

**PROTECT  
PUBLIC HEALTH**

**REVIVE  
THE ECONOMY**

**STRENGTHEN  
OUR COMMUNITY**

## **CAPITOL CONNECTION**

**MARCH 2022**

### **From the governor: Preparing for better days ahead**

**T**he good news for Hawai'i: COVID-19 case counts are coming down. The challenge: How to keep us safe as we "learn to live with COVID" and how to position the state and its people for the future. Add to that the continuing Red Hill crisis and concerns for O'ahu's water supply. The governor and the Ige administration are holding firm on their emergency order for the Navy to defuel the tanks because "national security can't come at the expense of the community's health."

**Q. Are we preparing for ways to live with COVID-19?**

**A.** We're clearly transitioning, especially since case counts are lower in Hawai'i. Statewide, we're above 75 percent in vaccinations, and we continue to make progress on boosters and vaccinating children ages 5 to 11. We're preparing for the day when we would have to respond to future COVID surges with much less federal support. For example, we wouldn't have the resources for extended mass vaccination and testing, so the Department of Health is looking to acquire more at-home tests, especially for communities that are more vulnerable.

**Q. What about indoor masking and the Safe Travels program?**

**A.** We know masking is effective, but even if we don't extend a requirement by emergency proclamation, our residents have a high degree of compliance and will do what they can to keep our community safe. We do anticipate eventually closing the Safe Travels program, but the timeline is still being discussed. No other state is requiring vaccinations or boosters for travel. From a public health perspective and the status of our healthcare system, we're in good shape for now.

**Q. How do you feel about the Navy appealing the state's emergency order on Red Hill?**

**A.** Basically, the Navy is challenging the state's authority to issue the emergency order. But we believe the law is clear that DOH has the authority to issue this emergency order, and the law is also clear that everyone, including the federal government, has to comply with state rules dealing with underground storage tanks. People's lives have been affected and our aquifer is threatened. We have fuel in the water, we don't know if it will continue and we don't know if corrections will prevent it from happening again. We're standing by our order to remove the fuel, then have the Navy establish that they can operate the facility safely.

**Q. What's your reaction to the news of federal bribery charges against former legislators Kalani English and Ty Cullen?**

**A.** It's a terrible breach of public trust. I do believe elected officials must operate at the highest level of ethics. That's why when I was a legislator I did not have fundraisers during session. It's bad practice to have fundraisers to solicit campaign contributions at the same time they're holding hearings on measures and making decisions that impact these contributors.



**Public libraries can expand as digital hubs.**

**Q. Why is investing in broadband so important to the state's future?**

**A.** With the pandemic, virtually every service the state provides — from education to unemployment and SNAP benefits to library services — went online because we had to. We want to make government investments using federal and state funds in what we call the "middle mile" to deliver affordable broadband to every single resident in the state, whether they live in a rural community or an urban area. And we want to have our libraries help deliver the "last mile" of services as community hubs where people can go for help.



**Governor Ige is serving as the 2022 national president of the Council of State Governments, the largest organization of state officials. He welcomed members in Washington, D.C.**

# DOH amends Red Hill advisory but remains vigilant

Flushing and monitoring of contaminated water from the Red Hill bulk fuel storage facility continues, amid a pending court challenge by the Navy and calls to permanently decommission the tanks. Although the state Department of Health has declared that residents in Zones I1 and A1 can use their water for all purposes, Governor Ige and DOH officials said they fully understand people's concerns. "While this announcement is a step forward in the state's emergency response, we have a long way to go," the governor said. "Families remain displaced. Keiki are having their learning disrupted. Businesses remain closed. **And we must not forget that this disaster shouldn't have happened in the first place.**"

