2020: FROM COVID-19 TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

The year 2020 ushered in a new decade, and with it came resolutions to create a better future. The 2020 legislative session was no exception. In January, the Senate, House, and governor unveiled an ambitious joint package to create an affordable and livable Hawai‘i. In an effort to help Hawai‘i residents struggling to make ends meet, the 2020 Cost of Living Initiative focused on four areas: increasing wages and tax credits for working families, creating long-term affordable housing solutions, improving aging school facilities, and providing early learning access to all 3- and 4-year-olds by 2030.

The tone of the legislature quickly changed as the risk of COVID-19 in Hawai‘i grew imminent. Their attention shifted from passing legislation for working families to emergency response and protection of public health. The state instituted a Stay-at-Home order and a mandatory 14-day travel quarantine to prevent an outbreak that could overwhelm Hawaii’s healthcare system. This helped keep Hawaii’s case count low, but also caused massive economic damage to the state. Thousands were out of work and the state faced a projected $2.3B budget shortfall. Federal funds flowed into the state to help with recovery, but could not cover budget deficits.

The COVID-19 pandemic also exacerbated the health disparities experienced by racial minorities and those living in poverty. The Black Lives Matter movement, fueled by the tragic deaths of several Black Americans, further highlighted inequities caused by racism. As the nation rebuilds from these two historic, transformational events, people no longer accept the status quo. They do not want to return to the old “normal.” Instead of being defined by the tragedies, we must use these events as an opportunity to confront these issues directly, rethink our priorities, and invest in a just society for a safe and healthy future.
2020 ELECTIONS

As the nation and state face turbulent times ahead, strong leadership is needed. Many difficult decisions will need to be made in the coming years, and elected officials will have a pivotal role in shaping policies that influence health, both in Hawai’i and nationally. To help voters know where candidates stand on important public health issues, Hawai’i Public Health Institute conducted a candidate survey available at hiphi.org/survey20.

With the threat of COVID-19, Hawaii’s adoption of all-mail voting could not have come at a better time. This year, all primary and general election ballots will arrive in the mailboxes of all registered voters. Ballots are completed from the safety of voters’ homes, then sealed and signed with multiple return options:
1) via mail (prepaid postage),
2) at a ballot drop box site, or
3) in-person at a voter service center.

2020 PRIMARY
BY THE NUMBERS

795,248 ballots mailed
51.2% voter turnout
121,010 more voters than the 2018 election

GENERAL ELECTION

Oct 5 Voter registration deadline
Oct 5-9 Ballots mailed out
Oct 20 Voter service centers open
Nov 3 General election
Despite efforts to undermine vote-by-mail, studies of existing mail-in voting efforts prove that there is no significant evidence of voter fraud. In fact, Hawai‘i has implemented several security measures to prevent this from happening:

**Signature Verification.** Voters must sign the ballot envelope before returning it. The signature is then closely examined by election officials to see if it matches the signature on file. The elections office only contacts voters to resolve an issue, such as a missing or mismatched signature, in an attempt to get the ballot counted. A new ballot is also reissued to the voter.

**Bar Codes.** Each voter has his or her own unique barcode, and when a ballot is submitted and scanned, it is recorded and tracked in the system. Voters can track receipt of their ballots online at [ballotstatus.hawaii.gov](http://ballotstatus.hawaii.gov).

Hawai‘i saw a record number of ballots returned in its first all-mail election. Hawai‘i is notorious for poor voter turnout rates, but the 2020 primary elections saw a 51.1 percent voter turnout rate, nearly 47 percent higher than the 2016 primary elections! Whether it was due to the convenience of being able to vote at home or a desire for change, this is a promising sign for Hawaii’s future elections.
2020 RACES TO WATCH

2020 marks an important presidential election year, with much at stake. Elected officials at the federal, state, and county levels will be taking office during turbulent, and often divided times. Strong leadership is needed to take on the monumental tasks of directing COVID-19 response, guiding the nation through recovery efforts, and working to dismantle racist systems. A select number of races to watch in the November General Election are highlighted in this election section.

