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TO: The Honorable Representative Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

FROM: Pankaj Bhanot, Director

SUBJECT: **HCR 206/HR 185 – STRONGLY URGING THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL FEDERAL AID AND SUPPORT TO THE STATE OF HAWAII FOR FINANCIAL, MEDICAL, AND OTHER FEDERAL ASSISTANCE FOR MIGRANTS COVERED BY THE COMPACT OF FREE ASSOCIATION.**

Hearing: March 22, 2019, 8:30 a.m.
Conference Room 329, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports SCR HCR 206 and HR 185.

PURPOSE: The purpose of HCR 206 and HR 185 is to urge the Department of the Interior and the United States Congress to provide additional Federal aid and support to the state of Hawaii for financial, medical, and other Federal assistance for migrants covered by the Compact of Free Association.

DHS recognizes the unique circumstances our community members from the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau face when exercising their right to live, work, and pay taxes in the United States. In 1996, when the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) removed Medicaid and other Federal benefits for this population, the law created a higher bar or a barrier to access for federally supported benefits for those from the COFA Nations.

Where most immigrants are permitted access to benefits after a 5-year waiting period, lawfully present COFA migrants continue to be ineligible for most Federally funded

services, including Medicaid coverage for those other than for children or pregnant women. Hawaii's Medicaid program operates State funded programs to provide coverage to some of the most vulnerable members of this community, but this coverage comes at considerable cost to the state. An even more critical cost, however, may be the societal impact to Hawaii residents from COFA nations who often suffer from lack of equal access to services that are provided to other Hawaii residents with similar income levels.

Federal funds should be increased and federally funded programs should be accessible to Hawaii residents from COFA nations. DHS supports increasing the ability of Hawaii's low-income residents to meet their most basic needs so that each individual and family has opportunity for social and economic mobility. Educational and economic success of Hawaii's low-income residents will have a positive impact on the entire state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.