

2018 LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

State Representative Nicole Lowen

Kailua-Kona • Holualoa • Kalaea • Honokohau



Aloha Neighbors,

With the conclusion of the 2018 Session of the Legislature, I wanted to update you on key actions taken by the legislature this year, including bills passed and budget highlights.

It is a privilege to serve as your representative and together we have accomplished much in recent years.

I look forward to continuing to serve our community, and I count on your input and ideas to help me do this. Please don't hesitate to contact me any time with your questions, concerns, or comments.

Mahalo nui loa,

Nicole

Rep. Nicole Lowen

Productive Session includes action on Affordable Housing, Homelessness

This session proved to be very productive, with housing and homelessness at the top of the list of the many issues we took action on. House Bill 2748 was passed to help create 25,000 affordable rental housing units across the State by the year 2030 for both low-income and middle-income working families (families with incomes of up to 140% of area median income). The bill appropriates \$200 million to the rental housing trust fund to help finance housing development. It also exempts affordable rental housing construction from the general excise tax, which is equal to a value of \$360 million over 12 years. This exemption creates a powerful incentive for affordable housing development. Finally, the bill appropriates \$10 million into the Dwelling Unit Revolving Fund, to provide bridge financing for construction of affordable housing projects. Bills were also passed to provide rent subsidies and first-time homebuyer down payment assistance.

To address Hawaii's homeless crisis, approximately \$35 million was allocated for the establishment of ohana zones—three on Oahu, and one each on Big Island, Maui, and Kauai. Ohana zones are transitional encampment areas where outreach workers can connect homeless individuals with services. By providing a place where people can legally stay, we hope to break the cycle of homelessness, to connect people with needed health care, substance abuse counseling, and other services, and to start them on a path to re-housing and recovery. \$15 million was included in the state operating budget to fund these services.

Fighting Little Fire Ants, Rapid Ohia Death, and Rat Lungworm Disease

Invasive species continue to be a big concern on Hawaii Island, especially little fire ants, which are spreading in West Hawaii. This year I passed a bill to create a Hawaii Ant Lab position specifically for West Hawaii and to increase education and mitigation. Rapid Ohia Death (ROD) also continues to spread and devastate native forests. The legislature allocated a total of \$2.3 million in the budget biennium to address ROD. Annual recurring funding of \$300,000 for UH Hilo to research rat lungworm disease was also included in the budget.



District 6 Capital Projects

Palamanui Community College

- \$1.8 million for improvements to outdoor learning and dining areas (including creating additional shaded areas), for site work for the trade & apprenticeship program, and physics lab equipment.

Kealakehe High School

- \$350,000 for design of new Performing Arts and Student Activities Center.
- \$3.5 million for all-weather track.

Keahuolu Courthouse:

- \$5.8 million for equipment, fixtures, and interior.

Ellison Onizuka Kona International Airport at Keahole:

- \$69 million (in revenue bonds) for construction of a federal inspection station, new holding room, and additional tour bus parking area.

Kona Community Hospital

- \$2.5 million for repairs and improvements

West Hawaii Veterans Center

- \$850,000 for planning and design of a new Veteran's Center.

Honualua Forest Reserve

- \$1.3 million for access road and fence improvements to protect Kona's priority watershed.

NELHA:

- \$5.65 Million for seawater infrastructure improvements, planning for a regional seawater air conditioning district, and removal of abandoned deep sea pipelines.

Public Schools R&M:

- \$1.3 million lump sum for repairs, maintenance and improvements to district 6 public schools.

Rep. Lowen Chairs State Grants Process

For the past two years, as a member of the Finance committee, I have served in the position of Grant-In-Aid (GIA) Chair. I have the responsibility of reviewing hundreds of applications each year from organizations who apply for State-funded grants, and play a key role in making decisions about which applications to fund. With a budget of approximately \$30 million, GIAs play a large role in supporting the policy direction of the state. My role as GIA Chair and position on the finance committee has also been helpful in ensuring that Hawaii Island does not get overlooked when it comes to the budget. Below is a list of some of organizations who have received grants that will have a positive impact in District 6.

- West Hawaii Community Health Center
- West Hawaii Habitat for Humanity
- Going Home Hawaii
- Family Support Services of West Hawaii
- Donkey Mill Art Center
- Lai Opua 2020
- People's Advocacy for Trails Hawaii
- Friends of NELHA
- West Hawaii Community Health Center
- West Hawaii Habitat for Humanity
- Hawaii Island Humane Society
- Kona Historical Society

Courthouse and Highway Project Update

The State Dept. of Transportation estimates that all four lanes of Queen Kaahumanu Highway should be open by the end of August, with work on the shoulders continuing through November, after which the project will be complete.

The Kona Judiciary Complex is also moving along, and is estimated to be move-in ready by late summer of 2019. Construction is about 70% complete with all the framing complete; plumbing, mechanical, and electrical being installed; and window frames and elevators about to be as well. The official name of the new courthouse will be the "Keahuolu Courthouse," which honors the name of the ahupuaa in which it is located.