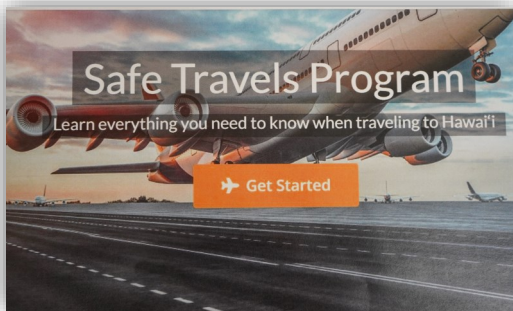
**In the meantime, DOH's emergency order remains in effect.** "Our order to the Navy said five things: 1) stop fueling activity, 2) install a safe drinking water treatment system, 3) safely defuel the tanks, 4) hire an independent assessor and 5) take whatever corrective actions are needed to make the facility safe," the governor explained. "We want them to remove the fuel, then establish that they can operate the facility safely. If they can't, then the facility cannot be refueled." He said the state has the legal authority to regulate underground storage tanks, including Red Hill.



**Governor Ige also took exception to the statement issued by Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks** after the United States filed its appeal of the state's emergency order. "I actually met with her at the Pentagon when I was in Washington, D.C. for the National Governors Association conference," he said. "Her statement said we discussed options to find 'a mutually agreeable path forward,' but they didn't lay out any options. They just said they were going to file the lawsuit but didn't provide any information on what was actually in it. It felt like the meeting was called to give the appearance of collaboration while they buy time. They're still claiming the state doesn't have the authority to issue our emergency order and protect our drinking water. I told her the people of Hawai'i don't trust the Navy."

**Kathleen Ho, DOH deputy director of environmental health, added,** "We understand many are wary, and we will continue to investigate and hold the Navy accountable to provide safe drinking water. DOH will act . . . in a manner that is protective of public health as we evaluate the remaining Navy water system zones." Navy water system users in other areas remain under the health advisory and should not consume tap water. Anyone with questions or concerns can contact DOH at (808) 586-4258 or [sdwb@doh.hawaii.gov](mailto:sdwb@doh.hawaii.gov).

## Boosters not added to Safe Travels requirements



The Safe Travels Hawai'i program remains unchanged for now, and booster shots are not required for "up-to-date" vaccination status for anyone traveling to Hawai'i, Governor Ige has announced. All four county mayors, the state Department of Health (DOH) and visitor industry leaders coordinated closely in making this decision, which took into account declining COVID-19 case numbers and hospitalizations, as well as Hawai'i's robust vaccination rate.

DOH director Dr. Libby Char added, "While booster shots are not required for the Safe Travels program right now, they continue to be very effective in preventing severe illness from COVID-19." She noted that even though Omicron case counts are dropping,

we don't know if or when we may see another surge in COVID-19 cases. The DOH is currently working on criteria and conditions that would allow the state to safely end the Safe Travels program. If conditions require the continuation of Safe Travels, federal funding will be available to support the program. For more information, go to <https://travel.hawaii.gov/#/>.

## New, free COVID-19 hotline available to help statewide

**W**hat should I do if I test positive? What if I've been in close contact with someone who has tested positive? Who can get a booster shot? Those questions and many others can be answered by calling the new, free COVID-19 hotline at (808) 586-8332 or toll-free at 833-711-0645.

"The hotline provides information about isolation, quarantine, booster shots and more," said state epidemiologist Dr. Sarah Kemble. "It is especially useful for people who have tested positive or have been in close contact with someone who has COVID-19. It's also useful for businesses where there is more than one COVID case." People are encouraged to check [hawaiiicovid19.com](http://hawaiiicovid19.com) before calling the hotline. Calls are answered by an automated information system, or bot, for common questions. Callers who need more information can ask to be transferred to hotline representatives in specific counties for more details.



# Broadband: Connecting people so no one gets left behind

**P**eople to people. That's how members of the **Broadband Hui** are galvanizing whole communities to connect them to online services and provide the training they'll need for school, work, healthcare and nearly every aspect of daily living. "What the pandemic helped us realize is that we've got to have the internet connection, the hardware, the digital literacy and the know-how to be full participants. If you don't have 'digital equity,' you're at a real disadvantage," said **Burt Lum**, the state's broadband strategy officer.



