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CAPITOL CONNECTION

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From the governor: Making history for Hawai'i's future

With the stroke of a pen, Governor Ige has signed bills into law that are destined to change the lives of thousands of Hawai'i residents for the better. From housing, health care and education to digital equity and women's criminal justice reform, the new laws will bring changes that have been called "historic," thanks to the efforts of many people. This issue of Capitol Connection recaps some of what lies ahead and how these actions are key to advancing the governor's vision for Hawai'i.

Q. What do you want people to know about making indoor masking optional in the public schools, even with the new COVID-19 variants?

A. The new guidance reflects where we are with the virus as a community and knowing what actions we can take individually. Schools will be developing more specific guidelines, depending on what makes sense to protect students, teachers and staff. But we continue to urge people to get vaccinated and boosted as the best way to keep everyone safe.

Q. What more can the state and the Department of Health do to make sure Red Hill repairs and defueling can proceed safely and quickly?

A. DOH can't accelerate the work to be done until we fully understand what the risks will be. The department is insisting on more specific plans from the Navy to see what repairs are the highest priority and need to be done as soon as possible. New military officers have rotated in, and staff working there know less and less about this complex system. The U.S. Pacific Fleet's own investigations have revealed "cascading failures" that were preventable, so the Navy has to do much more to earn back the trust of the community.

Q. Several of the legislative bills you've signed have been called "historic." How do they advance your own vision for Hawai'i?

A. The funding in the bills reflects the state's strong financial position, even with the hits we took during the pandemic. I just received the state's revenue report, and it's up 30% from last year. I can't ever recall a time when there was such a dramatic increase in a single year. The increased revenue is making possible historic investments in the environment, affordable housing, Hawaiian Home Lands, medical care, education, and broadband access. COVID-19 actually spurred the digital transformation of state systems and modernization of the economy I wanted to achieve. Now we're seeing how important broadband and internet skills are for everyone, along with the promise of tech careers for our homegrown talent. All of this is going to benefit the people of Hawai'i for generations to come.

Q. As you look back on your time in office, what has been the best part of being governor? The worst part?

A. The best part is being able to help people in some way. The worst part is knowing that sometimes decisions aren't going to be popular, so you just have to live with that fact. Being able to make tough decisions — even if it means being criticized — is very important. I've always believed that it's about doing the right thing for the community as a whole, not just the popular thing.

Q. Are we better off than we were eight years ago — even with the pandemic?

A. I do believe we're significantly better off, which is a tribute to our community's ability to work together. Hawai'i has become a world leader in fighting climate change, and we're reaching the point where clean energy sources are going to save people money. We've delivered thousands of affordable rental units for local residents, and there are more in the pipeline. We're making a historic investment for Hawaiian Home Lands beneficiaries and also restored water rights for kalo and traditional practices. We're finding ways to fill gaps in our healthcare system. We've launched programs to create new careers for local residents. And now we have the funds to expand public pre-K. We know that students who have access to preschool do much better than those who don't. And that will make a huge difference for their future and our communities.



Governor Ige signs HB 2511, providing \$600 million for Hawaiian Home Lands.

What's Governor Ige's favorite snack? Favorite music? What does he watch on Netflix? You can see him respond to some fun questions on Instagram Reels. Also on Instagram, take a look behind the scenes as cameras recorded "A Day in the Life of the Governor."

Indoor masking optional for new public school year

Indoor masking will be optional at Hawai'i's public schools for the new school year, based on new guidance from the state Department of Health. However, masks will be "strongly encouraged" when COVID-19 Community Levels are at medium or high, said Dr. Sarah Kemble, state epidemiologist. "This is an opportunity to move forward towards a new normal," she said, since COVID vaccines and booster shots are more widely available for younger children and there is a relatively lower incidence of critical illness.

"Targeted" indoor masking may still be recommended in some situations, Kemble said, depending on if there is a cluster in a specific classroom. "You don't know if the student sitting next to your child is going to be masking or not, so now is a really good time to boost." She added that 73% of students between 12 and 17 years old have received the first two doses of vaccine and 26% are boosted.



