

Senate Provides Its Draft of the Hawaii State Budget

More than a billion dollars has been cut from the State budget over the last three years. This year's \$11 billion supplemental budget for the State, HB 2012, is a change in course. The Senate version reinforces the safety net, restores core services decimated in the prior three budgets, and invests strategically to stimulate the economy and sustain a more prosperous future for Hawaii. Responsible and responsive to Governor Abercrombie's budget requests, the Senate's version funds most of his initiatives to support the state government's ability to carry out its duties to the public.

Education is a top priority. The Senate's budget invests \$44 million in key areas, giving schools more funds through increases in the weighted student formula. More dollars for early learning programs aim at raising the potential for children to succeed in school. Returning funds to the community school for adults will help them improve their economic opportunities. Augmenting allocations for student meals and bus services are also included.

The charter school law was rewritten to reflect findings of a significant evaluation of system and reform it. The Senate added \$1 million to the charter school budget to equalize the per-pupil funding discrepancies between public and charter schools, and implement the transition plan mandated by the new law.

There's good news for libraries, too. After a four year hold on ordering, the library system was given \$500,000 to purchase new circulating materials, including books, e-books, and other items.

The Senate version of the budget also aims at strengthening the social and healthcare safety net. Infusing \$18.2 million to temporary assistance for needy families (TANF), the funding will address child welfare, domestic violence shelters, Medicaid, and shortfalls in human services programs. Updating the IT system of the Department of Human Services (\$3.6 million) will enable it to better serve the public.

More than \$27 million will go to modernizing the state's information technology infrastructure. The IT projects aspire to transform delivery of state services by increasing information systems efficiency. The governor's broadband initiative likewise will improve services and expand access for Hawaii residents.

To view a YouTube video of the description of key aspects of the budget by the Senate Ways and Means Committee Chair Senator David Ige, go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPooZH7wq-U>.