Tsuji and Chris Todd, and finally in my office.

The learning curve for a new Representative is steep, but having an Office Manager as experienced as Lora made it as smooth as it could have been. I appreciate all she sacrificed in service to the people, and I will miss her deeply. All my aloha to Lora's parents, Bobo and Ernesta, her sister Leona and her family, and the many friends Lora made over the years.



## WORKING FOR KONA



Rep. Kahaloe joined Rep. Jeanné Kapela and Sen. Dru Mamo Kanuha for a visit to Kealakekua Bay in June to discuss the challenges in managing the area. The day-long visit included conversations with community members, representatives from state and county agencies, and lineal descendants with generational kuleana to mālama Kealakekua, and the vision for future stewardship and conservation efforts.



As a former executive director of the Kona-Kohala Chamber of Commerce, supporting local business is close to Rep. Kahaloe's heart. She was happy to host representatives from our island's Chambers of Commerce at the Capitol during Chamber Week in January.

Rep. Kahaloe is part of the largest class of new members the House has seen since 1994 – 16 first-time Reps elected, and two more appointed to fill vacancies.

Front Row: Rep. Cory Chun, Rep. Kahaloe, Rep. Rachele Lamosao, Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Rep. Mahina Poepoe, Rep. Trish La Chica. Back Row: Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, Rep. Micah Aiu, Rep. Darius Kila, Rep. Luke Evslin.







At a June ceremony at Hawai'i Island Community Health Center, Gov. Josh Green signed a number of bills in the company of Hawai'i Island legislators and their colleagues working on health issues, as well as representatives of West Hawai'i's health care community.

## Governor Signs Key Health Care Bills At Hawai'i Island Community Health Center

A number of bills to make health care more accessible for Kona and other rural communities were signed into law in June at a special ceremony at Hawai'i Island Community Health Center. The bills will help close the gap between public insurance reimbursements and the cost to deliver care, get medical professionals coming to work in Hawai'i on the job more quickly, and allow for the expansion of telehealth.

**SB404:** Updates the Hospital Sustainability Program to support a hospital's ability to provide services to Medicaid recipients

**SB671:** Excludes fentanyl testing strips from the definition of drug paraphernalia, legalizing the potentially life-saving strips.

**SB674:** Allows Hawai'i to enter into the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact to streamline the process for licensed physicians who want to practice in Hawai'i.

**HB907 HD2 SD2:** Allows for the reimbursement of services provided through telehealth.

The ceremony was a homecoming for Gov. Josh Green, who came to Hawai'i to serve as a doctor on Hawai'i Island. He was also involved in the initial conversations that led to the establishment of West Hawai'i Community Health Center, which recently merged with Bay Clinic to become Hawai'i Island Community Health Center.



## House Defends Access To Reproductive Health

In March, Rep. Kahaloa proudly voted to pass Senate Bill 1 to ensure women in Hawai'i have access to safe reproductive health care following the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson*. The bill was quickly signed into law by Gov. Josh Green.

The measure established that the state will not deny or interfere with a person's right to an abortion and prohibits releasing information about reproductive health care services. It also allows licensed physician assistants to perform certain abortions and shields medical providers in Hawai'i from legal action from other states.





Rep. Richard Onishi, Rep. Lisa Ichiyama, Brian Miyamoto (Hawai'i Farm Bureau), Rep. Cedric Gates, Rep. Kahaloa, Rep. Chris Todd (with Ruby Todd), Eric Tanouye (Green Point Nursery) on a site visit.



Rep. Kahaloa and Pōmai Weigert (GoFarm) at Agriculture Day at the Capitol.

## House Agriculture & Food Systems Committee Working To Support Hawai'i's Farmers, Ranchers, and Agriculture & Food Producers

As Vice Chair of the Committee on Agriculture & Food Systems, Rep. Kahaloa worked to advance policy that supports the people who put food on our tables.

Those include measures to protect Kona Coffee, provide much needed food safety training and certification, and protections from invasive species.

### Food and Product Innovation Network

Funded a network and funded facilities across Hawai'i to develop value-added agricultural products.

### Advocated For Double Up Food Bucks

Passed a resolution urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture to expand this important program to all retailers that participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

### Expanded Food Safety Certification

Introduced and passed a bill with \$1 million to fund a GroupGAP certification program, allowing smaller producers to comply with federal food safety standards. This funding is important because it increases the market opportunities

for small farms that become Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) certified.

### Protected Kona Coffee

Co-introduced an expansion of truth-in-labeling requirements, and to extend programs fighting Coffee Berry Borer and Coffee Leaf Rust.

### Agriculture Bills Passed

<b>SB746</b>	Coffee labeling
<b>SB833</b>	Wahiawā Dam acquisition
<b>SB1588</b>	Food safety certification program
<b>HB306</b>	Ornamental ginger
<b>HB307</b>	Lease negotiations in ag parks
<b>HB615</b>	Restrictions on ag land uses and activities
<b>HB692</b>	Pesticides fines and warning
<b>HB695</b>	Agricultural fencing
<b>HB972</b>	Veterinary lab and animal disease program

### Invasive Species Bills Passed

<b>SB743</b>	Coffee pest control
<b>SB1552</b>	Fire Ants





Many bills are introduced every legislative session, and not all pass. Rep. Kahaloe will be continuing to advocate for these bills in the 2024 session.

- HB259** Protecting The Integrity Of The Kona Coffee Brand
- HB1248** Expanding Access To Healthy Local Produce
- HB1250** Protecting Hawai'i-Grown Tea On The Market
- HB1259** Exporting Hawai'i Liquor Products
- HB1348** Protecting Hawai'i-Grown Macadamia Nuts



Since their Kona brewery and taproom opened in 2017, **Ola Brew** has been working to support Hawai'i Island's agriculture sector by promoting Hawai'i-grown crops in its uniquely flavored beers, ciders, teas, and seltzers. They continue to research and develop new products using local produce. Congratulations to Ola Brew's nearly 3,000 community investors and over 40 employee-owners on five successful years!

## Grants-In-Aid Awarded To Organizations Serving Kona

The Grants-In-Aid process awards funds to support activities of organizations that benefit the community. Congratulations to these recipients, and mahalo for all your hard work!

- Big Island Mediation - \$60,000**
- Boys & Girls Club of the Big Island - \$450,000**
- Friends of Hawai'i Technology Academy - \$250,000**
- Habitat for Humanity Hawai'i Island - \$350,000**
- Hawai'i Island Community Health Center - \$400,000**
- Hawai'i Island HIV/AIDS Foundation - \$130,000**
- Hawai'i Island Humane Society - \$150,000**
- Hawai'i 'Ulu Co-op - \$200,000**
- Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition - \$195,000**
- HOPE Services Hawai'i - \$400,000**
- Innovations Public Charter School Foundation - \$100,000**
- Japanese Cultural Center of Kona - \$50,000**
- People for Active Transportation Hawai'i (PATH) - \$89,000**





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## AT YOUR SERVICE



It is an honor to represent Kona's House District 6 (Hōnaunau, Nāpo'opo'o, Captain Cook, Kealakekua, Keauhou, Hōlualoa, Kailua) alongside my counterpart in the State Senate, Senator Dru Mamo Kanuha (Kona, Ka'ū, Volcano). Stop by and visit if you are in Honolulu, or let me know how our team can help you!

[Connect With Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa](#)

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