Head librarian Sara Kamibayashi (left) and library assistant Maelene Kaapana.

In his **State of the State** address, **Governor Ige** proposed "the largest investment in technology in state history" of \$400 million to build the critical infrastructure of the future, connecting all of the main Hawaiian islands, including Moloka'i and Lana'i. "This initiative will not only close the digital divide between the haves and the have-nots, but also strengthen us as a community." The state plans to leverage millions of dollars in federal funds for major investments in infrastructure, such as cable landing stations and modernizing cable networks, called the "middle mile." However, everyday users still need the basics to connect to the digital highway. That's where public and private sector members of the Broadband Hui are the key. They're already working on the "last mile" — the people-to-people part of the broadband network to make sure rural communities and folks who don't have the skills, equipment or connectivity won't be left behind in a digital age. **Among the projects in the works:**

- **Health and digital navigators at 15 libraries statewide** — Starting this month, the **Na'alehu Public Library on Hawai'i island** is expected to be the first pilot site using trained high school and college students to help people access health information and telehealth visits. Other sites that will be gradually rolled out include Lāna'i, Moloka'i, Hāna, Kihei, Waimea, Princeville, Hanapepe, Pāhoā, North Kohala, Hilo, Wai'anae, Kahuku, Waimānalo, Wahiawa and Waipahu. **Sylvia Mann, supervisor of DOH's genomics section, said the \$3.7 million federally funded project is an important example of statewide collaboration.** "We're working with the state library system, the UH Pacific Basin Telehealth Resource Center and even a grant from the FCC for Chromebooks, hot spots and broadband access," she said. "All these folks have the same heart. This is going to help lots of people in Hawai'i." Later this year, the plan is to set up mobile clinic vans, rotating among the libraries on each island. Clinic vans can also be deployed to community sites or even a patient's home to provide services.

## Bridging the digital divide at a library near you



Hawai'i State Librarian Stacey Aldrich

**O**nce upon a time, a homeless fellow on Maui wrote a novel on a library computer. It got published and he's not living in his car anymore. Then there's the little girl who didn't like books until a librarian read to her during storytime. Or what about the tutu whose grandkids gave her a Kindle for Christmas? She went straight to her local library, where she learned how to download e-books. Those are just a few of the ways **Hawai'i State Librarian Stacey Aldrich says libraries are helping people every day.**

"I can't tell you the number of people who have written us saying if they didn't have a library to get books and movies, they wouldn't have survived the pandemic," she recalls. But the pandemic also highlighted the "digital divide" and the need for people to learn how to navigate the internet — if they could even afford a computer or other device and a digital connection. To bridge that divide, Aldrich wants people to think of their local library as the great equalizer when it comes to digital literacy. "Libraries are a great place to start, with opportunities for everyone. It doesn't matter how much money you have or where you come from," she says. "Everyone should have the same opportunities to grow and be successful, and the library can be there for them." Aldrich points out that libraries have always been a community resource — now more than ever.

"Our librarians are there to help because so much of daily life went online during the pandemic — whether it's setting up an email account to register at a government website or as basic as teaching someone how to use a mouse," she explains. "I wouldn't categorize it by age either. Young people may know how to surf the 'net, but they may not know how to stay safe or when information is fake. Then we have folks who are looking to change careers and need new skill sets. The library is here to support all these different people."



**Aldrich says Hawai'i's libraries are brimming with resources** people don't know about such as Northstar, which helps you figure out where you need to beef up your computer and internet skills. Or Gale, a series of free courses with online instructors. Hawai'i is one of the few states with two National Governors Association WIN grants: one to create a one-stop site through the Labor Department to connect people to jobs and safety net benefits and the other, coordinated by Aldrich, to develop a statewide plan to close the digital skill gaps in our workforce. "We're looking at ways to help people advance at different levels — from basic skills to digital certifications to upgrade our workforce," she says. **Aldrich is also excited about a project promoted by Governor Ige in his State of the State address.** "The goal is to rethink how a regional library like Pearl City can be a test bed for new ideas and reimagined spaces," says Aldrich. "The telehealth navigators are one example of how we can maximize our potential. Libraries need to grow with their communities."

