



Senator Joy San Buenaventura

Senate District 2, Puna

Chair, Senate Committee on Health & Human Services • Vice Chair, Committee on Hawaiian Affairs
• Committee on Government Affairs • Committee on the Judiciary

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January 2026 E-Newsletter

DECEMBER 2025 LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Aloha:

As we move closer to the opening of the 2026 Legislative session, I would like to thank everyone for your continued engagement throughout the interim. Due to federal developments outside of our control, the 2025 interim was especially busy. As Chair of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services, I held informational briefings related to the Federal Shutdown's effects on SNAP recipients, the status of Medicaid (QUEST Integration) in Hawai'i following passage of the OBBB Act, updates on the Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) Adult Mental Health Division and the Hawai'i State Hospital (HSH) overcrowding, and the DOH Deposit Beverage Container Program failures.

Despite the challenges and the continual changes at the federal level, we at the Hawaii State Legislature passed a number of bills to help lesson the economic hardship on many struggling local families. To prepare for more expected federal funding cuts, I am already working on bills to safeguard support programs that benefit local families and mitigate the fiscal strain on state taxpayers. I have also been encouraging state agencies to be proactive in identifying and leveraging funding sources that would help our state to administer benefits in the event of another federal shutdown.

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Visiting the new public preschool rooms at Keaau Elementary with Lieutenant Governor Sylvia Luke. The new classrooms provide early learning opportunities that contribute to development, while also helping the local economy by allowing working families, who would have otherwise had to choose between childcare and their careers, to continue to work without the stress of relying on family for care. As chair of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services, I supported the expansion of early learning programs and expedited the passage of these measures knowing that many families within our community would benefit from having a trusted pre-K located in the Puna district.

2026 GRANT-IN-AID

The Hawaii State Legislature announces that the Grant-In-Aid (GIA) process for the 2026 Legislative Session is now open, and eligible organizations are asked to submit their applications to the legislature.

The Legislature will continue to accept GIA applications until Friday, January 23, 2026, at 4:30 p.m., and final determinations will be made as Council on Revenue forecasts in January and March are published.

The Legislature makes appropriations for GIA in accordance with Chapter 42F of the Hawai‘i Revised Statutes (HRS). The Eligibility Verification stage requires the submission of documentation to verify that the Grantee meets the standards for a grant award under HRS §42F-103.

For additional details on the GIA application process, visit: <https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session/GIA.aspx>.



INFORMATIONAL BRIEFING: SNAP CONTINGENCY PLANS

I held a public informational briefing to receive updates from the Department of Human Services (DHS) regarding the impact of the current Federal Government Shutdown on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Hawai'i and to review the state's contingency plan to ensure food security for affected residents. At a recent press conference, Governor Green credited my info briefing for the launch of the Emergency Hawaii Relief Program. I appreciate the Governor's quick action and will continue to work with both state and non-profits to minimize the impact of the shutdown. If you were unable to watch the livestream, an archived recording of the proceeding is available on the Hawai'i State Senate's YouTube channel.



PREPARING FOR THE 2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



With fellow Majority Senators at our annual pre-session retreat where we discuss our legislative priorities and identify what will be the most urgent issues of the upcoming session. As your Senator, I have always been a very vocal advocate for the needs of our district and I am very grateful to my colleagues who understand the unique challenges that we face.

INFORMATIONAL BRIEFING: MEDQUEST & OBBBA

On December 19th, I held a joint Informational Briefing with the Senate Committee on Consumer & Consumer Protection to receive a report from the Department of Human Services (DHS) Med-QUEST Division on the status of Medicaid (QUEST Integration) in Hawai'i, specifically addressing the recent and impactful federal policy changes. The agenda focused on the status of the Post-COVID medicaid unwinding process, analyzing Hawai'i's eligibility redetermination progress and disenrollment rates. Discussion covered federal policy changes from legislation like the OBBBA of 2025, which introduced administrative burdens and increased eligibility checks that are projected to cause significant disenrollment. The briefing examined the correlations with disenrollment and ACA marketplace transition, focusing on the process of moving ineligible individuals to the marketplace, their qualification for ACA Premium Tax Credits (APTCs), and the potential severe consequences from the scheduled expiration of enhanced APTCs at the end of 2025. Max 6% of residents will potentially be uninsured which means higher premiums for the insured and physicians/med centers not getting paid.

