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February 6, 2017

TO: The Honorable Senator Josh Green, Chair  
Senate Committee on Human Services

The Honorable Senator Will Espero, Chair  
Senate Committee on Housing

FROM: Pankaj Bhanot, Director

SUBJECT: **SB1243 – RELATING TO HOUSING**

Hearing: February 6, 2017, 3:05 p.m.  
Conference Room 016, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this bill to address the State's homeless crisis. However, DHS respectfully opposes this measure. DHS is concerned that the measure may create unforeseen consequences and may adversely affect the Governor's Executive budget requests for homelessness.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the bill is to establish residential campgrounds for homeless and provide supportive services like a housing first program.

Housing First is an approach that emphasizes stable, permanent housing as a strategy for ending homelessness for the chronically homeless. The State's Housing First program has been successful on Oahu in supporting participants to remain in housing, and DHS is expanding Housing First services to neighbor islands. The Governor's Executive budget request includes additional funds for Housing First and we ask the Legislature to support the continuation and expansion of Housing First.

Additionally, as noted by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, Housing First is based on the theory that client choice is valuable in housing selection and supportive service

participation, and that exercising that choice is likely to make a client more successful in remaining in housing and improving their life. The residential campgrounds proposed in this measure takes away that choice, which is the critical component of Housing First.

Many experts on the issue of homelessness agree that these types of encampments encourage more encampments. It is important for government to build affordable low income housing to increase the inventory of permanent housing instead of temporary camps. Barbara Poppe, former Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), has stated that tent cities are not part, or should not be part of the government's response to homelessness.

While DHS appreciates the Legislature's interest in a quick solution, an assessment of the long term implications and fiscal impacts of health and safety, law enforcement, and other considerations of official homeless encampments needs to be done to appreciate the unintended consequences.

DHS asks the legislature to support the Governor's executive budget requests to end homelessness and support the programs outlined in those budget requests.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.