

Representative Faye P. Hanohano, Chair
Representative Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice-chair
Committee on Public Safety

John Henry Felix, Chairman Emeritus
American Red Cross, Hawaii State Chapter

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

Support of HB 1568, Relating to Making an Appropriation for the American Red Cross.

The American Red Cross is a volunteer-led humanitarian organization whose mission is to prevent and alleviate human suffering by helping people prevent, prepare for, and respond to emergencies, and providing disaster relief to the people of Hawaii. Although established by Congressional Charter in 1905, the American Red Cross is NOT a government agency and must rely on the generosity of Hawaii's people to provide critical services to the community. All disaster training, services, and financial assistance to victims is free. We strongly support H.B. No. 1568, Relating to Making an Appropriation for the American Red Cross to the State Department of Defense to assist the American Red Cross, Hawaii State Chapter, with needed capital improvement projects.

The Hawaii Red Cross renders aid to victims of about 100 disasters in Hawaii per year (one every 3 days) with food, clothing, shelter, rental assistance, and mental health counseling for everything from everyday house fires to major disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods. In addition, they teach about 35,000 people per year how to prepare their families, schools, and businesses for a disaster.

The majority of disaster victims are poorest of the poor. Up to 82% of them live in low to moderate income areas, and at least 34% live below poverty level. The majority make less than \$25,000 per year. Over half do not own their homes and have no property insurance, so they are truly destitute after a fire destroys everything they own or claims the life of a loved one

Hardening of the Red Cross headquarters building to protect renovated assets and ensure continuity of operations during times of disasters will require funding for hurricane screens and film for doors and windows, generators to continue operations at headquarter and neighbor island offices, retaining wall and lanai to prevent flooding and mud in room where disaster volunteers assemble. Additional building renovation needed to create disaster storage space and solar panels for clean reliable energy.

The Hawaii Red Cross 30 year old headquarters building had never undergone any kind of upgrade or renovation, was badly in need of repair and maintenance, not ADA compliant and had no disaster operation center. This headquarters coordinates statewide operation of 8 other Red Cross offices on neighbor isles and military bases. Major renovation has been completed but there is not enough funding to protect this renovated building. It is still vulnerable to hurricanes and major floods, and there is no generator to

operate the building after a disaster strikes. Improvements are needed to ensure continuance of statewide disaster relief and safety services to the people of Hawaii for everyday and major disasters. This funding will make a difference between being prepared or not.

FEMA and State Civil Defense predicts a Category 3/4 storm (same force as Hurricane Iniki) would destroy or heavily damage 38% of homes and leave another 40% with minor damage. Based on 2005 statistics, 155,000 of the 329,000 housing units on Oahu have single wall construction which is highly susceptible to damage or destruction from hurricane force winds. Flying debris from lightly constructed structures and airborne vegetation increase potential for serious damage to adjacent properties and utility lines. Hawaii's topography funnels winds through mountain ridges and torrential rains create flash floods and landslides in valleys below. Therefore, even a relatively weak tropical storm can cause considerable property damage and losses. Draft Federal Support CONOP for Catastrophic Hurricane Impacting State of Hawaii.

The Hawaii Red Cross is in need of \$1.65 million in capital funding. These monies would be used for hurricane screens and window laminate (\$60,000), a retaining wall and concrete lanai to abate flooding (\$130,000), a generator (\$200,000), storage for disaster equipment and supplies (\$200,000) and solar photovoltaic panels to produce clean reliable energy (\$475,000).

In making this appropriation, you will ensure the Hawaii Red Cross will be there to respond after disaster strikes throughout the islands. We urge the committee to pass H.B. No. 1568. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.