

**PROTECT  
PUBLIC HEALTH**

**REVIVE  
THE ECONOMY**

**STRENGTHEN  
OUR COMMUNITY**

## **CAPITOL CONNECTION**

**AUGUST 2021**

### **From the governor: Vaccinations more important than ever**

**W**e're not out of the woods yet. Just when we thought we could relax our guard, the new Delta variant of COVID-19 has led to a spike in cases and made the push for vaccinations even more urgent. State, county and community partners can only do so much. It's up to all of us to deliver the message that the safety of everyone — especially our keiki — depends on people getting their shots. That's when more restrictions can be lifted and life can begin to feel "normal" again.

**Q. Why is reaching the 70% vaccination target so important? When are we hoping to reach it?**

**A.** Our state health officials believe that 70 percent should be high enough that the spread of the disease is limited. We continue to see people who are not vaccinated gathering in groups, then getting sick with COVID. We're trying to get enough people to be protected against the virus so it doesn't continue to circulate and we don't see a spike in cases. If we can maintain the vaccination rate at more than 16,000 doses per week, we can reach our target in the fall.



Gov. Ige signs bills to promote electric vehicle adoption in support of the state's clean energy goals.

**Q. Why are we maintaining the indoor mask mandate when other states have lifted it?**

**A.** The Delta variant is highly transmissible and is driving a surge in cases across the country and here in Hawai'i — especially among younger people. We know that mask wearing is one of the most effective public health measures we can take when we don't know who's vaccinated and who's not. Some states that rushed to drop their mask mandates have had to reinstate them because of the spike in cases. I don't want to have to step back once we move forward to loosen restrictions.

**Q. With schools reopening, are you confident we can keep students safe for in-person learning?**

**A.** Yes, we've been successful in reducing transmission on campuses with mitigation measures and a "layered" approach. It means keeping children home if they're sick, wearing masks indoors, sanitizing classrooms and using outdoor settings when possible. We can also use cohorting strategies to limit cross-campus interaction. We've all gotten better at what we can do to reduce the spread of the virus, and students age 12 and up are now eligible to be vaccinated.

**Q. Given the Hawai'i Tourism Authority funding changes, what tools do we have to handle the influx of visitors?**

**A.** We're still committed to HTA's Destination Management Action Plans that identify "friction points" in each community and what could be done. The problem is, even if we identify solutions that the state, county and community can agree on, the question is how to fund them. Without HTA's dedicated funding, it means going back to the Legislature to get things approved before we can take action. Hā'ena State Park on Kaua'i is one successful example of how we worked with the community to manage parking, traffic and permitting and provide cultural activities. Also, we can't limit the number of visitors coming through our airports, but we can identify illegal vacation rentals and support HTA and community efforts to manage overtourism.

**Q. What is being done to help tenants and landlords once the eviction moratorium expires on Aug. 6?**

**A.** Our office is working with legislators, consumer advocates and service providers to make sure landlords and tenants know their options for mediation under HB1376 (Act 57). Renters will have more time to seek assistance and to work out agreements to avoid eviction. People who are still struggling can also apply for rent relief through county programs. (See story on Page 2).

# New law provides for mediation for renters, landlords

With the eviction moratorium expiring at 11:59 p.m. on Aug. 6, renters and landlords are being urged to familiarize themselves with **Act 57**, a new law that changes eviction procedures for non-payment of rent and incentivizes mediation for both renters and landlords. “The state, counties, Legislature, Judiciary and service providers are working together to keep people in their homes once the eviction moratorium expires,” said the governor. “Whether you’re a renter or a landlord, now is the time to understand the new law.”

The governor’s eviction moratorium has been in place since April 17, 2020 to prevent mass evictions when many people lost their jobs due to the pandemic. “The pandemic isn’t over, but thanks to safe and effective vaccines, many residents are now back at work,” the governor said. He urged renters and landlords to seek out rental assistance relief available through the counties. When tenants are notified of possible eviction, they should immediately contact the mediation center on their island to schedule a session with the landlord within the required 15-day period. The landlord is required to participate.



