

January 25, 2022

MEMO TO: Traci N. T. Fujita, Director of Council Services

F R O M: Laksmi Abraham, Legislative Analyst *LMA*
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SUBJECT: **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING: “CIVIL CAFÉ LEGISLATIVE PREVIEW”** (PAF 21-012(26))

On January 13, 2022, Honolulu Civil Beat held a Civil Café webinar with Representative Della Au Belatti, Representative Sylvia Luke, and Senator Chris Lee in a panel discussion on the 2022 Legislative Session, which began on January 19. Issues covered included the State budget, affordable housing, the minimum wage, homelessness and ‘Ohana Zones, health care, the new Aloha Stadium, the Oahu Community Correctional Center (“OCCC”), and managing tourism.

The budget discussion included questions on Governor David Y. Ige’s desire to set aside \$1 billion for the rainy day fund and the Legislature’s use of projected revenue that exceeds the Governor’s budget by \$890 million.

Panelists said the provision of affordable housing and increasing the minimum wage can help residents in the “ALICE” group: Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed. Even before the pandemic, the Legislature prioritized addressing issues for this community. During the pandemic, State government worked together to prioritize helping people who need it the most, providing a model for further progress. Related issues included workforce development and mitigating inflation.

The Legislature will also continue to address homelessness, which the State saw grow during the pandemic. Community participation increased and the public came together in a way that was not previously seen, which provided a major social safety net. More housing was provided where other social services could be provided, which is something they hope to replicate in a way that can be harnessed for communities, and the hope is that community organizations and providers will continue to collaborate with the State in a way that will alleviate the burden. There is a need to provide mental-health services in addition to housing.

‘Ohana Zones have served 5,067 people statewide and placed 1,129 into permanent housing. The initiative was created through Act 209 (2018), which

appropriated \$30 million, and the program was expanded by \$2 million through Act 128 (2019). Acts 209 and 128 require that projects receiving 'Ohana Zone funds have a connection to State and county land and provide services to help homeless individuals and families to access permanent housing. A minimum of six projects were required to be developed with these funds: three sites on O'ahu and one each in Maui County, Kaua'i County, and Hawai'i County. The Legislature hopes to continue expanding funding for 'Ohana Zones in this year's budget.

With COVID-19 putting pressure on the healthcare system, the Legislature is looking into methods to free up private hospitals and long-term-care facilities so they may be used as intended. The legislators also suggested that rather than continuing to increase funding for health care, the State should take a closer look at where the money should be invested within the healthcare sector to best serve community needs and most efficiently address shortfalls.

Legislators expressed frustration over plans for the new Aloha Stadium on O'ahu. Community concerns and increasing expense projections have the Legislature wanting to consider other routes, including allowing the University of Hawai'i to build the stadium site. But for now at least, construction is set to begin in 2023, with the State providing \$350 million to the New Aloha Stadium Entertainment District and an additional \$1.65 billion coming from the private sector.

The expansion of OCCC was also discussed, with legislators expressing skepticism of the need. The Legislature believes that prison-population issues can be addressed by other initiatives, including phasing out cash bail and investing in diversion and treatment programs.

The Legislature is interested in managing tourism to provide better benefits for residents. There has been an expansion on conversations around so-called green fees—charging visitors to provide funding for environmental protection—and environmentally friendly tourism. Because air travel is not regulated by the State, there is no way to cap tourism. The solution lies in protecting natural areas and educating tourists on their responsibility to be good stewards of the environment and to give back where they can.

Thank you for the opportunity to attend this informative webinar. Please let us know if you have any questions.

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cc: David Raatz, Deputy Director of Council Services