PRESIDENT

The race for president between incumbent Donald Trump (running mate Mike Pence) and Joe Biden (running mate Kamala Harris) will dominate the November 3 ballot.
Both U.S. Representative seats are up for election. Incumbent Ed Case is seeking reelection and faced no Democratic opponents in the primary election. Republican Ron Curtis will be challenging Case in the general election. Hawaiʻi State Senator Kai Kahele hopes to take the seat vacated by Representative Tulsi Gabbard. Kahele faces a crowded field in the general election, with Joseph Akana, Ron Burrus, John Giuffre, Jonathan Hoomanawanui, and Michelle Rose Tippens also on the ballot.
Each of the 51 State House seats are up for election this year, along with 13 of the 25 State Senate seats. Some long-time incumbents lost their primary races to political newcomers; others are seeking other offices or not running for re-election, leading to some notable changes in the legislature’s makeup next year.

HOUSE
Several House members are running for different elected offices - Representatives Rida Cabanilla, Chris Lee, and Joy San Buenaventura are seeking seats in the State Senate, while Representative Calvin Say is running for Honolulu City Council. Representative Richard Creagan will not be seeking reelection due to COVID-19 concerns, and Representative Cynthia Thielen is retiring after 30 years of service. In addition, Representatives Tom Brower and Romy Cachola did not advance through the primary elections. In the upcoming general election, Adrian Tam will face off against Nicholas Ochs to replace Brower, while Sonny Ganaden is running against Tess Quillingking to fill Cachola’s seat.
Senator Breene Harimoto (SD16) passed away after a long battle with pancreatic cancer. HIPHI remembers Senator Harimoto for his sincerity, warmth, and passion for public health and thanks him for his many years of public service.

SENATE

Senators Russell Ruderman and Laura Thielen are not seeking re-election. In addition, Senator Kai Kahele, whose senate term ends in 2022, is running for Congress and will need to vacate his seat if he wins. Senator Breene Harimoto, whose seat was not originally up for election this year, sadly passed away on June 18. Bennette Misalucha was appointed to fill the District 16 seat until a special election can be held in November, where she will be running against Kelly Kitashima.

OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Four out of the nine seats on the board of trustees for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) are also on the ballot. Dan Ahuna has won a third term as the Kaua‘i trustee. Advancing to the general election are Keola Lindsey and Lanakila Mangauil for the Hawai‘i resident seat, incumbent Colette Machado and challenger Luana Alapa for the Molokai seat, and incumbent Keli‘i Akina and Keoni Souza for the at-large seat.
2020 RACES TO WATCH

MAYOR
The two mayoral races drew a large field of candidates, with 15 running to replace term-limited Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell and 13 other candidates challenging incumbent Hawai‘i Island Mayor Harry Kim. First-time candidates Keith Amemiya and Rick Blangiardi advanced to the general election for the Honolulu mayoral race. Hawai‘i County will also have a new mayor in 2021, with Ikaika Marzo and Mitch Roth beating out Kim in the primary elections.

PROSECUTOR
Kauai’s current prosecuting attorney, Justin Kollar, ran unopposed. Kelden Waltjen won the election for Hawai‘i County, replacing Mitch Roth, who is running for mayor. Steve Alm and Megan Kau are seeking to restore the public’s faith in the City and County of Honolulu’s Prosecuting Attorney’s office after embattled current prosecutor Keith Kaneshiro was named a target in a federal criminal investigation for corruption. Maui’s prosecuting attorney position, currently occupied by Don Guzman, is appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the county council.
COUNCIL
This year’s Honolulu City Council race is historic and drastically changes the makeup of the council, as five of the nine councilmembers are term-limited. Some of the incoming councilmembers will be familiar faces, with former state representatives Andria Tupola (District I) and Calvin Say (District V) winning the council races outright. Runoff elections will be held for the other three seats, with Esther Kia‘aina and Greg Thielen running for District III, Jacob Aki and Radiant Cordero and for District VII, and former State Senator Will Espero and Augie Tulba for District IX.

