

PROTECT
PUBLIC HEALTH

REVIVE
THE ECONOMY

STRENGTHEN
OUR COMMUNITY

CAPITOL CONNECTION

FEBRUARY 2022

Excerpts of the governor's 2022 State of the State Address (to see the speech, go to <https://fb.watch/aMfo3Kx1w9/>)

A belief in Hawai'i, its people and purpose

We've endured tremendous hardship over the last two years. Throughout the pandemic, we've sacrificed, delayed or cancelled so many of life's cherished milestones. We've had to face shutdowns, restrictions of all kinds, and two variants that have changed how we deal with the coronavirus. And the fight is far from over. **But I'm proud of the way that we, as a community, have responded.** Our nurses, doctors and healthcare professionals have worked endless shifts to provide quality care. Our teachers and principals have gone above and beyond to make sure students have the opportunity to learn despite the many challenges. Our state and county public employees have worked together to ensure we keep everyone safe. And you have done what you've had to do to protect all of us—by getting vaccinated and by conducting your daily lives responsibly.



Gov. David Ige offers heartfelt praise for Hawai'i.

This pandemic is redefining us as a generation — in the same way that the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor and the Vietnam War shaped their generations. Events and history have a way of repeatedly testing us. **In many instances, we've had to choose between what is best for ourselves as individuals and what is best for us as a community.** As a state, we've never been one to take the easy path. Instead, we choose to do the right things for the right reasons. Last week, we celebrated Martin Luther King Day. He said, "The time is always right to do what's right." **In Hawai'i, we have a name for this: pono or righteousness.** An idea so important that it's imprinted on our state seal: *Ua Mau Ke Ea o ka 'Āina i ka Pono* — *The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness.* **I have three goals this year: To continue to steer us through the pandemic, to strengthen our families and communities, and to move toward full economic recovery. With your help, I know we can accomplish all three.**

Protecting our health with expanded training, facilities



Courtesy Queen's Health Systems

More doctors, nurses have been needed during the pandemic.

I believe everything begins with keeping us healthy and safe. Over the last seven years, we focused on modernizing our telehealth infrastructure, providing health services to underserved populations, and strengthening mental health services. In our pandemic response, **we took immediate action to protect our health, provide healthcare for another 110,000 residents under our Medicaid program (a 34-percent increase since the start of the pandemic), and make sure everyone had good healthcare coverage.** At the same time, we distributed critical medical supplies, including personal protective equipment, test kits, vaccines and medicines to protect the elderly, rural communities, as well as the entire state. I deeply appreciate the thousands involved in this monumental task.

Vaccinations have proven to be our strongest weapon against the coronavirus. In all, we've provided more than 2.5 million shots at hundreds of clinics across the state. But the virus has been relentless in exposing gaps in our healthcare infrastructure, including critical shortages of doctors and nurses. To address these concerns, we're asking the Legislature to:

- **Fund the expansion of the University of Hawai'i's doctor residency programs on the neighbor islands.**
- **Strengthen the university's nursing program and add more clinical instructors at our community colleges. We want to add 39 lecturers across multiple campuses to handle the increased demand for nursing programs.**

In addition, a new \$3.7 million, federally funded project will improve access to health information, especially for underserved communities. The project will train and employ high school and undergraduate students to be health and digital "navigators" in 15 libraries across the state to help individuals access telehealth services and information. . . . Our plans to relocate OCCC to Halawa will create a modern facility better suited to support the needs of its population. We've asked the Legislature for \$45 million to build a consolidated healthcare unit at Halawa to better deliver medical and health services there (to protect the health of our inmates, staff and the general public).

Strengthening the community with jobs, housing, \$\$

While we work to maintain our health, we must also strengthen our communities. To do that, we must first help our struggling families—to *malama pono*, make things right for them. It means making sure they can secure the very basics of food, shelter and jobs. That’s why our Department of Human Services developed online applications for **SNAP benefits (formerly food stamps) and added 32,000 additional families during the pandemic**. As many faced job losses, **we provided \$6.6 billion in unemployment benefits**. The pandemic also caused many workers to lose long-held jobs and pursue new career paths. To help them, the Department of Labor is rolling out the **Hawai’i Career Acceleration Navigator**, with its one-stop, online hub to help unemployed workers with new career and training opportunities.