Masks will be optional for public school students.

Historic \$600 million for Hawaiian Home Lands



Governor Ige, legislators and DHHL officials gather at the Washington Place bill signing.

On July 11, Governor Ige signed into law **HB 2511**, marking the most consequential allocation of funding for the Hawaiian Homes Commission in 100 years. "Today marks an unprecedented moment in our state's history," said the governor of the \$600 million to the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL). It continues the Ige administration's push to reduce the wait list for beneficiaries. During the past eight years, DHHL has initiated new rules for subsistence ag lots, rental projects and changes to allow beneficiaries to use DNA testing to confirm parent-child relationships.

Hawaiian Homes Commission chair **William J. Aila, Jr.** added, "This measure will allow DHHL to expedite the construction of thousands of new homestead lots and housing units and expand services, including down payment assistance, rental subsidies and expanded financial literacy education." The governor also signed **SB 3041**, which included \$328 million as part of the Kalima case settlement. "As a state, we must continue to provide funds to support the delivery of Hawaiian Home Lands to its beneficiaries," he said.

More funding for affordable housing, homelessness

Governor Ige and state legislators are continuing major efforts to keep Hawai'i residents housed with the signing of three bills. **SB 3048** deposits \$300 million into the Rental Housing Revolving Fund, half of which is earmarked to develop moderate-income housing for individuals and families. The bill also allows the Hawai'i Housing Finance and Development Corporation (HHFDC) to transfer GO Bond proceeds into the Dwelling Unit Revolving Fund to build infrastructure for future housing. "My administration met our initial goal of producing 10,000 housing units by 2020, with 3,500 more units on the way. This funding will keep the momentum going," said the governor. **HHFDC director Denise Iseri-Matsubara** said what is special about the new law is that it targets the "missing middle" – those whose income falls in the 60 to 100% AMI of about \$78,000 to \$130,000 a year. "These are our food service workers, teachers, and nurses, who have been here for our community since the pandemic started," she said.



Hale Moena in Kapolei is one of many recent affordable projects.

HB2512 builds on the success of the 'Ohana Zone pilot program and extends it through June 30, 2026. It also provides \$15 million to fund services for this fiscal year, along with other provisions. "Since its inception in 2018, the 'Ohana Zone program has served more than 5,500 individuals across the state, and we've added 400 more beds to shelter and housing inventory," said the governor. Finally, **HB 2233** gives the Department of Human Services the authority to provide a housing assistance subsidy of up to \$500 per month to participants in the First-to-Work program. "Together, these bills represent a significant investment in our communities, to meet the needs of families and individuals across the state," the governor added.

Searching for a job just got a little easier, thanks to a new digital hub called the **Hawai'i Career Acceleration Navigator (HI CAN)** at <https://hican.hawaii.gov/#/login>. The site, launched by the Hawai'i Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR), connects unemployment insurance claimants (UI) and job seekers to promising career pathways. The site allows UI claimants to digitally track their work search requirement. HI CAN also helps those eligible for additional social services to connect to the programs they need.

"We're pioneering a first-of-its-kind data platform to connect job

seekers to careers in our post-pandemic economy," said Gov. David Ige. "Hawai'i is on the cutting edge, using government data for a user-friendly program that creates highly customized job recommendations." DLIR director Anne Perreira-Eustaquio added, "At the same time, eligible users can get help without sifting through dozens of government links that can lead to confusion and frustration."



