

Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander



**HAWAI'I
COVID-19**

Response Recovery Resilience

TEAM

August 25, 2020

Committee on Economic Assistance and Revitalization
City Council
City and County of Honolulu
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813-3077

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT WITH COMMENTS of Resolution 20-206,
Proclaiming Honolulu City Council's Commitment to Equity and Social
Justice**

Aloha mai * Talofa * Yokwe * Kaselehlie * Alii * Hafa adai * Mālō e lelei * e
Chair Waters, Vice Chair Kobayshi and Council Members of the Committee on
Economic Assistance and Revitalization,

The Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander COVID-19 Response, Recovery and Resilience Team (NHPI Hawai'i COVID-19 Team) offers its **support and comments** for Resolution 20-206 Proclaiming the Honolulu City Council's Commitment to Equity and Social Justice and to the Realization of Equitable Outcomes for Frontline Communities Through COVID-19 Pandemic Economic Recovery Programs (hereinafter "Resolution"). **The NHPI Hawai'i COVID-19 Team supports this resolution particularly as it applies to employment, housing, education, and also suggests explicitly listing Micronesians as part of the frontline communities that this Resolution is intended to positively impact.**

The Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Hawai'i COVID-19 Response Recovery Resilience Team (NHPI 3R) was established in April 2020, in alignment with the national NHPI Response Team, to improve the collection and reporting of accurate data, identify and lend support to initiatives across the Hawaiian islands working to address COVID-19 among Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, and unify to establish a presence in the decision-making processes and policies that impact our communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted Hawai'i's extreme and growing vulnerabilities to a number of potential and growing threats to the health, economic stability, and cultural identities of our islands' communities. These threats and vulnerabilities, in addition to the current pandemic itself, counsel the urgent need to seek new, innovative solutions to restore and reinforce the resiliency and self-sufficiency of our islands. The current pandemic's impacts, which have particularly affected Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and others already challenged by systemic biases and social inequities, also further counsel the need for these solutions to consider and protect in particular those communities that are too often overlooked or left behind in public policies, socioeconomic development strategies, and government decisionmaking.

The NHPI Hawai'i COVID-19 Team supports and commends your commitment to equity, as the resolution states, "is the correction of broken systems in order to eliminate disparate outcomes based on identity." Further, we acknowledge and honor the decades-long efforts made for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander health equity as influenced by social determinants of health. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander social determinants of health are inclusive of determinants already listed within the Resolution. While there is extensive research to inform the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander health disparities experienced with each social determinant of health, we comment on three: **employment, housing and education.**

The NHPI Hawai'i COVID-19 Team further supports and commends your reference to the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women's and Aloha 'Āina Economic Futures' COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery plans that focus on equity issues. We add that many of the frontline communities that are currently working low to minimum wage tourism-driven jobs are part of our NHPI community. **We further encourage moving away from a tourism-only driven economy to include supporting local agriculture, particularly NHPI farmers who are already doing the work.** Supporting our local agriculture will provide a sustainable, circular economic future that also furthers the Office of Climate Change, Sustainability, and Resiliency's Equity Program. Additionally, we also ask for your support of NHPI community members who are currently unemployed but possess the skills to assist with COVID-19 response efforts like contact tracing. This is another example in which our NHPI community members are already embedded within these NHPI communities experiencing disparate COVID-19 impacts, and are ready to assist with COVID-19 recovery efforts.

We also encourage referencing the Office of Hawaiian Affairs' Haumea Report¹ that specifically looks at the health and well-being of Native Hawaiian wāhine. It is important to note not only an economic recovery plan that centers on women, but also how centering Native Hawaiian women is aligned with your Resolution to center our most vulnerable with the COVID-19 increased impacts, risks, and challenges on Native Hawaiian wāhine.

¹ See generally, Office of Hawaiian Affairs, *Haumea – Transforming the Health of Native Hawaiian Women and Empowering Wāhine Well-Being*, at 4 (2018), available at <https://www.oha.org/wahinehealth>.

Housing is a social determinant of health² with three main but intersecting constructs: adequate housing conditions, affordability, and residential stability.^{3,4}

Housing is particularly critical to achieving equitable outcomes⁵ for our NHPI frontline communities, and COVID-19 has further exacerbated the need for not only housing, but also affordable housing. Adding to our recent press conference statement denouncing the improper discriminatory treatment of landlords illegally evicting our NHPI community members, we also comment on the COVID-19 health impacts. Much of the frontline communities, as the Resolution notes, is made up of our NHPI population. In addition to the majority of frontline communities working low to minimum wage jobs where they are frontline employees during this pandemic, housing is another compounding determinant resulting in a disparate impact of COVID-19 on our NHPI communities. The lack of housing, affordable housing, and the close living quarters in which our NHPI live have resulted in difficulties for our NHPI community to quarantine or isolate during COVID-19.

Inadequate housing conditions are associated with both physical and mental illnesses through direct and indirect pathways. As housing conditions are tied to economic factors, vulnerable populations (i.e., racial/ethnic minorities, families with young children, the elderly, and low-income households, Medicaid and Medicare beneficiaries) are most likely to be housing insecure and suffer health consequences related to poor housing conditions, residential instability and unaffordable housing expenses.

Additionally, we suggest adding education as part of the equitable commitments outlined within this resolution. **Education is positively correlated with positive health outcomes.⁶** There is extensive literature that further demonstrates this positive correlation, and also the role of education as it relates to economic recovery, revitalization, and resilience. The Hawai'i State Department of Education also commits to equity in its Strategic Plan,⁷ but yet our NHPI communities are particularly impacted with the inequities experienced at public and charter schools⁸ that is highly represented with our NHPI students.

² Thomson H, Thomas S, Sellstrom E, Petticrew M. Housing improvements for health and associated socio-economic outcomes. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2013, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD008657. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD008657.pub2.

³ Koh HK, Restuccia R. Housing as Health. *JAMA*. 2018;319(1):12–13. doi: 10.1001/jama.2017.20081

⁴ Hernandez & Suglia (2016). Housing as a Social Determinant of Health. Accessed from <https://healthequity.globalpolicysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Housing2.pdf>

⁵ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2017. *Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/24624>.

⁶ See generally, Native Hawaiian Education Council as created under the Native Hawaiian Education Act <http://www.nhec.org/about-nhec/the-native-hawaiian-education-act/#6202>

⁷ See generally, Hawai'i State Department of Education's Strategic Plan <http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/DOE%20Forms/Advancing%20Education/SP2017-20.pdf>

⁸ See generally, Act 130 (SLH 2011) https://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/session2011/bills/GM1233_.PDF

Recognizing the State of Hawai'i's history and treatment of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, **we suggest that Micronesians be explicitly listed as part of the "frontline communities" as defined in this Resolution in an effort to provide clarity with this Resolution's commitment to equity and social justice specifically to this community as well.**

Our team is ready and willing to help Council Members, the Mayor, and Departments to implement the recommendations listed in this resolution. We hope the rest of the counties, state, and the nation respond to the pillars of equity and social justice set here and commit to similar objectives.

Further, we encourage appropriate resourcing to be provided to Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander programs which are founded on the values of equity and social justice. We are confident that identifying common goals that build on our strengths will bring about impactful and sustainable change to assure that our people will thrive within O'ahu and the City & County of Honolulu.

For the reasons described above, we respectfully support the resolution and ask that you consider adopting the changes suggested.

Aloha me ka 'oia'i'o,



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