The Ige administration is delivering more affordable housing.

The pandemic also highlighted the need for **childcare for working families** and how it is essential for many to continue to hold jobs. To help them, the state’s Child Care Program Office is distributing **nearly \$80 million to support access to childcare and provide much needed relief for young families**. These funds will support childcare businesses weathering the challenges of the pandemic. **To assist renters and homeowners**, we provided **\$260 million in emergency rent and mortgage assistance** to ensure that no family would be evicted because of the pandemic. Meanwhile, the **Hawaiian Homes Commission** postponed mortgage payments and provided its beneficiaries with rent and utility assistance. The state is also working closely with the counties to increase the number of affordable rentals on all islands, including more than a thousand affordable units on the neighbor islands since we took office. Two years ago, the legislature created **‘Ohana Zones**. We opened 20 sites across all islands that provide a wide range of services for individuals and families. These projects have assisted over 5,500 individuals statewide, with more than 1,300 placed directly into permanent housing. . . . But the biggest factor affecting home ownership in Hawai’i is supply. **That’s why we set out to build 10,000 new homes by 2020—and we did it! We also expect to build another 3,000 homes by the end of this year.**

We can strengthen our communities in another way too. **Given the recent revenue projections, we’re asking the Legislature to return some of those dollars back to taxpayers**. We want to issue refund checks of \$100 for every taxpayer and for each dependent. For a family of four that means 400 extra dollars. In this way, we’ll also inject \$110 million back into our economy, giving it a very big boost as well.

Reinventing education — now and for the future



Virtual learning can expand student opportunities.

No community can be strong without taking care of their keiki—our future. Empowering our schools and enriching Hawai’i’s community of lifelong learners have always been among our top priorities. That’s why I’ve asked legislators to restore funds taken away during the pandemic — for programs so important to our children’s learning and for upkeep of their classrooms. This includes funds to take care of those who teach our students and to support the development of new teachers, especially in areas with chronic shortages, such as Hawaiian immersion and special needs. Safely reopening schools was one of our top priorities, but that wasn’t possible during the early days of the shutdown. **Our schools and teachers had to literally reinvent education—overnight.** Virtual classrooms became a necessity, but we also learned that they could supplement in-person classes and provide opportunities that would not otherwise be available. That’s why we are supporting the expansion of the **Hawai’i Virtual Learning Network**.

We’ve long talked about distance learning—but more as an alternative to the traditional classroom. The pandemic made us realize that we could use virtual classrooms to ensure that every student has every opportunity to learn no matter where they live. Using the **federal Governors’ Emergency Education Relief fund**, we’re also empowering schools and teachers to innovate and create projects to recover learning lost due to the pandemic. We dedicated \$5 million for UH to launch a **Hawai’i Online Portal for Education**, which is developing curriculum for distance learning and for additional training for teachers. The projects include everything from STEM education to agriculture. One of these projects is **Ka’ū Dream**, a place-based, community-focused education initiative on Hawai’i Island to align the curriculum to Ka’ū career and business opportunities.



The community has joined forces for Ka’ū Dream.

And it’s time to retool our underutilized educational resources. For generations, our public libraries, like the one in Pearl City, have been quietly supporting our students and communities. We want to “reimagine” how we use those facilities. We want **Pearl City to be the role model for other libraries across the state**—a place where groups can gather to meet and exchange ideas. We want them to house early learning centers, as well as gathering places for our kupuna. And we want to equip them with the latest technologies, where the community can learn, create and enrich their lives. “Reimagine,” if you will, Pearl City Library, becoming a beehive of activity as a **community-based learning center**. . . . **And let’s work together to take the next step to provide preschools for every child in Hawai’i.**