Aerial view of Keahuolu Courthouse

Advances in Education: Hawaii Promise Program and Early College

The Hawaii Promise Program provides “last-dollar” scholarships to UH college students for tuition costs not covered through other financial aid for income-qualified students. The program began last year for UH community colleges, and, due to the success of the program, this year it has been expanded to students at UH four-year institutions. This program has helped over a thousand Hawaii students attend college, and will help many more with its expansion and additional funding. By investing in education, we are investing in the future of our children, community, and economy.

The legislature also provided additional funding this year for the early college program, which allows Hawaii’s high school students to earn dual credits. Kealakehe High School is one of only twelve high schools in the state participating in the early college high school initiative. Other wins for education included expanding school-based health programs and funding computer science curriculum for all public schools.

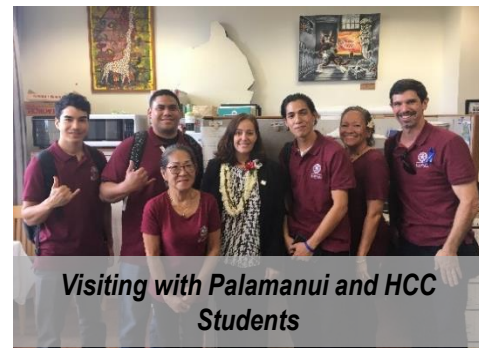
Environmental Initiatives: Oxybenzone, Pesticide Safety, Composting, Climate

Hawaii is leading the nation with progressive environmental policies. This year we became the first state to ban the sale of sunscreens containing the harmful chemicals oxybenzone and octinoxate. These chemicals cause corals to bleach at lower temperatures and also inhibit recovery from bleaching events by disrupting coral reproduction.

After many years of considering bills about pesticide safety, this year we finally took action. SB3095 protects Hawaii’s keiki by requiring 100-foot buffer zones around schools within which restricted use pesticides cannot be applied during school hours. This bill also includes a state-wide ban of the pesticide chlorpyrifos, a neurotoxin associated with numerous negative health outcomes that has been banned by the European Union.

To address the large amount of food waste produced by the 265 schools across the state, we passed a bill to establish a composting grant pilot program. This will allow any school that is interested in implementing a composting program to apply for funds to do so. Through these projects, students will learn about the impacts of food waste, nutrient cycling, and local food production.

Climate change and sea level rise continue to be a concern for our island state. In the 2017 session, we passed a landmark bill to become the first state to adopt the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, despite the federal government’s withdrawal. This year we followed up by setting a goal for the state to become carbon neutral by 2045, the most ambitious climate goal of any state in the nation. Part of this goal will be achieved by establishing a carbon offset program, which is in the process of being developed.



Visiting with Palamanui and HCC Students



Learning about Kona’s Watersheds in Honualua Forest Reserve.



Women’s Legislative Caucus



Working with Innovations Public Charter School Students



Honoring Hawaii Next 50 Essay Contest Winners

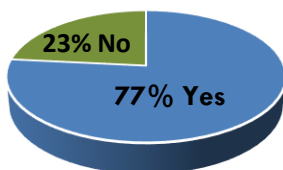


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Your Voice: Community Survey Results

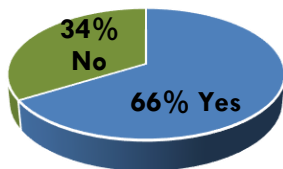
Mahalo to everyone who participated in our community survey. We are pleased to share the results with you!

Do you support the creation of homeless safe zones (designated areas where homeless people can camp legally)?



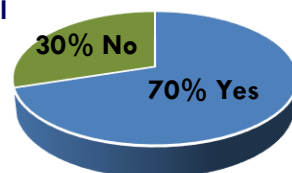
Safe zones, also called ohana zones, are temporary homeless encampments where outreach workers can connect homeless with available services. Homelessness is a difficult issue that will not be solved overnight, or with one single solution, but safe zones may prove to be one option that can help. This year, the Legislature allocated \$35 million for the establishment of safe zones on all islands.

Do you support creating a citizen's initiative process in Hawaii?



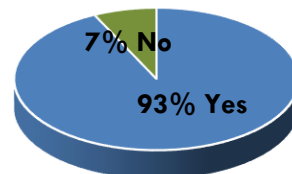
A citizen's initiative is a process that would allow citizens the right to directly change the law on certain issues without having to go through the legislature. Citizen's initiatives are currently in place in 24 states. Although some bills were introduced this year to establish this in Hawaii, no action was taken at this time.

Do you support recreational fishing permits for Hawaii, at a nominal fee for residents and a higher fee for visitors?



Hawaii is the only state without recreational fishing permits. Fishing permits could help to support better management of marine resources by enabling data collection and education. On the other hand, there are concerns about protecting fishing as a cultural practice and means of sustenance for native Hawaiians. No action was taken on this issue this year.

Do you support legislation banning the sale of sunscreens containing toxic chemical compounds, such as oxybenzone?



A bill was passed this year to ban the sale of sunscreens containing these chemicals that harm our coral reefs—a big win for our reefs and the environment! The ban will take effect officially in 2021, but we are already seeing local businesses respond to the new law by offering environmentally-friendly alternatives.