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May 20, 2020

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
Senate President
Hawai'i State Senate
State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Honorable Scott K. Saiki
House Speaker
Hawai'i State House of Representatives
State Capitol, Room 431
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Re: COVID-19 Testing

Aloha Senate President Kouchi and Speaker Saiki:

As elected officials, we are all deeply troubled by the economic devastation that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused. It has hit the mainstay of our state's economy, our visitor industry, particularly hard. The 14-day quarantine imposed by the Governor on incoming travelers from out-of-state as well as on inter-island travel has slowed the arrival of visitors to a trickle, resulting in massive layoffs of hotel employees and a substantial reduction in visitor spending, with the attendant loss of revenue to the state and counties.

Given the extreme financial hardship the shutdown of our visitor industry has inflicted on our constituents, state and county governments need to work together in developing plans to lift the travel quarantine and begin reopening our tourism market in the near term, while affording maximum protection to our fellow residents from this dangerous and highly contagious virus.

Public health officials and medical experts from across the country have emphasized that the key to safely reopening our economy is widespread testing and contact tracing. The ideal testing system would require all travelers to undergo tests before boarding an airplane to Hawai'i . However, the reality is that many travelers will not have access to coronavirus testing before arriving in Hawai'i in the near-term given limited testing capacity in mainland and international jurisdictions. Therefore, it is clear that if the objective is to reopen our tourism economy in the coming months, then the state needs to ramp up its testing capabilities now.

In this regard, we respectfully request that the Legislature consider allocating funds to implement a proactive diagnostic viral testing system, which would include nasal swab tests, that every traveler entering Hawai'i would be required to undergo. It is our understanding that diagnostic viral test results could be finalized within approximately twenty-four hours. Moreover, although not foolproof, such tests have a high degree of accuracy. Antigen testing which can deliver results within minutes could eventually be utilized when the testing devices become more widely available and their reliability firmly established.

The tests would be administered not only to individuals who exhibit symptoms, but also to those who are asymptomatic since they may also be carriers of the virus. This is why thermal screening alone, which diagnose fever symptoms, is not sufficient. Based on discussions we have had with health care professionals involved in organizing testing sites locally, the key components of a diagnostic viral testing system for incoming travelers would include the following:

- An individual would be required to undergo a test either before embarkation or upon arrival in Hawai'i. A person who obtains a test out-of-state would have to furnish a certification form, approved by the Department of Health (DOH), to airport officials upon arrival indicating that a test was administered in accordance with DOH specifications and that the test results were negative.
- Travelers who have not undergone testing prior to arrival would be given the option to have the test administered in Hawai'i on the day of arrival or complete the 14-day travel quarantine currently required under the Governor's emergency supplementary proclamation.
- The tests could be administered at the airport or, if this would not be workable, at a facility designated by the state. Possible testing sites could include vacant hotel properties adjacent to the airport. Visitors would be required to stay at the designated testing facility while awaiting test results.
- Travelers whose test results are negative would be offered another diagnostic viral test seven days after the initial tests, whether performed prior to embarkation or upon arrival, to confirm the negative test results.

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- Those who test positive would be immediately isolated and contact traced to contain transmission of the virus. Again, the state should seriously consider utilizing vacant hotels for isolation and quarantine purposes. We would like to note that on May 6, 2020, the City Council unanimously passed Resolution 20-107, FD1 which urges the Governor, Mayor, state Health and Emergency Management officials and the hotel industry to develop a plan for the use of designated hotels for isolation and quarantine purposes.
- Moreover, it is important for the state to hire and/or train a large number of contact tracers to track people who have come into contact with visitors who are carrying the virus. Tests administered in Hawai'i would be overseen and monitored by DOH.

Funding for the expanded testing program that we are proposing could come from a variety of sources including: fees charged to visitors; monies from the general fund; a portion of TAT revenues; airport landing fees or surcharge on airline tickets or merchandise purchased at the airport. The state can also tap substantial federal funding that Congress has approved to expand testing capacity throughout the country.

We respectfully request your careful consideration of our proposals. Thank you for your attention to the above matters.

Very sincerely yours,



Ron Menor
Council Chair Emeritus



Tommy Waters
Chair, Select Committee on Economic Assistance and Revitalization

cc: Members of the Hawai'i State Senate
Members of the Hawai'i State House of Representatives