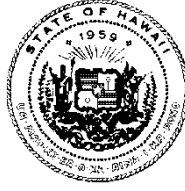


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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

P. O. Box 339
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February 14, 2021

TO: The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 192 – RELATING TO PUBLIC ASSISTANCE.**

Hearing: Tuesday, February 16, 2021, 3:00 p.m.
Via Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this bill and provides comments. DHS respectfully requests that any general fund appropriation contemplated by this measure does not replace or reduce budget priorities identified in the Executive biennium budget.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the bill is to allow the Department of Human Services to administer and provide public assistance to eligible residents of the State during a governor-declared state of emergency.

This bill proposes a new state-funded financial assistance program for a population of "able-bodied" individuals between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five years of age during a declared state of emergency. Currently, there is no financial assistance program for this population of individuals who are able to work and do not have minor dependents.

DHS provides financial assistance to residents living at or under the poverty level by administering the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and state-funded

Temporary Assistance for Other Needy Families (TAONF),¹ the state-funded Aid to the Aged, Blind or Disabled (AABD), and the state-funded General Assistance (GA) programs. These programs cover a broad spectrum of needy Hawaii residents: the TANF and TAONF programs cover families with minor children; the AABD program covers individuals who are age sixty-five years and older, and individuals who are under age sixty-five who are permanently disabled and blind; and the GA program covers individuals age eighteen to sixty-five without minor children who are not permanently disabled, but have a disabling mental or physical condition(s) that prevents them from working thirty hours per week for at least sixty days.

Other benefit programs that serve this population include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), HINET – a SNAP and general fund supported workforce education program for SNAP eligible individuals attending University of Hawaii Community Colleges, homeless services, vocational rehabilitation services through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and health care insurance coverage through the Med-QUEST division.

The proposed benefit limit would far exceed the benefit levels of any program currently administered by DHS. The federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program's 2021 payment to an SSI beneficiary is \$794, which is 64 percent of the 2021 Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and would be 85 percent of the 2006 FPL. In contrast, the income standards for TANF, TAONF, AABD, and GA, are based on the percentages of the 2006 FPL, and none of the income standards can exceed 62.5 percent of the 2006 FPL by current Hawaii law.²

A general fund appropriation is required to fund the benefit and to implement this program; currently, there are no federal funds available. Typically, if federally funded, the implementing federal agency provides program guidelines and restrictions as to how the federal funds may be used. If the requirements for those federal funds are contrary to the program proposed by this measure, federal law and rules will prevail.

If the measure proceeds, State general funds and additional time are required to implement the program. DHS will need additional time and resources to develop and adopt administrative rules, design, develop, and implement changes to the Department's eligibility

¹ The state-funded TAONF program serves households of mixed citizenship with program rules that mirror the TANF program; the TAONF is part of the State's Maintenance of Effort (MOE) for the TANF program.

² See section 346-53, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

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system to be ready to execute this program upon the declaration of an emergency. Given the current pandemic related priorities, DHS respectfully requests an effective date further into the future to allow sufficient time to develop and adopt rules for this program and to make the required system enhancements.

Lastly, DHS respectfully requests any general fund appropriation to implement this measure does not replace or reduce budget priorities identified in the Executive biennium budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.

SB-192

Submitted on: 2/15/2021 11:13:32 AM

Testimony for HMS on 2/16/2021 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Brian Donohoe	Testifying for DHS	Comments	No

Comments:

Standing on Department's testimony offering comments and available for questions.



**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Human Services
Tuesday, February 16, 2021; 3:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 225
Via Videoconference**

RE: SENATE BILL NO. 0192, RELATING TO PUBLIC ASSISTANCE.

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Ihara, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a 501(c)(3) organization established to advocate for, expand access to, and sustain high quality care through the statewide network of Community Health Centers throughout the State of Hawaii. The HPCA **SUPPORTS** Senate Bill No. 0192, RELATING TO PUBLIC ASSISTANCE.

As received by your Committee, Senate Bill No. 0192, would allow the Department of Human Services to administer and provide public assistance during the issuance of a proclamation by the governor declaring a state of emergency so long as the person is not otherwise able to provide sufficient support for themselves or their dependent and certain income, and residency requirements are met.