The other county councils have only one term-limited member each. Heather Kimball and Dominic Yagong seek to replace Valerie Poindexter (District 1) on Hawai‘i County Council. Alberta de Jetley and Gabe Johnson and are running for Maui County Councilmember Riki Hokama’s seat to represent Lāna‘i. Kaua‘i Councilmember Ross Kagawa is also term-limited, and the top seven candidates will form the final council.
COVID-19 KEY EVENTS

**HAWAI’I**

16 State legislature goes on hiatus.

17 First emergency order.

21 Mandatory 14-day quarantine (trans-Pacific).

23 "Stay at Home" order.

31 Mandatory 14-day quarantine (interisland).

18 Eviction moratorium.

7 "Safer-at-Home" order; beginning of reopening.

11-22 Legislature reconvenes.

18 "Act with Care" order; announced recovery plan.

22 Legislature reconvenes.

**MARCH**

6 Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act passes.

18 Families First Coronavirus Response Act becomes law.

**APRIL**

24 Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and Health Care Enhancement Act becomes law.

27 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act becomes law.

**MAY**


**JUNE**

10 Legislature adjourns (sine die).

16 Interisland travel quarantine lifted.

31 SB 126 signed into law.

4 PPP application period extended through August 8.

31 $600 plus up expires.

8 Lost Wages Supplemental Payment Assistance signed by President.

4 CDC issues a temporary halt on evictions until the end of 2020.

**NATIONAL**

After SARS-CoV-2 was discovered in late 2019 in Wuhan, China, the world watched nervously as the new virus spread and the death toll rose. Travel restrictions were enacted to slow its spread, but it was not enough to stop the first cases of COVID-19 from arriving in the U.S. in January. By March, COVID-19 was quickly spreading in hotspots like New York City. State and local governments were forced to take swift action while Congress worked on packages to support local pandemic response.
Facing both a public health emergency and an economic crisis, the federal government passed four bills in March and April 2020 totaling nearly $2.8 trillion in aid to assist state and local governments as they grappled with the pandemic’s effects. Early relief bills focused on outbreak response and public health infrastructure, while later bills attempted to ease the financial burden on state and local governments, businesses, and individuals.

Notable programs include the Paycheck Protection Program for small businesses, the $600 weekly plus up payments for unemployed workers, the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program for self-employed or gig workers that are not normally eligible for unemployment benefits, and the Coronavirus Relief Fund that provides financial aid to state and local governments for COVID-19 response. Congress has not passed another relief package since June, and several important programs have expired or are expiring soon. Negotiations for the next iteration of the relief package are ongoing.
Coronavirus Preparedness & Response Supplemental Appropriation Act

March 6, 2020

$8.3 billion

- Support for Medicaid telehealth efforts
- Medical supply purchases
- Support for vaccine research and development

Families First Coronavirus Act

March 18, 2020

$104 billion

- Free COVID-19 tests
- Support for paid leave
- Unemployment benefits
- Food assistance
- Emergency state funding

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, & Economic Security Act

March 27, 2020

$2.2 trillion

- Direct relief payments
- $600/week unemployment benefit
- Paycheck protection program
- Medical supply purchases
- Support for vaccine research and development

Paycheck Protection Program & Health Care Enhancement Act

April 24, 2020

$484 billion

- Extended PPP
- Financial assistance for hospitals
- COVID-19 test research and development
HA\WAI‘I SPENDING OF FEDERAL FUNDS

Through the four federal COVID-19 laws, Hawai‘i received more than $2 billion in federal assistance, not including funds provided directly to individuals or businesses such as the economic stimulus checks, Paycheck Protection Program loans or unemployment plus-up payments.

The Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) accounts for more than half of federal funds allocated to Hawaii’s state and county governments, providing $1.25 billion to be spent at their discretion. The only caveats for these funds are that expenses must be related to COVID-19, the money cannot be used to fill budget deficits, and any unspent funds after December 31 must be returned to the federal government.