Gov. Ige urges tenants and landlords to use free mediation services.

**Act 57 gives time and a process for landlords and tenants to work together** on a payment plan so landlords can begin getting the back rent owed and tenants can remain in their homes. “Mediation is not part of the legal system,” explained Tracey Wiltgen, executive director of The Mediation Center of the Pacific. “Landlords and tenants craft their own agreements that work for them.” The state’s five community mediation centers have been preparing for the large number of anticipated cases with designated, trained staff. County and state agencies such as the Office of Consumer Protection, county offices, the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii, community advocates, legislators, and other organizations are helping to reach out to anyone who needs advice. For more information, go to <https://governor.hawaii.gov/featured/eviction-moratorium-resources/>.

# COVID-19 cases spreading among those unvaccinated



The state Department of Health doesn’t want you gambling with your life — or the lives of others. That’s why they’re leading the charge to get as many people in Hawai’i vaccinated as possible. “Ninety-eight percent of the COVID-19 cases we’ve seen recently are in unvaccinated people,” said DOH spokesperson Brooks Baehr. “The goal of reaching 70 percent of the population being fully vaccinated is absolutely attainable, but it will take time. Lana’i did it. The rest of the state can too.” (Check <https://health.hawaii.gov/coronavirusdisease2019/current-situation-in-hawaii/> to see maps of vaccination rates on every island.)

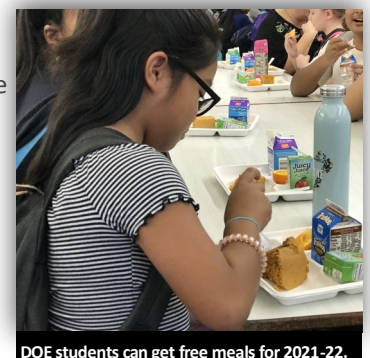
Governor Ige, DOH officials and other health care professionals are especially concerned about the recent surge of triple-digit COVID-19 cases, due mostly to the highly transmissible Delta variant — now present in cases statewide. Getting vaccinated is more important and easier than ever, with pop-up and walk-in clinics and outreach through community organizations. With the new school year starting, children under age 12 who aren’t eligible to be vaccinated yet are especially vulnerable, so it’s up to adults to protect them. Of the 243 new cases reported July 22 in Hawai’i, about 27 percent of them were children and teens age 18 and under.

The **HIGotVaccinated campaign** is also in full swing and slated to run through Aug. 31. More new prizes have been added, including three \$5,000 cash prizes offered by American Savings Bank, a Kaimana Beach Hotel stay-cation package, restaurant gift cards, and many other incentives to encourage people to get vaccinated. Go to <https://higotvaccinated.com/> for details.

# State’s public school students to receive free meals

All students at Hawai’i’s 257 public schools will receive **free breakfast and lunch for the 2021-2022 school year**, thanks to a nationwide waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Federal funds will reimburse state education departments for meal costs. The waiver aims to minimize the possible spread of COVID-19 at schools by eliminating meal payment transactions in cafeterias.

“This has been a challenging time for our ‘ohana, and I am proud to continue our safety net support to improve food security for our students and provide economic relief for our families,” said former Department of Education superintendent Dr. Christina Kishimoto. Waipahu High School principal Keith Hayashi has assumed the post of interim superintendent. Parents and guardians who have not yet purchased meal credits for the upcoming school year do not need to take any action. Those who have already purchased meal credits in advance may choose to leave funds in for the next school year or contact their child’s school for a refund.



DOE students can get free meals for 2021-22.