By way of background, the HPCA represents Hawaii Federally-Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). FQHCs provide desperately needed medical services at the frontlines in rural and underserved communities. Long considered champions for creating a more sustainable, integrated, and wellness-oriented system of health, FQHCs provide a more efficient, more effective and more comprehensive system of healthcare.

The HPCA also asserts that the COVID-19 pandemic has severely threatened the health and welfare of our citizens, especially Hawaii's underprivileged and rural communities. With so many people unemployed, entire families are struggling to put food on the table on a consistent basis. All one needs to do is visit one of our member FQHC's food distribution events and see the line of cars stretch for miles and the large number of people who wait for hours to receive some surplus food.

The HPCA understands that the State is experiencing its worst financial crisis since the Great Depression and appreciates how difficult your job will be in deciding where very limited resources will go over the next two years. But, a wise person once wrote that the true test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable populations, especially during hard times. We ask that you consider that as you deliberate on this measure.

Testimony on Senate Bill No. 0192
Tuesday, February 16, 2021; 3:00 p.m.
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We urge your favorable consideration of this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Public Affairs and Policy Director Erik K. Abe at 536-8442, or eabe@hawaiiipca.net.

Sen. Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Sen. Les Ihara Jr., Vice Chair
Committee on Human Services

Olivia DeQuiroz
808-469-7028

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

SUPPORT TO S.B. 192, which proposes a new section to be added to Chapter 346 to allow Department of Human Services to provide public assistance to eligible Hawaii residents during a governor-declared state of emergency.

Aloha Chair Joy A. San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Les Ihara Jr., and Members of the Committee:

My name is Olivia DeQuiroz and I am a graduate student of Social Work currently attending the University of Hawaii at Manoa. I have interned with multiple agencies that service the homeless population, low-income individuals, and low-income families of Hawaii. The well being of Hawaii's residents is highly reliant on the opportunity to obtain financial resources whether it may be through gainful employment and/or federal/state assistance. Without any financial resources, Hawaii's residents struggle to obtain basic needs such as shelter and medical attention.

This testimony strongly supports SB 192, because this bill represents what Hawaii has been experiencing within the last year during the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 4, 2020, Governor David Ige declared a state of emergency and the state was "shut down" for most of 2020. According to World Population Review (WPR), Hawaii is the MOST expensive state to live in the United States (2021). Hawaii has a cost index of 196.3 with the average home price of \$1,158,492, and we have the HIGHEST utility index where the average monthly energy bill is \$388 (WPR, 2021). Hawaii residents already struggle with the hardships of making ends meet under normal circumstances. I have interned at public service agencies assisting Hawaii residents before and during this COVID-19 pandemic. Hawaii's homelessness is the second to HIGHEST rate (2020, HUD). I have witnessed clients make the following statements: "I know I can go to the emergency room for a night in a clean bed, food, and medical attention for free" or "I go to the emergency room because I know they will have to take me in". Therefore, struggling Hawaii residents turn to emergency services made for "true emergent" circumstances to fulfill their basic needs.

During a state of emergency, the state uses its declaration to make way for emergency services to continue without any disruptions. If our emergency rooms are filled with individuals who are seeking non-urgent medical attention, food, or a clean bed then the livelihood of Hawaii's residents may be at stake. If Hawaii's Department of Human Services can provide public assistance to residents under a state of emergency it will:

- Encourage residents to use non-emergent methods to fulfill their basic needs.
- Residents who are unable to work under a state of emergency will be able to pay their bills.
- Lessen the chance of Hawaii residents to become in-debt post state of emergency and homelessness.
- Allow those who already financially struggling to not be pushed into more debt.
- Allow an easier transition of out state of emergency for residents.
- Allow residents to obtain shelter and medical needs with the means to help pay for such services.
- Lessen overpopulation for emergent services.

This pandemic has shown the painful side affects Hawaii's residents are struggling financial and emotionally. I urge the committee to pass **S.B. 192**. Hawaii will be more prepared for the next pandemic, hurricane or other causes of state of emergency. This will allow Hawaii to be proactive for our resident's needs and not reactive, in which Hawaii cannot afford to be reactive in an emergent situation. Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

World Population Review (2021). *Most Expensive States to Live In*. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/most-expensive-states-to-live-in>

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (January 2020). *The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>