Balancing community health and economic recovery

The real balancing act during the pandemic has been between the economy and our health. The fact is that keeping us safe—and making Hawai‘i a safe place to visit—is an essential step to restoring our visitor industry, reviving our small businesses, and re-energizing our economy. Our **Safe Travels Program remains the only program of its kind in the country.** At the same time, we worked hard to keep insurance rates down for small businesses, even as unemployment ballooned. And as the economy recovers, we’ll continue to make sure that our small businesses are brought along with the rising tide, through programs that expand our locally produced goods and services, support business innovations, back local manufacturers, and fund low-interest, small business loans. **With federal funds, the state is helping small businesses** through digital marketing and e-commerce initiatives, assisting more than 500 companies with training and virtual marketing events.



Hawai‘i also became one of the safest locations to film during the pandemic, as our film office worked with producers and unions to create a plan with strict COVID-19 protocols to resume filming here. People all over the world can now watch “NCIS: Hawai‘i” as well as “Magnum P.I.” We also know that keeping up is not good enough to be competitive. We must stay ahead of the game. That’s why we’re proposing to fortify the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority and the Hawai‘i Convention Center, support Hawai‘i Small Business Innovation Research projects, and provide fuel for our business accelerator programs and manufacturing assistance grants. We’ll also launch a **\$56-million State Small Business Credit Initiative** to provide capital for local start-up tech companies.



Construction has led the state’s recovery.

During an economic downturn, public works projects not only build critical infrastructure, but they also provide a shot in the arm to business, labor and the economy. **For the last two years, Hawai‘i’s construction industry has led the state’s economic recovery, thanks in large part to our investment in public infrastructure.** Those investments help stabilize the local construction industry and, with a record bond sale of \$1.88 billion, this trend will continue. In addition, an estimated \$2.8 billion from the federal infrastructure law is expected to further boost the development of transportation, clean energy, and our internet capacity.

Government too needs to upgrade and reinvent itself. That is one of the most important tasks we’ve been doing over the last seven years: modernizing government operations across all agencies, transitioning from antiquated paper-based systems to computerized ones, modernizing our tax and payroll systems and transforming walk-in services to convenient virtual centers. And we’re asking the Legislature to help us make government more efficient by replacing a state accounting system that hasn’t been updated in 50 years.

Protecting the ‘āina and fighting climate change

We cannot be a strong state without protecting the resources upon which we depend. That is also a part of being *pono* and making things right. At the heart of these resources is the environment. In Hawai‘i, we’re no strangers to the need to protect the environment. There’s a reverence for the ‘āina that goes beyond issues of sustainability. That’s why we’ve always been so protective of the environment. As an island community, we see the impacts of climate change and global warming more intensely. But by working together, **Hawai‘i has become a world leader in actions to fight the climate crisis.**

Hawai‘i was the first state to set a goal of 100 percent renewable energy by 2045 with 12 other states following our lead. Hawai‘i was also the first state to commit, by law, to the goals of the Paris Agreement. Hawai‘i became the first state to commit to a net-negative goal by 2045 to capture more carbon than we produce. We’ll do that by protecting our oceans, expanding our native forests and supporting sustainable agriculture. Again, my thanks to our legislators for helping to make all of this happen, but we need to continue this good work. **We need to:** retire Hawai‘i’s last coal plant, establish a rebate for working families to buy electric cars, expand the State-to-Farm program to support local farmers and move forward with the Royal Kunia Agriculture Park to encourage food self-sufficiency.



Protecting the ‘āina has been a priority of the governor.



Coral bleaching: a sign of global warming.

Creating a more sustainable lifestyle is all part of being good stewards of these islands. So is protecting them from harm. The recent events at the **Navy’s Red Hill facility** alarmed and shocked everyone. We’ve met with Navy leaders and let them know that their first job is to ensure that our drinking water stays safe and clean. Draining the fuel tanks at Red Hill is a good first step. But we must work to find long-term solutions. National security cannot come at the expense of our people’s health. I believe we can protect **both** national security and public health. But it will take determination and the collaborative efforts of everyone.