Examples of programs funded through these efforts include financial assistance for businesses and individuals, increasing testing capacity, food distribution, personal protective equipment, and cleaning supplies. The next section will detail the COVID-19 responsibilities and response efforts of key state departments.
Because the funding landscape is constantly changing, we encourage you to visit Hawai‘i Data Collaborative’s live dashboard dedicated to monitoring federal funds received by Hawai‘i. To see allocations by category, track how funds were expended and more, visit hawaiidata.org/hawaii-covid-federal-funding.
COVID-19 RESPONSE BY DEPARTMENT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
The Department of Health (DOH) is responsible for the health and well-being of Hawaii’s residents and is one of the key departments managing the outbreak response for the COVID-19 pandemic. DOH’s most visible efforts are around testing, contact tracing, and data statistics, but their duties expand far beyond those areas. Other areas include managing isolation and quarantine facilities, programs for vulnerable populations, and behavioral and mental health services.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
The Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) works to help alleviate the economic hardship caused by unemployment, as well as workforce development. Responsible for operating the state’s Unemployment Insurance Division, they struggled to process the massive number of claims using an outdated system. DLIR also manages the newly created Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program that extends eligibility to individuals who normally do not qualify for traditional unemployment benefits. In addition, DLIR received funds for food assistance programs and training programs to help the unemployed and diversify the economy.
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Department of Education (DOE) is responsible for the state’s public education system. Schools were forced to transition to distance learning as COVID-19 abruptly interrupted the school year, just as students were scheduled to return to school in March after spring break. To help the transition, DOE received emergency funding to help educators adapt to virtual learning and ensure access to devices and internet for students. Beyond education, DOE offered free Grab-and-Go meals, often a critical food source for children from low-income families, at certain schools to all children under the age of 18 through the end of the school year and summer.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

The Department of Defense houses the Hawai’i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA), which helps to manage the state’s emergency response efforts. HIEMA has taken a leading role in the acquisition, management, and distribution of personal protective equipment and sanitation supplies.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

The Department of Transportation (DOT) oversees all modes of transportation in the state. In relation to COVID-19, their Airport division is responsible for implementing the travel quarantine in conjunction with the Attorney General. DOT received funding for an airport screening program, which included a thermal screening system and equipment to test, verify and monitor travelers.
HAWAI‘I BUDGET

Hawai‘i faces an unprecedented budget crisis due to the impact of COVID-19. In its September 9, 2020 forecast, the Council on Revenues anticipates a loss of $200M in tax collections next year, leaving the state with a cumulative loss of $2.3B by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2021. In addition to a hiring freeze, the administration is planning for additional budget cuts and furloughs, which can be damaging to an already injured economy and workforce.

IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- **Peak rate of unemployment** in April 2020. Compared to the average 2.4% in March, it represents 139,000 unemployed workers.
- **23.8%**

- **$3.3B**
  - Amount of Uninsurance Claims paid out by DUH as of September 24, 2020.
  - Increase in applications to MedQUEST, representing 49,363 new members from March - September 2020. 26.5% of Hawai‘i’s population is now covered by Medicaid.

- **177,000**
  - Total individuals participating in SNAP as of September 2020, representing a 15% increase in enrollment from January 2020.

- **887**
  - Positions eliminated by the Legislature in FY 2021, which includes 797 permanent FTEs and 90 temporary positions. No positions have been reinstated for FY 2022.

- **$383M**
  - Decrease in total general fund appropriations by the state legislature from FY 2020.

- **59.2%**
  - Percent of Hawai‘i’s workers that lost employment income in May, the highest rate of income loss in the nation.

- **$18.3M**
  - Total reduction in retirement benefit payments.
The Legislature worked on several bills when they reconvened in May and June to cope with the budget shortfall. In July, the Legislature finally passed a key budget bill (SB 126), amending the state budget and outlining a plan to use the state’s $635 million portion of the Coronavirus Relief Fund. This year, appropriations for all grant-in-aid operating and capital improvement projects were suspended. On July 30, Governor David Ige announced eight line-item vetoes to SB126, highlighted below.