The briefing included presentations from: Kaiser, HMSA, and AlohaCare, and two Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC): Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center (WCCHC), and Hawaii Island Comprehensive Health Center (HICHC). The briefing concluded with a presentation from HealthCare Association of Hawaii (HAH). The recorded session has been archived for public viewing on the Hawai'i State Senate YouTube channel.



At the Groundbreaking of upper Puna library. Thankful that State Librarian worked hard to continue the process started by former Senator Ruderman in his push for a Puna library (the Pahoa library is still awaiting county purchase of land for the co-located bus hub) and former Representative Richard Onishi who ensured state budget had also upper Puna in mind for a library. I am thankful that they passed me the baton to push and nag thru the COVID shutdown and Maui wildfire budget issues to ensure that both libraries will be completed despite their retirement. Especially thankful to Lt. Governor Sylvia Luke who ensured initial funding when she was Finance chair and current Finance Chair and Puna rep. Chris Todd and Puna Rep. Jeanne Kapela whose support is needed for completion.



Frmer Sen. Ruderman, Bd of Ed director Lee, Puna-Keaau-Kau CAS Bello, me, State Librarian Aldrich, LG Luke, Keaau middle School Principal Tanabe, Rep. Kapela, Rep. Todd, frmr rep. Onishi and County Councilman Onishi



After 30 years of heartfelt service and dedicated leadership, Alan Johnson will be retiring as CEO of Hina Mauka. Brian Baker will be taking his place as of January 1st. Hina Mauka provides treatment for adults seeking help through every level of addiction recovery and offers assistance to incarcerated women and persons experiencing homelessness.



We will be forever grateful to Fire Chief Kazuo Todd for his unwavering commitment to the safety and well-being of the residents of Hawaii Island. The warmth and professionalism of Chief Todd's leadership reflected the passion, humility, and courage with which he served his community. My sincere condolences to the family and friends of Chief Kazuo Todd.



With Ways & Means Committee and the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity at Green Point Nursery where we received an update on efforts to improve our biosecurity network and protect local agriculture and natural resources.



Our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of Kirby Shaw, Executive Director of the Disability and Communication Access Board. Hawaii's commitment to equal access and disability rights are a testament to Kirby's legacy and lifelong commitment to public service.

BUSINESS AND TRADE MISSION TO OSAKA AND OKINAWA

During the interim I was invited to join the Department of Business, Economic Development, & Tourism's mission to Osaka and Okinawa. The goal of our mission was to encourage investment and business activity, exchange best practices in key industries, examine advances in research & development that could be of benefit to the people of Hawaii, strengthen our sister-state/city-sector relationships, and promote tourism to Hawaii.



SENATE DISTRICT 2 UPDATE: FUNDING AWARDED TO
HOPE SERVICES HAWAI'I
\$100,000

THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
HAS AUTHORIZED RELEASE OF
**\$100,000 FOR HOPE SERVICES
HAWAI'I.**

FUNDING FOR THE CAPITAL
IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP)
GRANT-IN-AID (GIA) PROJECT WILL
BE USED FOR CONSTRUCTION FOR
GROUND AND SITE IMPROVEMENTS
FOR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IN PUNA.





For life-threatening emergencies, call 911.

For non-life-threatening emergencies, call (808) 935-3311.

For the Fire Department, call (808) 961-8336.



PROPER 911 USE

Learn when and how to use 911 for emergencies to ensure a quick and effective response.



