

**OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

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January 31, 2019

The Honorable Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
The Honorable Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair  
and Members of the Committee on Ways and Means  
The Honorable Sylvia J. Luke, Chair  
The Honorable Ty J.K Cullen, Vice Chair  
and Members of the Committee on Finance  
House of Representatives, Capitol Auditorium  
State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chairs Dela Cruz and Luke, Vice-Chairs Keith-Agaran and Cullen, and  
Members of the Committees on Ways and Means and Finance:

**SUBJECT:** Informational Briefing with County Mayors

Thank you for the opportunity this afternoon to brief you on matters of importance to the City and County of Honolulu. While my comments will be focused on matters of importance to the City, let me also start by emphasizing that the City and County of Honolulu supports several initiatives proposed by our sister counties, and the four counties are unified in this effort. These bills propose to 1) provide liability exemptions for our water safety officers except in cases of gross negligence or wanton act or omission, 2) allocate additional transient accommodations tax revenues to the counties, and 3) provide an extension to the timeframe for a county to adopt a county surcharge on State tax and expand the allowable uses for revenues generated by a county surcharge on State tax already adopted by our sister counties.

As for the City and County of Honolulu, our focus is on helping those individuals most in need of our assistance. The main issues the City wants to address this year are as follows:

**MINIMUM WAGE**

Undoubtedly, one of the major topics discussed over the years has been that of raising the minimum wage. This became abundantly clear during the last six months of 2018, when members of UNITE HERE Local 5 went on strike. While the strike was not about raising the minimum wage, the theme of the strike did hit home for many individuals in this state. Those on the lower end of the pay spectrum in Hawaii are struggling to make ends meet and are often forced to work multiple jobs simply to pay

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for basic necessities. Furthermore, the middle class, the backbone of a thriving economy, is being squeezed out. According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as of 2018, low income for a single person in Honolulu is someone making up to \$65,350, and a person living on Oahu and making \$40,850 is considered "very low income. A family of four in Honolulu can now make up to \$93,300 and still be considered low income, while that same family with an annual income of \$58,300 is considered "very low income."<sup>1</sup>

While the minimum wage was just increased in January of this year to \$10.10 per hour, this still results in an individual working a full-time minimum wage job earning approximately \$21,000 per year before taxes – which is considered way below "very low income" according to the statistics released by HUD. That is why the City and County of Honolulu supports an increase in the minimum wage.

As you are well aware, a number of bills have been introduced this session to address an increase in the minimum wage in various amounts and through various methods. The City has introduced a bill that increases the minimum wage to \$15 an hour on a statewide basis and provides a mechanism for the increase in the minimum wage by allowing the State Department of Labor and Industrial Relations to annually adjust the minimum hourly wage rate in accordance with the Honolulu Region Consumer Price Index. Our measure also provides the flexibility to the counties to establish their own minimum wage so long as that minimum wage is at a rate higher than the state minimum wage.

Although I understand that increasing the minimum wage will have an economic impact on businesses, will result in increased labor costs to the City and County of Honolulu, and is not the silver bullet to address the income needs of Hawaii's people, I truly believe that we need to at least begin to move forward on how to better improve the financial stability of our residents and local families, many of which are faced with leaving their island home.

## **TRAFFIC SAFETY**

2018 was one of the deadliest years on record for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians on Honolulu's roadways despite various attempts to prevent these senseless tragedies from occurring. As of December 29, 2018, there had been 63

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<sup>1</sup> "Report: In Honolulu, \$40K Salary Now Considered 'Very Low Income'; Hawaii News Now Report, April 23, 2018. <http://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/38019260/40000-salary-now-considered-very-low-income-in-honolulu-per-new-federal-guidelines/>

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traffic fatalities on Oahu's roadways with 28 of those fatalities involving pedestrians.<sup>2</sup> This is simply unacceptable. Far too many individuals are being killed on our roadways and we need to address this through a variety of means.

The City and County of Honolulu is currently looking at things we can do on roadways under our jurisdiction to improve traffic, pedestrian, and bicycling safety. The City has already established dedicated bike lanes and continues to expand the establishment of these lanes on City roads. We are also looking at simple, yet effective means of making crosswalks safer, such as the use of bollards with signs indicating a pedestrian crossing, painting crosswalks with high visibility paints, or installing flashing crossing signals at certain crosswalks. The City has also introduced a couple of bills aimed at beginning discussions on how to improve traffic safety for all road users, including a bill that would prohibit any turns from occurring while a traffic control device facing oncoming traffic displays a red signal and a bill to allow the counties to establish photo red light imaging detector systems. Both of these measures are intended solely to increase traffic safety and reduce the number of fatalities occurring on our roadways.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

Climate change can no longer be disputed. The overwhelming majority of international scientists have agreed that the world is currently on a pathway of warming more than 5.4°F above pre-industrial levels. They concluded this level of warming will be extremely dangerous to humanity, including rapid melting of ice sheets, extreme heating of the tropics, damaged marine and terrestrial ecosystems on which we rely for food and water, superstorms, and disrupted international economic networks. These scientists have also warned that the climate is already shifting in this direction, and without dramatic, broad-based, and immediate cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions, the very worst impacts of climate change will become inevitable.

As recently as 2018, king tides had impacts upon transportation infrastructure and the City and County of Honolulu faced an unprecedented number of storms approaching our island as elevated sea temperatures helped to fuel these storms on their approach. While the City and County of Honolulu stood prepared to address the aftermaths of these storms, we were lucky that the full impact of these storms were never felt. However, if we fail to address climate change, our island home will face greater storms and increased challenges over the next several decades. The fate of the City and County of Honolulu, and our state in general, depends on our work to address the issue of climate change head on.

In July of 2018, I issued a formal directive to all city departments and agencies to

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<sup>2</sup> "Oahu Pedestrian Fatalities Climb to 28 After Waipahu Man Dies", Honolulu Star-Advertiser, December 29, 2018. <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2018/12/29/breaking-news/oahu-pedestrian-fatalities-climb-to-28-after-waipahu-man-dies/#googDisableSync>

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take action in order to address, minimize the risks from, and adapt to the impacts of climate change and sea level rise in response to the *Sea Level Rise Guidance* and *Climate Change Brief* presented to myself and members of the City Council by leadership of the city's Climate Change Commission. I stated then that I believed that climate change was the defining challenge to humanity — and to O'ahu — in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that by issuing this directive, I wanted to ensure that every policy and project decision dealing with sea level rise going forward was made in the best interest of the public. I still believe this today.

There are a number of bills introduced by various legislators this session that attempts to address the issue of climate change and the effects it will have on our island state. The time to take action to address this increasingly important issue is growing short and we need to work together now for the sake of our future generations.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before this honorable body today and I'll be happy to answer any questions the Committees may have at the appropriate time.