### THE BUDGET: WHAT MADE THE CUT AND WHAT DIDN’T

The Legislature worked on several bills when they reconvened in May and June to cope with the budget shortfall. In July, the Legislature finally passed a key budget bill (SB 126), amending the state budget and outlining a plan to use the state’s $635 million portion of the Coronavirus Relief Fund. This year, appropriations for all grant-in-aid operating and capital improvement projects were suspended. On July 30, Governor David Ige announced eight line-item vetoes to SB126, highlighted below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNDED</th>
<th>NOT FUNDED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$70M for airport screening and enhanced health security measures</td>
<td>$230M to provide an additional $100 to weekly unemployment insurance payments to replace the $600 federal plus up funds lost in July (*Governor vetoed).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>($decreased from $90M).</td>
<td>$919K reduced funds for public health nursing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50M for a housing and rental assistance program</td>
<td>$2M reduced funds for alcohol and drug abuse division.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>($decreased from $100M).</td>
<td>$2.8M reduced funds for family health services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$61M for the purchase and distribution of personal protective</td>
<td>$1.4M reduced funds for chronic disease prevention and health promotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equipment (PPE) ($decreased from $100M).</td>
<td>$6.7M reduced funds for emergency medical services and injury prevention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10M in startup funding for businesses to create a local supply</td>
<td>$539K reduced funds for environmental health administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chain for PPE and sanitation supplies ($decreased from $15M).</td>
<td>$4.1M reduced funds for cash support for child care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10M for a retraining and workforce development program ($decreased</td>
<td>$30M reduced funds for health care payments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from $36M).</td>
<td>$359K reduced funds for the University of Hawaii’s John A. Burns School of Medicine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1M to support a public-private partnership program for high school</td>
<td>$22M reduced funds for school-based budgeting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>seniors affected by school closures ($decreased from $2M).</td>
<td>$5.4M reduced funds for special education and student support services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$21.6M for Hawai’i Health Systems Corporation (HHSC) operations.</td>
<td>$719K reduced funds for early learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>$19M subsidy for Maui Memorial Health.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$750K for Hawai’i Public Housing Authority’s rent subsidy program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>$750k for family planning (Act 113).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$4.1M for the Kūpuna Care Program (Act 123).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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2020 SESSION OVERVIEW

The start of the 2020 session was already different from most - in a unified front, the Governor and both chambers of the legislature announced a joint economic package to help working class families and individuals stay in Hawai‘i.

Despite these ambitious plans, the COVID-19 pandemic quickly changed the course of the legislature in March. The legislature went on several extended recesses, reconvening in May and June before finally adjourning on July 10. The short revoenings were primarily concerned with urgent budget and pandemic response bills, but a few non-COVID and budget related bills were also considered and passed.
Every year, thousands of bills are considered by the state legislature. 2020 was no different, with 2,336 bills introduced in January and 2,839 carry-over bills* from 2019. However, with the interruption from a global pandemic, the attention of the legislature shifted to emergency needs and response efforts. As a result, only 82 bills passed the legislature. In comparison, the legislature usually passes approximately 10% of bills introduced, or 200-300 bills.

*Bills that do not pass the legislature in the first year of the biennium are automatically “carried over” to the next session for consideration.
PUBLIC SAFETY

COVID-19
One of the most controversial bills this year would have provided the state’s Department of Health more authority to fight COVID-19 and future public health emergencies. The goal of HB 2502 (FAILED) was to provide the director of the Department of Health with additional powers during public health emergencies. This would allow the director to quickly take action to protect Hawaii’s residents from communicable and infectious diseases and implement measures such as screening, testing, mandatory quarantine, and isolation. Earlier versions of the bill would have given the director the authority to declare a public health emergency, a power normally reserved for the governor. Critics saw the bill as an overreach of authority and feared that their civil liberties were being infringed upon. Others questioned giving a non-elected official such broad policing powers. Supporters argued that the bill was necessary to give health experts - instead of politicians - the ability to make decisions during a public health emergency.