# Celebrating 175th anniversary of Washington Place

As a little girl, First Lady Dawn Amano-Ige remembers passing the big white house on Beretania Street, wondering what was inside. “To have the opportunity to actually live on the property is just amazing,” she said. “Now, with COVID-19 case counts coming down, we have a chance to celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Washington Place with the people of Hawai‘i. We want to help the community learn more about its storied history and the people who have lived here, especially Queen Lili‘uokalani.”



A series of events is planned to mark the occasion, starting with a proclamation signing March 31 by Governor Ige and a simultaneous statewide hula performance of “E Lili‘u E,” showcasing fourth graders from around the state. Then on April 2 the Royal Hawaiian Band will perform on the Washington Place lawn. That day the public can attend a free open house to tour the home and view a special exhibit honoring the queen. The exhibit was curated by historian DeSoto Brown from the Bishop Museum and designed by Drew Broderick from Kap‘iolani Community College’s Koa Galleries.



Events will honor historic Washington Place.

“Washington Place was where the queen had memorable and difficult experiences, yet she was able to forgive,” said Mrs. Ige. “The sense of calm in the home is what I feel the most. I do believe people leave their spirit, their mana, behind. The queen spent 55 years of her life there and left a legacy of strength, dignity and courage.” The First Lady encourages everyone to visit the current website at <https://washingtonplace.hawaii.gov/> to take virtual tours of the home and learn about its history. Mrs. Ige also led the refurbishment of the second floor with exhibits for people to learn more about past leaders of Hawai‘i.

The theme of the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary is “E Ola Mau I Ke Kumu: A Strong Foundation to Grow and Thrive.” Look for more announcements of anniversary events in the media this month.

## New Affordable Connectivity Program to expand access

A federal program to help low-income households pay for internet service is available now. Under the **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)** established by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), eligible households can receive up to \$30 a month to pay for broadband service. Qualifying lessees on Hawaiian Home Lands may apply for a benefit of up to \$75 per month. Eligible households may also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 toward the purchase of a laptop, desktop computer or tablet. “

### Affordable Connectivity Program Benefits



**About 200,000 residents could be eligible for this benefit,” said Governor Ige.**

“The COVID-19 pandemic transformed the way we live, work and learn. Everyone needs broadband access and internet connectivity, or they’ll be left behind.” Hawai‘i households can qualify for the ACP based on your household income, if you or your child or dependent participates in certain government assistance programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, WIC, and others. For more details, go to <https://www.fcc.gov/acp>.

## Apply now for Hale Kalele

**H**ale Kalele, an affordable housing project on Piikoi Street, is accepting applications through **April 1** for a lottery later that month. The 20-story building will have 200 units with monthly rent for tenants earning 30 to 60 percent of the area median income. Depending on tenant income levels, studio units range from \$542 to \$1,177 a month; 1-bedrooms from \$570 to \$1,250; and two-bedrooms from \$664 to \$1,480. A Juvenile Services Center and shelter will occupy the first and part of the second floor. For more details, go to <https://www.halekalele.com/>.

## Funds to help O‘ahu homeowners

**T**he new **O‘ahu Homeowner Assistance Fund** is available to help any eligible O‘ahu homeowner negatively impacted by the pandemic, but it’s important to act soon. Based on eligibility, applicants could receive up to \$30,000 to help cover mortgages, property taxes, utility payments and more.

O‘ahu homeowners will only be able to qualify for mortgage assistance if their bank or loan servicer signs up to participate in the program. The Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement has been contracted by the state’s Hawaii Housing Finance and Development Corp. to administer the program. To see if you meet eligibility requirements, go to [www.hawaiiancouncil.org/oahuhome](http://www.hawaiiancouncil.org/oahuhome). Funding is provided through the American Rescue Plan Act.

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