Learning to love books and a glimpse of history

First Lady Dawn Amano-Ige has always championed a love of learning, which is why she's highlighting several educational opportunities this month. They include an expansion of her 'Ohana Readers initiative on Kaua'i, a new virtual tour of Washington Place and a free lecture series featuring six former residences of Queen Lili'uokalani.

"We wanted to keep reaching out to keiki on Kaua'i so we're doing a virtual event Feb. 15 for the 'Ohana Readers program," Mrs. Ige said. "Families with children under the age of 4 and a half can sign up to receive free books by mail through our partnership with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library." The event is targeting keiki in the Anahola, Princeville, Hanalei, Wainiha and Kilauea communities. For more details, contact the Princeville Public Library. Contact information can be found at <https://www.librarieshawaii.org/visit/branches/all-branches/>.



If you've never visited historic Washington Place — home to Queen Lili'uokalani and many of Hawai'i's governors — you can now do that virtually. The tour at washingtonplace.hawaii.gov provides a glimpse of history as it takes visitors through the home and describes some of the artifacts of special significance. Also, a free virtual lecture series held every Thursday from Feb. 3 to March 10 will focus on residences of significance to the queen and some of her musical compositions. The lectures, available by registering at www.HistoricHawaii.org, are part of the Cathedral Lecture series, co-sponsored by the Historic Hawai'i Foundation and UH Mānoa.

A positive outlook, a chance for new initiatives STATE OF THE STATE (cont.)



Proposing largest technology investment in state history

Governor Ige wants to expand broadband statewide.

In the first year of the pandemic, we were forced to cut over a billion dollars from the budget, with every state agency scrambling to find new ways to continue essential services to our residents. Describing our financial prospects back then as bleak would be an understatement. But we took the hard and necessary steps to address the very thing that threatened the life of our economy: the pandemic. Many wanted us to immediately fix the symptoms of the problem, the devastated economy. But we needed to balance that with putting people's health first. As painful as it was, it was the right remedy for the long term — to make things *pono*. When things seemed to get better, we tempered our optimism. And we continue to do so—with economic and health issues.

As you have heard, we now expect a positive budget balance of more than a billion dollars. Tax collections have jumped by an astounding 27.3 percent over last year's totals—a direct reflection of the rebound in visitor arrivals, increased consumer spending, and the growing strength of our local businesses. We have a chance to restore painful cuts that have been made over the last two years, to repay outstanding loans, and to replenish various state funds. We have a chance to safeguard our future and our children's future.

For the first time in a long time, we have the resources to take care of both our immediate and long-term needs. We can rebuild the solid fiscal foundation that we created before the pandemic. We also have a chance to pursue new initiatives, including the development of an all-inclusive broadband infrastructure. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's about the crucial role that the internet plays in all of our lives. That's why we're leveraging state resources to maximize federal funding for broadband and proposing the largest investment in technology in state history. We're calling it *Apa-kau Ka La*, "spreading of the sun's rays." It is critical infrastructure of the future, connecting all of the main Hawaiian islands. This initiative will not only close the digital divide between the haves and the have-nots, but also strengthen us as a community. We also recently launched the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which extends federal emergency broadband benefits to those who would not otherwise be able to afford internet service. It's estimated that more than 100,000 Hawai'i families will be able to qualify for internet services under this program.

It's our deep-seated belief that we're part of a greater 'ohana'

There's a popular local saying: "Keep the country country." In an era that is propelling us through unprecedented changes and challenges, how do you keep Hawai'i, Hawai'i? How do you sustain and nurture what makes us, us? How do you make things *pono*? Like our response to the pandemic, there is no easy answer. But I believe it lies somewhere deep within all of us who call Hawai'i home. It lies in our willingness to share — to give, even when we have very little to give. **It's our deep-seated belief that we're part of a greater 'ohana and that we have a responsibility to our community. We are all connected.** . . . I believe in Hawai'i, in its people and in its purpose. I am proud to be your governor. For all that you do and all that you are, my thanks and deeply felt aloha.

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