# Taking action on Hawai'i 2050 Sustainability Plan

When it comes to climate change and protecting our environment, actions speak louder than words. That message of collective action was delivered last month when Governor Ige signed a suite of bills into law addressing local food production, sea level rise and economic diversification. **"I applaud the Legislature's focus on sustainability issues this session," the governor said. "The bottom line is we have a collective commitment to meeting Hawai'i's sustainability and climate goals."**

The bills have taken on new urgency as the state recovers from COVID-19 and highlights Hawai'i's need for greater self-sufficiency. "Our vision includes a diversified economy rebuilt sustainably, not a simple return to business as usual," said the governor. The 10-year update of the Hawai'i 2050 Sustainability Plan provides a roadmap for such priorities as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving climate resiliency and perpetuating traditional ecological knowledge and values.



Gov. Ige with Office of Planning and Sustainable Development staff.

- **Increasing demand for local food products to benefit both growers and consumers:** **HB767** establishes a farm-to-school goal of at least 30% local products by 2030. **HB817** establishes benchmarks for state departments to purchase local agricultural or food products. **SB512** enables SNAP recipients to continue using the popular Double Up Food Bucks to buy locally grown fruits and vegetables.
- **Addressing impacts of sea level rise:** **HB243** requires state agencies to identify facilities vulnerable to sea level rise and flooding and develop plans to minimize the impact of these threats. **SB474** requires anyone selling a home to disclose if the property lies within a sea level rise exposure area. This bill puts Hawai'i on the leading edge of addressing coastal erosion impacts.
- **New economic activity and green jobs:** **HB683** establishes a sustainable aviation fuel program to provide grants to small businesses developing products. **HB1176** creates a green job corps program in the Department of Land and Natural Resources to work in fields such as natural resources management, agriculture, conservation and renewable energy.

## State commits to promoting electric vehicle adoption



New laws promote electric vehicle use by state agencies and financing of more charging systems to combat climate change.

The multiple benefits of electrifying vehicles in Hawai'i took center stage with the recent signing of three bills by Governor Ige. The bills promote electric vehicle adoption and reinforce the state's role as a leader in reducing the impacts of climate change. Legislators, state officials and other clean energy advocates joined in celebrating the progress being made. **"We were the first state to commit to 100% clean energy by 2045, and we were the first state to commit by statute to the Paris climate agreement. Yet there is still work to be done,"** said the governor. "Ground transportation in Hawai'i accounts for about a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions and is a large contributor to our dependence on imported oil. Coupled with our renewable energy goals, electric vehicles can support our transition away from fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy."

**The three bills include:** **HB 424** - Requires all state agencies to "adopt a preference for renting electric vehicles or hybrid vehicles" (for state employees). **HB552** - Establishes clean ground transportation goals for state agencies to transition 100% of light-duty motor vehicles to a zero-emission fleet by December 31, 2035. **HB1142** - Allocates a portion of barrel tax revenue and establishes dedicated funds to support and finance electric vehicle charging systems. "The transition to clean transportation reduces our contribution to emissions that cause climate change, saves taxpayer dollars and reduces reliance on imported fuels, which leaves more dollars circulating in our local economy," said Rep. Nicole Lowen. Sen. Sharon Moriwaki added, "This is a momentous day for clean energy. These bills are significant because they send the message that Hawai'i is serious about clean energy."

## Hawai'i among first to receive NGA workforce grants

When COVID-19 hit the state, one frustration for those looking for help was applying to multiple — and separate — state programs — many for the first time. To address this, the governor's office, in coordination with the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, the Department of Human Services, and the Office of Enterprise Technology Services, wants to make it easier for applicants to navigate to and move between state programs to access benefits and job training opportunities.

Hawai'i is one of 10 states in the inaugural cohort to join the National Governors Association (NGA) - Workforce Innovation Network (WIN) and receive a grant from the NGA and Cognizant U.S.

Foundation to expand access to support services, connect job seekers to work, and advance skill development for all workers. Hawai'i's grant will be used to plan for a one-stop website to help unemployed job seekers access employment services and essential support services and training.