POLICE REFORM
The violent murder of George Floyd and countless others murdered as a result of police brutality renewed calls to reform the role of police and the criminal justice system. HB 285 (PASSED) requires that all county police departments publicly disclose information to the Legislature when an officer is suspended or discharged, including their identity. It authorizes the law enforcement standards board to revoke certifications and requires the board to review and recommend statewide policies and procedures that relate to law enforcement. Supporters said the bill provided greater accountability and transparency to policing and was the first of many steps to ensuring justice in the State of Hawai‘i. Opponents argued that it was premature to release the names of officers before allegations were investigated and that systemic racism in policing is not as big of an issue in Hawai‘i compared to the mainland.
PUBLIC SAFETY & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

RED LIGHT CAMERAS
HB 1676 (PASSED) establishes a two-year red light camera pilot program on O'ahu. The cameras would be set up at designated intersections with tickets issued via mail to the registered owner of a vehicle entering the intersection after the light turns red. Opponents called it another iteration of “van cams,” Hawaii’s earlier and unpopular attempt at photo enforcement to deter speeding. Supporters pushed back, saying the new program includes several measures to avoid many of the issues that plagued the previous program. These provisions include a public awareness and education campaign prior to implementation, license plate-only photos to protect privacy, no incentives tied to the number of tickets issued, and tickets generated from the program not affecting insurance rates.

COAL-GENERATED ELECTRICITY
There is only one remaining coal-generated electricity plant in Hawai‘i and its power purchase agreement is set to expire at the end of 2022. SB 2629 (PASSED) prohibits issuing or renewing power purchase agreements for coal-powered electricity, pushing Hawai‘i to be coal-free by 2023.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES
HB 2699 (FAILED) would have advanced clean transportation goals by transitioning the state's fleet of light-duty motor vehicles to be 100 percent powered by renewable energy sources by December 31, 2035.
TOBACCO

In response to Hawaii’s high rates of youth e-cigarette use and nationwide reports of lung injuries associated with vaping, several bills attempted to regulate these products. **SB 2227 (FAILED)** would have subjected e-cigarettes to a tobacco tax and restricted online sales to consumers. Supporters said this legislation would close the loophole that allowed underage youth to purchase e-cigarettes. **HB 2457 (FAILED)** sought to decrease the appeal of tobacco to youth by prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products in Hawai‘i with the exception of menthol. For underage youth caught with a tobacco product, the bill also offered tobacco education courses, cessation programs or community service as an alternative to fines. Supporters asserted that it was essential all flavors were included to prevent youth from switching to remaining legal flavors. They also emphasized that any penalties should focus on the industry instead of youth that have fallen victim to predatory advertising. Opponents argued that adults also enjoy flavors and that the bill would severely impact e-cigarette retailers. They also warned that some e-cigarette users may return to cigarettes if flavors were prohibited.

CANNABIS

Lawmakers also continued to work on improving Hawaii’s medical cannabis laws. **HB 2097 (PASSED)** allows the Department of Health to expand the list of allowable edible products, allow remediation under certain circumstances, and permit licensed dispensaries to provide educational and sponsor events related to medical cannabis. Prior to this legislation, edible products were not allowed and any products that failed testing had to be destroyed. Remediation allows failed batches to be retested after treatment to fix the issue.

ALCOHOL

For several years, bills have been introduced seeking to lower the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) limit allowed to operate a vehicle. **HB 2464 (FAILED)** would have lowered the BAC threshold from 0.08 to 0.05. Opponents claimed that 0.05 BAC is too low and would penalize moderate drinkers, while supporters said that a person’s ability to drive is already impaired at 0.05 BAC, with decreased alertness and delayed responses.
This year, the legislature and governor committed to the 2020 Cost of Living package: four bills meant to help the ALICE population (an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, named after the Aloha United Way report). ALICE represents working families and households that struggle to afford essential needs and are only one financial emergency away from having to make impossible choices between necessities. The COVID-19 crisis soon shifted legislative priorities, but with the economic fallout from the pandemic, the need was greater than ever.

**IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 ECONOMIC SHOCK**

- **42%** (or 190,390) Households ALICE or below before COVID
- **59%** (or 268,531) Households ALICE or below following the sudden economic shock of the COVID shut down

Source: Hawai’i Data Collaborative and Aloha United Way, June 2020
2020 COST OF LIVING INITIATIVE

HB 2541 (FAILED) would have gradually increased the minimum wage to $13 per hour by 2024, made the earned income tax credit (EITC) permanent and refundable, and adjusted the food/excise tax credit. The EITC reduces the tax liability for low-income workers, allowing them to keep more of their paycheck. Making the EITC refundable would allow these workers to receive cash if the tax credit exceeded what they owed in taxes.

SB 3104 (FAILED) attempted to increase the inventory of affordable housing in Hawai‘i. Some provisions included leasing public lands to build affordable housing and reducing the number of processes developers must undergo to speed up the process. In testimony, there was much discussion on what qualifies as “affordable” and how to ensure these units went to the intended recipients.

HB 2543 (PASSED) updates the state’s early childhood plan with the ambitious goal of providing access to public preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds in the state by 2030. Considering the high cost of private preschools and limited supply of public preschools, increasing access to more affordable options is important to support working parents. Robust conversation arose on whether the emphasis was on the quality of early learning opportunities or providing childcare to allow parents to work.

SB 3103 (PASSED) creates a School Facilities Agency to take over the development, planning and construction of capital improvement projects at public schools from the Department of Education with the goal of expediting the process. Most testifiers agreed on the need to make school construction projects more efficient, but earlier iterations of the bill raised concerns about exemptions to procurement, environmental, and historic preservation laws. Most of the exemptions were removed in the final version of the bill.

Not part of the package was SB 2491 (FAILED), which would have established a family leave insurance benefits program. It would have provided for up to sixteen weeks of leave for their own medical reasons, including pregnancy and adoption, or to care for an ill family member.
YOUTH ACCESS TO SERVICES
Hawaii’s existing statute allows minors ages 14 years and older to receive mental health services from licensed professionals without their parent or guardian’s consent. **HB 2043 (PASSED)** adds provisions to increase access to mental health professionals and ensure confidentiality, both potential barriers that may prevent youth from utilizing the current law. It accomplishes this by preventing health plans from disclosing service and payment information to the minor’s parents or guardians and allows minors to receive services from health professionals-in-training under the supervision of a licensed professional.

ER TREATMENT FOR THE HOMELESS
**SB 3117 (PASSED)** extends the emergency department homelessness assessment pilot program and the medical respite pilot program through June 30, 2021. These pilot programs aim to prevent expensive, unnecessary emergency room visits by providing homeless patients with social services, such as free meals, case management, and continuous healthcare, as well as a pathway to permanent housing.

STABILIZATION BEDS
**SB 2505 (FAILED)** would have repurposed unused state facilities to create more stabilization beds for patients struggling with mental health, substance use, or homelessness. The increase in capacity is part of a larger effort to provide coordinated care for behavioral health patients and lessen the burden on Hawaii’s emergency departments and police.

MEDICAID
**HB 668 (FAILED)** would require DHS to receive approval from the legislature prior to executing a contract that would reduce the number of Medicaid plans available in any part of Hawai‘i. This in response to MedQUEST’s announcement in January to contract with four health plans statewide, with just two operating on the neighbor islands, a restriction which some health plans deemed unfair.
At the beginning of the 2020 legislative session, HIPHI and partners compiled a list of priorities for our public health agenda.

Here’s how the priorities that were introduced fared...
TOBACCO PREVENTION & CONTROL

- Prohibit the sale of all flavored tobacco products and vaping liquids, including menthol, to prevent and protect youth from a lifetime addiction to tobacco.
- Create policy parity between cigarettes and e-cigarettes through regulations that include restricting online sales and requiring taxing, permitting, and licensing.

HEALTHY EATING + ACTIVE LIVING

- Change school meal debt rules to ensure children aren’t denied school meals.