POLICE DIRECTORY

Access contact information for HPD departments, stations, and specialized units.



CRIME STOPPERS

Submit anonymous tips about crimes or suspicious activity to help keep our community safe.



ANIMAL CONTROL

Report stray or dangerous animals, access lost-and-found services, or learn about licensing and care.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Find support, counseling, and emergency resources for victims of domestic violence.



KULEANA HOTLINE

Share non-emergency community concerns confidentially to improve neighborhood safety.



REPORT AN UNSAFE DRIVER

Notify authorities about reckless, impaired, or dangerous driving behavior.



GET A COPY OF A POLICE REPORT

Request copies of police reports for legal, personal, or insurance purposes.



SUBMIT A TIP ABOUT AN UNSOLVED CASE

Provide confidential information to assist investigations.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: TELEMARKETING SALES RULE

Did you know that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) established the Telemarketing Sales Rule (TSR), a federal law to protect consumers from unwanted or deceptive sales calls? Here are three core protections you're entitled to:

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- 1** **Disclosures:** By law, telemarketers must clearly identify who they are, the company they represent, and the purpose of the call. Legally, they cannot mislead you about their identity, the product or service, or your options.
 - 2** **Call Time Restrictions:** Under the TSR, telemarketers are only allowed to call during reasonable hours — typically between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. in your time zone — unless you've given them permission to call at other times.
 - 3** **Do Not Call Registry:** If your number is on the National Do Not Call Registry, most telemarketing sales calls are illegal. Telemarketers may only call you if you've given prior consent or have an existing business relationship. Violating this law can result in federal penalties.



SCAM ALERT: MEDICARE



Scammers are exploiting the Medicare open enrollment period by pretending to be from Medicare and asking you to "update" or provide "new information" for your Medicare card. Their goal is to steal your personal and financial details. Here's how to keep safe from these scams:



Ignore unexpected calls

Caller ID can be faked. If you receive an unexpected call claiming to be from Medicare, asking you for your personal information, hang up and call 1-800-MEDICARE directly (1-800-633-4227).



Get help comparing coverage options

Contact the Hawaii Insurance Division, the Hawaii State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), or visit Medicare.gov for a reliable source of official Medicare information and trusted guidance.



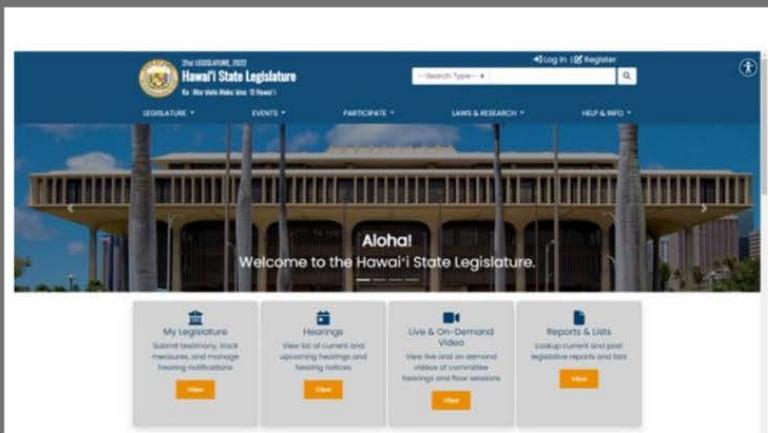
Report Medicare Scams

Help keep others safe by reporting Medicare scams to 1-800-MEDICARE and the FTC at ReportFraud.ftc.gov

Stay safe and scam-free!



Legislative Reference Bureau: Public Access Room



The Public Access Room (PAR) provides the public with information, facilities, and services to assist them as they engage and participate in the State legislative process. PAR's website includes guides on how to track measures, submit testimony, and subscribe to hearing notices.

To learn more, please visit: <https://lrb.hawaii.gov/par/>