

# HONOLULU STAR-ADVERTISER

*President and Publisher*  
Dennis Francis

*Editorial Page Editor*  
Lucy Young-Oda

*Deputy Editorial Page Editor*  
Stephen J. Downes

*Vice President / Editor*  
Frank Bridgewater

[lyoungoda@staradvertiser.com](mailto:lyoungoda@staradvertiser.com)  
529-4831

*Editorial Page Staff*  
Maureen O'Connell / Vicki Wotli

## OAHU PUBLICATIONS INC.

### Board of Directors

Dennis Francis	Colbert Matsumoto
Larry Johnson	Jeffrey Watanabe
Duane Kurisu	Michael Wo

### ISLAND VOICES

# Housing and homelessness: Let's stick with what works

By Marc Alexander

The Hawaii Legislature is at a critical juncture as various bills addressing housing and homelessness enter their final stage. Much of the attention has been focused on so-called "ohana zone" proposals, the definition of which no one seems to agree on.

The "ohana zones" that some lawmakers are describing seem similar to safe zones, which are not safe and don't work. We think it's time for the Legislature to focus on what we know does work and truly helps our vulnerable homeless citizens and the community as a whole.

Last year, Honolulu experienced only a 0.4 percent increase in homelessness. In



*Marc Alexander is executive director of the city Office of Housing.*

fact, the City and County of Honolulu has a lower rate of homelessness than cities like Seattle (their homelessness count increased by 9 percent), Las Vegas, San Francisco, San Diego and Los Angeles.

Of course, here locally, people remain frustrated because the visible and unsheltered homeless population continues to increase, despite the progress we have

made in moving sheltered homeless persons into housing, especially families (14 percent fewer homeless families in 2017).

I believe that everyone — every child, woman and man — needs a home in order to truly prosper. I also believe that the only permanent solution to homelessness is housing with an effective support system, including mental health and addiction services.

For most of Honolulu's 1,159 chronically homeless persons — those struggling with mental illness, addiction and physical disabilities — Housing First is the intervention of choice. Housing First provides housing without condition, offers effective services to clients, and both the city and state Housing

First programs have demonstrated excellent results.

In fact, the University of Hawaii's evaluation of the city's Housing First program showed that 89 percent of clients remained in housing after two years. In addition, 64 percent were less likely to visit an emergency room and 61 percent less likely to be arrested. It is estimated that an unsheltered homeless person costs the community \$40,000 to \$80,000 annually, while Housing First costs between \$20,000 to \$30,000 per person, per year.

As state and city government continues to address the creation of more affordable housing, one of the most promising approaches is public-private partnerships, as seen recently in

Kahauiki Village. On Jan. 12, 30 homeless families (114 individuals, including 64 children) moved into their own homes complete with kitchens and bathrooms and were no longer counted among the homeless population.

The initial, first phase of the project took six months and one day to complete, from groundbreaking to move-in. When the full array of 153 units is completed, the cost per unit will be less than \$130,000, including infrastructure.

We need to keep expanding programs and projects like Housing First and Kahauiki Village that deliver proven and cost-effective results, and not waste time on failed and hard to define social experiments. In addition,

we need to expand other programs that move people into housing and help keep them housed once they're there, including mental health services, addiction services, housing subsidies, effective outreach, navigation centers and LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion).

Finally, we need to support and expand proven programs that increase affordable housing, including the state Rental Housing Revolving Fund and Dwelling Unit Revolving Fund.

We know what works. It's time for our legislators to exercise clear leadership and fund initiatives with proven results that rally help to those who are among the most vulnerable in our community.