September 4, 2020

To:  
David Ige, Governor of the State of Hawai‘i  
Kirk Caldwell, Mayor of the City and County of Honolulu  
Susan Ballard, Chief of the Honolulu Police Department

RE: Open Public Spaces for Recreation

Hawai‘i is at a critical juncture in our fight against COVID-19. Our community, which once experienced the lowest COVID-19 rates in the country, has now become a hotspot with community spread rampant and our healthcare system at risk of being overwhelmed.

While we agree that actions must be taken to mitigate the spread of the virus in our community, we believe that these policies must be evidence-based and data-driven for community buy-in and compliance.

The recent executive order that restricts public access to beaches, parks, trails, and community gardens both ignores the evidence on transmission and is unnecessarily punitive towards those doing otherwise lawful and healthy behaviors. Below are reasons why we believe this order may be counterproductive, and even hurt the health of the people:

- **Exercise, the outdoors, fresh air, and sunshine can boost your immune system - critical during a global pandemic.** Research indicates being outdoors and in the sunshine, in addition to mask-wearing, are factors that help to fight against viral infections. In addition, regular, moderate-intensity exercise may help the body fight off infections, including COVID-19.

- **Time spent in nature can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression.** Exercise is also a proven mood booster and can help adults reduce stress levels and build emotional resilience. During such uncertain and stressful times, people need an outlet in order to maintain their mental health and well-being.

- **Children need at least 60 minutes per day of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity to maintain good health.** Stuck in their homes and spending a large amount of time on devices due to virtual learning, children may have a harder time meeting the recommended amount of physical activity.

- **With limited options for outdoor recreation, law-abiding citizens are forced to crowd into the remaining legal spaces.** This makes it harder for people to practice social distancing, one of the key methods to preventing the spread of COVID-19. Evidence points to the fact that the virus spreads more readily in crowds, so it doesn’t make sense to have people fill up the sidewalks.

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while open spaces like beaches and parks remain empty. In addition, vigorous exercise may
cause people to expel more respiratory droplets and can further increase the transmission rate
of COVID-19 when people are in close proximity, with a high risk of transmission in indoor
spaces with poor ventilation4.

- Community gardens are critical resources for physical activity, psychological health, and
nutrition among the very populations that are most impacted by COVID-19 in Hawai‘i, such as
immigrant and refugee communities5. It makes little sense to actively remove people’s access to
their usual source of healthy food and physical activity during a time of high food insecurity.

EQUITY IMPLICATIONS
As the nation continues to work toward a more equitable society, we urge you to reconsider policies
such as this one that clearly place a disparate burden on the same vulnerable communities that are
already over-represented in cases and fatalities. Not all residents on O‘ahu have the ability to access
outdoor space equitably. Many live in apartments without access to a yard. Some neighborhoods do not
have sidewalks or have sidewalks that are in poor condition, making them an unsafe alternative to
beaches, parks, and trails. Low-income urban apartment renters and public housing residents are reliant
on community spaces for food-growing, while more affluent suburban homeowners are able to garden
in their private backyards. Community gardens serve as an important source for food and physical
activity, as well as an outlet for their emotional well-being. Considering all the health and wellness
benefits, we believe that all residents should be able to access these public resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS
We understand the urgent need to curb the spread of COVID-19 in our communities. We acknowledge
that there were good intentions behind these orders. But neither evidence nor example support these
policies, therefore we must ask the Governor, Mayor, and Honolulu Police Department to reassess the
current restrictions, and focus our energy and resources on opening these public spaces safely. At
minimum, we recommend that parks, beaches, trails, and community gardens are opened for
exercise, recreation, and gardening. The current order has over 40 pages of exemptions and
qualifications for essential businesses, yet there are none allowed for these free, publicly accessible
open spaces. We think that there should also be nuances in what areas can be reopened and activities
that can be resumed at these public open spaces. For example, gathering limits should be imposed to
prevent large social gatherings that were occurring before the shutdown. Enforcement should not be
directed at individuals that pose little risk of spreading the virus.

It’s been over five months since COVID-19 arrived in the islands, and will be with us for a while. During
these times, when health is paramount, it’s important that we shift our thinking from “holding our
breath” to developing sustainable norms that promote resilience and encourage wellness. It’s time to
reopen the parks, beaches, trails, and community gardens - safely - so all residents can achieve their
best health.

31, 2020, from
5 Hartwig, K. A., & Mason, M. (2016). Community Gardens for Refugee and Immigrant Communities as a Means of
Sincerely,

Hawai‘i Public Health Institute (HIPHI)

Obesity Prevention Task Force, a program of HIPHI

GreenWheel Food Hub, Larry Geller, Co-Project Director

Hawaii Bicycling League, John Rogers, Chad Taniguchi, Advocacy Team Members

Betsy Poulos, Hawai‘i Kai Community Garden

Brandon Siegrist, Whiting Turner Contracting Co.

Byron Morrison, President, Moiliili Community Garden

Dan Falardeau, UH Master Gardener

David Nash - Chair Na Ala Hele Advisory council, Oahu Mountain Bike Ohana, Owner - TheOahuAgents.com

Deborah Zysman, MPH, Hawaii Children’s Action Network

Dyson Chee, Advocacy Director, Hawai‘i Youth Climate Coalition

Hannah Hubanks, Vice Chair at Sierra Club Oahu Group

Holly Harding, AADP, INHC, The H Lyfe Method Integrative Health

Jane S Aquino, Manoa Community Garden

Kawika Ke Koa Pegram, Executive Director, Hawai‘i Youth Climate Coalition

Kristy Sakai, Kamali‘i Ola I ka Aina

Leonard Smothermon, President, Hawaii Kai Community Garden

Letitia Hickson, Garden Helpers Network

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Thomas Moniz, Diamond Head Community Garden

Tiffany Mathews, Diamond Head Community Garden

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Heather Caral
Heather Freeman
Heather Goodman
Ingrid Jall
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Isaac Moana, Sergeant, Active Duty Army
Isabella Kelley
Jack Bazzano
Jacob Fernandez
Jacqueline Lazarte
Jacquie Esser
Jade Shibata
Jake Guzzo
Jamie Manuwa
Janice Yokoyama
Jason Stanwood
Jay Palauan
Jay Velasco
Jaylen Murakami
Jeff Given
Jenna Lee Murad
Jesse Ayres
Jessica Thomson
Jiliana White
Joe
Joe Lopez, Citizen
Joel Mark
Joey Caballes
John Maxwell
Jon Gibson
Jon Theroux
Joseph Eale, Citizen Honolulu County
Josiah Lidge
Julianna Kelley
Julie Checknita
Justine Winkle
Kai Binney
Kaili Damalerio
Kamaka Preston
Kanani
Kapenakoa Liu
Kara O’Neill, Kindergarten Teacher
Keiana Rapoza
Kevin J. Cat, Sloth Mountain Biking Team, Aspiring MTBer
Kiana Otsuka
Kiani Mcbean
Kim Dauer
Maze Kinsey
Melissa Faith Ramirez
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Samuil Gaidaichuk
Sarah Fatonga
Sebastián Brito
Serena Baeseman
Shane Curtis
Shannon Yarber, Mom and Small Business Owner in Waimanalo
Sharon Leau
Shaylene Preston
Shoshanna Abing, Single Mother
Sierra Currie
Snezhana Mitsevich
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Tarena Monmaney
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