Pandemic lessons: Making an innovation economy a reality

“It took COVID-19 to teach us to embrace change or perish. Our children can have a future here if we can make change happen.” — Governor David Ige, July 2021

The state took a body blow from COVID-19 but now is surpassing all economic forecasts — with more funds available for essential programs and services and major investments in education, housing and other long-standing needs. So where do we go from here? The past two years have been a chance to take stock of our lives, jobs, businesses, and the future we want for Hawai‘i. **The result has been a sea change in daily life and a “new normal.”** Restaurants have pivoted to take-out and businesses to e-commerce. People started working from home . . . and liking it. Hawai‘i’s visitor industry is moving to a more sustainable model, not just racking up more tourism numbers. The pandemic accelerated what the governor and his team had already set in motion: Developing local talent in a more tech-savvy economy to fill jobs and compete in global markets. **“The next great economic transition for Hawai‘i will be driven by innovation and technology,”** said the governor. “In the past, our geographic isolation has been the greatest limitation. But today, technology is changing all of that.”



(top) The governor at TRUE Esports +Tech Lab launch. Restaurants pivoted to take-out to survive COVID-19.

At an event last year at the Entrepreneurs Sandbox, Paul Yonamine, executive chairman of Central Pacific Bank, referred to a report that found nearly half of our workforce has difficulty making ends meet. However, he noted that tech-enabled workers in Hawai‘i with the right training could make 50 percent more in wages than non-tech workers. “We’re talking about people who know how to use technology — not only coders and programmers — and get paid more because they add more value to an organization.” DBEDT director Mike McCartney said COVID-19 spurred the move to a more digital economy out of necessity. “We had to get the whole visitor industry together to mandate the first-in-the-nation self-quarantine and Safe Travels program. The governor held firm that if people don’t have their health, you don’t have an economy,” he said.

A brave new world for a more connected, sustainable future



The Entrepreneurs Sandbox provides a tech hub.

For the past eight years, the Ige administration has been developing ways to make Hawai‘i and its people more resilient for the future. This has included everything from expanded broadband infrastructure to digital literacy training, remote work options and a virtual marketplace for local products. **The progress to date:**

- **A more sustainable visitor industry** – The Hawai‘i Tourism Authority is focusing on “regenerative stewardship,” with messaging for residents and visitors alike and community-based Destination Management Action Plans to mitigate over-tourism.
- **More support for start-ups, small businesses and creative entrepreneurs to reach global**

markets – Even before the pandemic, DBEDT and other agencies launched programs such as accelerators to connect local companies with investment capital; fund expansion of broadband networks; develop creative industry projects in film, television, art, fashion and music; create marketing platforms for local goods through <https://invest.hawaii.gov/made-in-hawaii/>; and invest in facilities such as the **Entrepreneurs Sandbox** in Kaka‘ako. The Sandbox provides a new generation of entrepreneurs with tools and programs to grow their businesses and help diversify the state’s economy.

- **Expanded resources for emerging, high-demand jobs**, such as clean energy, health, IT, and green jobs, as well as remote work options. New platforms include <https://invest.hawaii.gov/remote/>, **HI CAN** at <https://hican.hawaii.gov/#/login> and labor.hawaii.gov/wdd.
- **Investing in transportation, broadband and other infrastructure** to maintain and expand Hawai‘i’s connection to the world – This has included major airport and harbor modernization as well as expansion of broadband accessibility to underserved areas.

Delivering digital access and advancing equity statewide

Governor Ige signed into law June 30 a package of bills that advance his efforts to improve digital access for all communities across the state. “We are committed to addressing the digital divide for all Hawai‘i residents, and these bills will bring us another step closer towards an inclusive digital community, where all ‘ohana, keiki and kūpuna have the tools needed to thrive in today’s digital world,” said Governor David Ige. “I am proud that Hawai‘i continues to lead the charge in digital equity.” **The bills include:**

SB 2076 requires UH and the Hawai‘i Broadband and Digital Equity Office to convene a Broadband Working Group to deter-

mine the governance structure for operating and maintaining broadband assets.

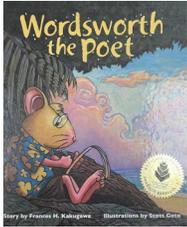
SB 2214 establishes a digital literacy program to be overseen by the Board of Education and implemented by the state librarian to promote digital literacy, including making digital technology accessible to those with disabilities. **SB 2184** establishes a Digital Learning Center within the Department of Education, with funds to staff it.

