

Hawai'i State House of Representatives Update

From the Desk of District 7 Representative David Tarnas



Photo courtesy of David Tarnas
Representative David Tarnas speaks for North Kohala as a member of the Hawai'i State House of Representatives.

Aloha. As we start 2025, I wish everyone a healthy and successful new year.

The 2025 legislative session has begun! Over the next four months, the legislature will have public hearings to consider and make decisions on numerous important bills and the State budget. As we do this work, your advice and opinions are important. By using the legislative website www.capitol.hawaii.gov, you will be able to easily track legislation and provide testimony. Once you tag the bills of interest to you, you will

get an email when a hearing is scheduled so that you can submit testimony on the legislative website and via Zoom. Video of legislative committee hearings will be livestreamed on YouTube and archived to view anytime. Our goal is to make the legislative process more transparent and easier for the public to participate.

In the set of bills proposed by the House Majority, we are working to address the priority issues facing our State.

Invasive species are devastating our farms and ranches. To address this threat, we are proposing to improve Hawaii's biosecurity with additional staff at the Department of Agriculture including a new Deputy Chair of Biosecurity and additional funding to stop the spread of these harmful invasive species.

Too many families in our community don't have enough food to meet their needs. To improve our community's food security, we are proposing to establish and finance a "Farm to Families Program" in which the State will provide funds to nonprofit programs like Hawaii Food Basket to purchase food from local farmers to alleviate hunger and food shortages in our community.

Childcare services are expen-

sive and hard to find. This drives up our cost of living and makes it hard for parents to go to work. To support early education programs in the State, we propose additional funding to hire more teaching staff for early learning schools, as well as for equipment and services.

Affordable housing is nearly impossible to find in our neighborhoods. To increase the supply of affordable housing, we are proposing to provide more funding for mixed-income rental housing development and continue funding for infrastructure development for affordable housing projects developed by public-private partnerships.

Homelessness continues to be a major challenge, so we propose more funding for transitional housing and social service programs to assist people to move into temporary housing, stabilize their lives, and secure affordable housing. Many of our homes still have cesspools. In some areas, these contaminate nearshore waters or streams. In these priority areas, we are proposing more funds to help homeowners finance converting cesspools to more effective wastewater treatment systems.

Many of us know people who made poor choices, were convicted of crimes, and are serving time in prison. To give them a second chance, we want to help them be ready when they are released so they can succeed as productive members of our community. So, we propose more funding for prison-based rehabilitation and training programs.

Many public and private construction projects working to provide housing, improve infrastructure, and establish businesses are delayed by burdensome permitting requirements. We propose to reform the State Historic Preservation Division requirements and boost its capacity to process development proposals efficiently.

It will be a busy session for the House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs, for which I am the Chair. We will be considering and approving the budgets

for the Judiciary Branch, Department of Law Enforcement, Attorney General, Campaign Spending Commission, Ethics Commission, Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands. We are also responsible for all the bills regarding elections, ethics, campaign finance, criminal justice reform, improving access to public records, policing policies, expungement and record clearance, drug policy, firearms, and fireworks.

Securing funding for public construction projects in our district is also part of my responsibility. Major projects that have been funded and are in process include the Kawaihae North Small Boat Harbor breakwater and harbor dock replacement, Waiaka Bridge and intersection replacement, traffic safety improvements in Waimea, and developing a community plan for managing public access at the Pololu trailhead. In the last legislature, I was able to work closely with Senator Tim Richards to secure funding for the new administration building and CT facility at Kohala Hospital, a new Waikoloa Library, major improvements to Kawaihae Commercial Harbor, and to complete the environmental review for the Saddle Road Extension. This next session, I will seek funding for improvements to the Pololu trailhead on the donated parcel at the former Mule Station, construction of a new Kohala High School gym, construction of a new Waimea community emergency shelter, planning and design for a new South Kohala District Courthouse in Waimea, and planning and design for the intersection of a second Waikoloa access road with Queen Kaahumanu Highway.

As my staff and I prepare to begin the work of the 2025 legislative session, we welcome your input and advice. Please contact me anytime at (808) 586-8510 and reptarnas@capitol.hawaii.gov to share your thoughts and to subscribe to my e-newsletter which provides regular updates on my work. Mahalo Kohala!



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