ALCOHOL, SUBSTANCE USE & MENTAL HEALTH

- Create access to services for individuals who are ineligible for Developmental Disabilities services such as those with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.
- Authorize the Department of Education to provide annual special training on addressing students who are at high-risk for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
HEALTHCARE & WORKFORCE

- Provide matching funds for the Hawai‘i State Loan Repayment program for healthcare professionals who work in federally-designated health professional shortage areas. **Failed**
- Establish a rural workforce development fund to support neighbor island travel and test taking costs for eligible healthcare professionals without regional certification and test taking facilities on their island. **Failed**

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

- Appropriate $150 million to the Rental Housing Revolving Fund to build low-income rental housing. **Failed**
- Appropriate $25 million to create a new Affordable Home Ownership Revolving Fund for those earning up to 80 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI). **Failed**
- Appropriate $2.5 million for Hawai‘i Public Housing Authority School Street Senior Housing Project for up to 60 percent AMI. **Passed**
- Appropriate $5 million for a Rent Supplement Program (Partially funded). **Passed**
- Appropriate $2.5 million for long-term case management for homeless going into housing who need supportive services. **Failed**
Increase the efficacy of the State Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program
Increase eviction protections for Hawai‘i renters.

TRANSPORTATION & PUBLIC SAFETY

Enable legislation for camera enforcement of red light violations.

ECONOMIC JUSTICE & FAMILY HEALTH

Raise the minimum wage to $17 per hour.
Establish a family leave insurance program in Hawai‘i to provide 16 weeks of partial wage replacement, based on a slide scale.
Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit to a refundable credit and eliminate the sunset date.
Continue funding for the Kūpuna Caregivers program at $2 million per year.
ORAL HEALTH

Failed

Re-appropriate funding for adult dental care as a benefit for Medicaid enrollees.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Passed

Eliminate the use of coal in Hawai‘i for electricity production by 2023.

Failed

Require the relocation of Red Hill fuel tanks away from Oahu’s drinking water aquifer.

Failed

Funding for behavior/substance abuse beds.
LOOKING AHEAD

2020 has been a year of change. Change in our everyday lives. Change in what we view as “normal.” Change in our acceptance of the status quo. While none of these changes have come without significant challenges and sacrifice, it’s allowed us to make significant progress.

Without these disruptions, we would not see some much-needed change. The fragility of our government’s emergency response efforts were exposed, leading to long-overdue technological upgrades and improvements. For years Hawai‘i has tried to decrease its dependency on tourism, but now there is an urgency to diversify our economy into more sustainable jobs. Nationally, it started the discussion to reexamine systems that have perpetuated inequities.

As we look to an uncertain future, we are still hopeful. We hope that even with historic budget shortfalls, the legislature renews its commitment to helping working families and does not cut safety-net programs. When times are tough, policies and programs for our most vulnerable residents are needed for long-term recovery. We hope that the technological advances made during COVID-19 continue to increase access to and transparency of government services and processes. Remote testimony has been requested for years by neighbor island residents seeking a voice in the legislative process - now is the perfect time to make it happen. We hope that public discourse on equity and social justice turn into action. These changes are centuries overdue and cannot be put off for another year. We must continue to learn from the many difficult lessons of this year; allowing the status quo to continue would be the true tragedy of 2020.
Paddle out for George Floyd, Honolulu, June 7, 2020

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MISSION
To advance the health and wellness of the people and islands of Hawai‘i.

TO ACHIEVE OUR MISSION, WE...
• Expand understanding of what creates health of people and place, embracing upstream social, cultural and environmental factors.
• Foster partnerships among public health, health care, and other diverse sectors to improve health and wellness.
• Cultivate programs — including education, advocacy, research, capacity building and training — to improve policies, systems, and the environments where people live, learn, work, age, and play.

HIPHI is home to Coalition for a Tobacco-Free Hawai‘i, Hawai‘i Farm to School Hui, Healthy Eating + Active Living (HEAL) county coalitions, and the Obesity Prevention Task Force.

learn more about HIPHI at hiph.org.