SB 2479 requires each public housing and state low-income housing project built or reconstructed after Jan. 1, 2023 to include all broadband infrastructure necessary for tenants to have access to broadband service.



Celebrating differences, creativity to transform lives

With the start of a new school year, First Lady and former educator Dawn Amano-Ige is sending words of encouragement to both students and teachers. “I hope we can take lessons learned from the pandemic and find inspiration from the resilience everyone has shown,” she said. “It’s always exciting to look forward to new adventures and experiences. I want all of us to stay healthy and safe as we enjoy the months ahead.”



The next book for Mrs. Ige’s August story time is “**Wordsworth the Poet**” by local writer Frances Kakugawa. The story is about a misunderstood mouse whose love of poetry sets him apart from others and helps him save the day. “I liked that the story celebrates differences and encourages creativity,” said Mrs. Ige. “When I was in the classroom, I wanted students to build on their own unique talents. That was the joy in teaching. Everyone has his or her own special gifts and abilities.” To see all of Mrs. Ige’s story time videos, go to <https://governor.hawaii.gov/meet-the-first-lady>.

This ability to appreciate differences also relates to the new “**Transforming Lives Center**” launched by **Assets School** in June. A \$378,000 **Governor’s Emergency Education Relief** fund grant to Assets will help assess students who may be facing academic challenges because of learning differences. At the center’s grand opening, Mrs. Ige said, “By identifying their challenges and gifts early, we can support and guide students on a journey for success. Some of the world’s greatest artists, athletes and innovators live with ADHD, like Olympic gold medalist Simone Biles, or with dyslexia, like Tom Cruise.” Families interested in an appointment at the new center can email appointment@assets-school.org or learn more at <https://www.assets-school.org/>.

More doctors, nurses, especially for neighbor islands



If the pandemic taught us anything, it’s that the state needs more doctors, nurses and other health care professionals. On July 7, Governor Ige signed into law two bills to **address the critical shortage of physicians statewide**. **SB 2657** will help retain more graduates from the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa School of Medicine by funding more medical residency training, especially on the neighbor islands and in partnership with Veterans Affairs. **SB 2597** appropriates funds for the Hawai’i State Loan Repayment Program in exchange for work commitments in geographically underserved areas across the state. The UH system will also receive nearly \$2 million to expand nursing programs statewide.

“We saw many gaps during this pandemic in high-quality, professional jobs where we had no qualified local applicants,” said the governor, who has called for expanded training of homegrown talent in cybersecurity, health care, doctor and nursing programs, and teacher education. He thanked legislators and members of the healthcare community for their support, noting that the Commonwealth Fund had ranked Hawai’i as first in the nation for its management of the pandemic. **Sen. Jarrett Keohokalole**, as chair of the Senate’s health committee, also praised the state’s response to COVID-19 and **singled out the governor as “the person who never takes enough credit for stepping in and taking all the criticism, all the heat, but also having the obligation of people’s lives at stake.”**

Judicial reform for women

A package of bills supported by the **Women’s Legislative Caucus** and signed into law by Governor Ige has been hailed as a significant step toward addressing inequities women face in the criminal justice system. Among the bills is **HB 2421**, which establishes a **three-year women’s court pilot program** within the judiciary. “This pilot program will provide services to ensure women have the resources to succeed,” said the governor. The services will address trauma and mental health treatment, family and housing support, education and job training and domestic violence prevention, among other areas.



The other bills are **HB 2637**, providing funds for community-based work furlough programs; **SB 2641**, funds for residential programs to allow children to remain with their mothers; and **HB 2312**, establishing the Women’s Corrections Implementation Commission.

Contact Us: Executive Chambers, State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawai’i 96813
Phone: (808) 586-0034 Fax: (808) 586-0006
Hilo Office (808) 974-6262 | Kona Office (808) 323-4542
Maui Office (808) 243-5798 | Kaua’i Office (808) 274-3100

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