"We want to tackle the 'siloed' nature of some of the state's workforce and human services systems to make the process easier to use," said Governor Ige. Through the NGA-WIN grant, Hawai'i will be able to receive technical assistance and collaborate with other states to exchange best practices and lessons learned.

# Goodwill and other nonprofits pivot in a pandemic

Like so many businesses and non-profits, **Goodwill Hawai'i** had to pivot for the first time in its history to online shopping when its stores closed during the pandemic. "We were amazed at the response," said CEO Katy Chen of the <https://www.goodwillhawaii.org/shop-online/> site. "We're on track to break \$1 million in sales — our first full year of doing e-commerce. We've been offering vintage goods, local designer brands and even 'ukuleles." The ease of that new method was on full display July 20 during "**Goodwill Goes Glam**," the popular annual event that showcases local designers and runway-worthy Goodwill fashions. Goodwill's simple yet powerful message, "Donate stuff. Create local jobs," became even more relevant this past year. "They're a full-circle program that's really valuable to our community," said First Lady Dawn Amano-Ige. "Besides education and job skills, they're also promoting sustainability, recycling and reusing."



Goodwill CEO Katy Chen and Mrs. Ige; McKenna Maduli (far right) hosts "Glam."

For the past seven years, Mrs. Ige has served as honorary chair of "Glam," but as a former teacher, her interest goes much deeper. "Goodwill has so many outstanding programs," she said. "They just opened their new Beretania flagship store on O'ahu with its **Honolulu Career and Learning Center**. Also, this year one of their success stories involves a young Hilo woman who worked with a Goodwill counselor to find a job through the **state's new Remote Ready Hawai'i** (see related article). It's exciting to see how Goodwill and the state can partner to connect a young person to meaningful work."

## Finding a career path through Remote Ready Hawai'i

Graduating at 17 during the pandemic, Morning-Glory saw her senior year of high school cut short, and she felt unsure about what to do next. Hearing this, a family member referred her to **Goodwill Hawai'i in Hilo** for support. Within a few days, Morning was able to get a job at a fast-food restaurant but quickly realized she wanted to do more. She and Goodwill counselor Siniva worked together to research different career paths. Morning wanted a career that would allow her to take on more responsibility with opportunities for advancement.



Siniva and Morning-Glory at Goodwill Hilo.

Siniva introduced her to **Remote Ready Hawai'i**, a new initiative by the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT), the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR), and the Workforce Development Council (WDC). The program provides residents with intensive training to find jobs remotely and quickly. Morning completed the paid training and, within a few weeks, successfully passed all the certifications. "At first, I thought this program was too good to be true. I am forever grateful to Siniva and Goodwill for guiding me to where I am today. I was finally able to step into a career I never imagined doing: working from home, helping people meet their customer service needs!" said Morning. She was offered a customer support position for Instant Teams, earning \$4.25 more an hour than before, with full benefits and a flexible, full-time schedule. "I love this program and the flexibility it gives me to manage my own time, to make a good living and to live life on my terms."

## Dear Governor Ige . . .

(Messages from the Web)



Thank you, Governor Ige, for keeping the indoor mask mandate in place. You're saving lives! — **A Hilo doctor**

I am a mom of two young kids who are still too young to get vaccinated. So please know that your decision to keep restrictions in place until 70% of the TOTAL Hawai'i population is vaccinated is supported by so many of us. We may not be as vocal as those in opposition, however, which is why I wanted to be sure and email my gratitude. — **An O'ahu mom**

## DLIR offices to open Sept. 7

People with unemployment benefit issues will be able to meet in person with staff at state Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) offices on every island starting Sept. 7, director Anne Perreira-Eustaquio has announced. Staff will handle walk-in claimants in the mornings and scheduled appointments in the afternoons.

DLIR will continue its call center but discontinue Zoom and phone appointments once the offices are open, Perreira-Eustaquio said. People can make in-person appointments three weeks prior to Sept. 7 through a system being developed now.

**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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