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Press Release by:

Councilmember MICHAEL J. MOLINA 

Molina responds to Mayor's attacks on proposed Department of Housing

WAILUKU – On June 30, 2020, Mayor Michael P. Victorino, stated that Councilmember Michael J. Molina's proposal to bifurcate the Department of Housing and Human Concerns "is reckless."

On Tuesday, June 23, 2020 the Council's Governance, Ethics and Transparency (GET) Committee recommended the approval of a proposed resolution, sponsored by Councilmember Molina, on first reading to the full Council.

The proposed resolution would separate the Department of Housing and Human Concerns (DHHC), into the Department of Housing and the Department of Human Concerns.

The intent of the proposed resolution is to allow a greater focus on the creation of affordable housing and permit increased concentration on human service needs.

"The Mayor's comments were overly dramatic, said Molina. The Mayor should be thanking the Council for providing him the tools to create affordable housing and address human needs."

The Mayor also criticized the Council for making "changes to the County's organization without properly analyzing how the amendments will benefit the economy, efficiency and services."

"Unfortunately, the Mayor's comments are baseless because the Council's GET Committee reviewed the matter at three meetings and the Director of DHHC has provided written and oral comments on the proposal."

"The proposal was well vetted by GET and was seen as a necessity, especially during these difficult times, where people are out of work, needing financial assistance and requiring shelter; the timing for this couldn't have been better," said Molina.

The Mayor also noted concerns about the Council's lack of review of the "benefits to the economy and services".

The main purpose of the proposal is to have the new Department of Housing (Housing) take a greater role in the creation of dwellings, affordable to families in need.

“If implemented correctly, the proposal will allow Housing to take the initiative as a developer or co-developer for affordable housing, said Molina. Building dwellings will put people back to work, put money in their pockets and boost their moral by providing shelter.”

“Mr. Mayor this sounds like a great “benefit to our economy”, said Molina.

The Mayor continues on with his criticism by saying the bifurcation “does not create any additional responsibilities or fund the necessary positions required.”

“It appears the Mayor has not read the proposed resolution. The proposal spells out and expands the responsibilities of Housing, said Molina.”

Currently, the Charter only identifies three areas of responsibility as it relates to housing, Councilmember Molina’s proposal increases the new department’s assignments, such as:

1. The creation of affordable housing units.
2. Develop and implement a comprehensive housing plan (which the Mayor declined to do).
3. Promote and expand new housing opportunities for homeless and needy families.
4. Increase affordable housing stock.
5. Expand existing housing programs.

Accordingly, Lori Tsuhako, the Director of DHHC has stated in correspondence dated May 6, 2020, “Ultimately, separating housing from human concerns may allow the departments to focus more effectively on their respective area of jurisdiction.”

“This statement is very powerful, even the Mayor’s Director admits that bifurcation could assist with developing affordable housing and address human needs,” said Molina.

Furthermore, the Mayor was critical that the Council did not “fund the necessary positions required to move housing initiatives forward.”

The DHHC Director provided GET with the funding requirements for the new department, therefore the committee fully vetting expenditures.

“Additionally, Mr. Mayor, the Council can’t fund expanded positions for the new department until the voters have spoken, you’re getting ahead of yourself, said Molina.”

Molina said, “My record speaks for itself as it relates to affordable housing, I introduced the Affordable Housing Fund, the First-Time Homebuyers Program, the resolution to initiate the Comprehensive Affordable Housing Plan and now a new tool to bifurcate DHHC.”

“Mr. Mayor it’s time to Call for Action, stop the talk, stop the criticism and start producing housing. Your criticism of this proposal appears to be a redirection of your disastrous housing policies, said Molina.”

The proposed resolution will be sent to the Council for consideration at its regular meeting of July 24, 2020 for first reading. The proposed resolution is a Charter Amendment and will require two reading by the Council.

** Mike Molina is Chair of the Council’s Governance, Ethics, and Transparency Committee. He holds the council seat for the Makawao-Haiku-Paia residency area.*

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