

May 20, 2020

STATE LEADERS URGED TO RESTART ECONOMY BY TESTING TRAVELERS

Honolulu City Council Chair Emeritus Ron Menor and Councilmember Tommy Waters today urged state leaders to work together with the counties to begin repairing our economy, devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, by taking a more proactive stance with testing.

In a letter addressed to State Senate President Ron Kouchi and House Speaker Scott Saiki, the councilmembers said they're deeply troubled by the statewide downturn that continues to hurt thousands of our residents. The 14-day quarantine for all incoming passengers, which Governor David Ige yesterday extended until June 30, has slowed visitor arrivals to a trickle.

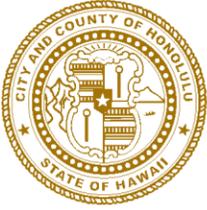
“COVID-19 has inflicted tremendous financial hardship on our island communities with the collapse of tourism,” said Chair Emeritus Menor. “It’s urgent that we develop viable plans to begin reopening our tourism market while maintaining maximum protection for the public from the highly contagious virus. Therefore, we ask state legislators to seriously consider allocating funds to implement a proactive diagnostic viral testing of travelers entering Hawai‘i that produce test results within 24 hours.”

Public health officials and medical experts continue to emphasize that widespread testing and contact tracing are vital to safely reopening the economy. Councilmembers Menor and Waters strongly urge the State of Hawai‘i to expand and improve its testing of travelers and those who work in the tourism industry.

“It would be ideal if all travelers were required to undergo testing before boarding an airplane to Hawai‘i, but that’s not realistic or likely in the near term,” said Councilmember Waters. “If the objective is to reopen our tourism economy in the coming months, then the state really needs to ramp up its testing capabilities now.”

The proposed diagnostic viral tests would be administered to all incoming travelers unless a passenger can furnish a certification form, approved by the Department of Health, proving they underwent testing prior to boarding the plane and their test results were negative. Travelers can choose to have the test administered on the day of arrival or complete the 14-day quarantine currently in effect.

“We support the councilmembers’ position on testing and contact tracing for visitors and workers alike,” said Eric Gill, financial secretary-treasurer of Unite Here, Local 5. “An important consideration for reopening tourism is to ensure the safety of the workplace.”



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The tests, being proposed, could be administered at the airport or at a facility, designated by the state, where visitors would be required to stay and wait for their test results. If test results are negative, those visitors would be offered another diagnostic viral test seven days after the initial tests to confirm the negative test results. Travelers who test positive would be immediately isolated and contact tracing would commence to contain community spread.

“I support the councilmembers’ proposals toward this very important effort,” said Jerry Gibson, vice president of the Turtle Bay Resort. “It is crucial to start the engines of our tourism business as quickly and with the utmost attention to excellent health protocols as we possibly can.”

The Honolulu City Council recently adopted Resolution 20-107, FD1, which urges state government leaders, emergency and health officials and the hotel industry to utilize hotels for isolation and/or quarantine purposes, and to hire many contact tracers to track individuals who came into contact with anyone who tests positive. The Council remains ready to work with any agency to repair our economy and help our residents in dire need of financial relief.

The letter, written by Chair Emeritus Menor and Councilmember Waters, is attached to this news release email.

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