



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE OF HAWAII
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OPENING DAY REMARKS SPEAKER SCOTT K. SAIKI JANUARY 15, 2020

Colleagues,

As you know, we are in a unique position.

We are fortunate to serve our community as policymakers.

And we are serving in a legislative session that marks the start of a new decade.

This should be a positive time, especially given the achievements made over the course of our state's history.

But there is one constant that has and will continue to dominate our work:

Many people cannot make it in Hawaii.

The questions before us are:

Can we keep up?

Can our state government keep up?

Can our working families keep up?

So far, the experiences of our families and the statistics tell us "no."

As a community, we are, at best, treading water.

At worst, we are drowning.

Since 2016 – 12,000 residents have left Hawaii.

214,000 Hawaii households – or 47% of all households – cannot pay for basic necessities or are below the federal poverty level.

Over 36,000 households need affordable housing.

Take a second to think about who these people are.

They are high school graduates.

College graduates.

They are our sons and daughters.

Our friends.

Our neighbors.

It has become someone in every family.

Our mission is clear.

We need to make it possible for our family members and the next generation to stay home.

We can begin to do this by attacking the three main drivers that make Hawaii unaffordable:

Income Inequality

Lack of Affordable Childcare and Early Learning

Lack of Affordable Housing

Our proposals are historic, dramatic and will bring relief for our working families.

1. INCOME INEQUALITY

Let me explain that over 80,000 persons in Hawaii earn less than \$30,000 per year.

Our working class families and individuals deserve tax relief. They are barely struggling to get by.

We will make the Hawaii Earned Income Tax credit refundable and permanent and increase the food/excise tax credit.

This will put over \$75 million directly into the pockets of working class families and individuals.

This is the most substantial tax relief we've done for working class folks in decades.

But tax relief alone will not uplift people.

The lowest paid workers should receive increases.

We will increase the minimum wage from \$10.10 to \$13.00 over a 4-year period.

This wage increase, together with the tax changes, will result in an annual cash benefit of more than \$4,600 to each worker.

2. CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING

The cost of childcare also contributes to Hawaii being unaffordable for so many.

We know that preschool allows children to learn and develop.

It also enables parents to work.

Many families cannot afford child care and that is the reason nearly 20,000 children do not currently attend preschool before showing up to kindergarten.

Our legislation will open more public early learning classrooms, while working with the private early learning schools and others to provide more learning opportunities to eligible students.

In 10 years, we aim to close the gap for these 20,000 children, so that all 3 and 4-year olds are in early learning programs.

3. AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A new housing report tells us that we need 17,000 units for working families.

This number is achievable if we increase funding and modernize regulation.

We will spend \$200 million for infrastructure at UH West Oahu for affordable housing development along the rail line.

We will also spend \$75 million for neighbor island infrastructure.

And we will free up state land and private land for affordable housing development on the rail line.

CONCLUSION

The pervasive nature of this problem calls us all to a new standard of working together, being strategic, and demanding creativity.

We can no longer approach issues in a siloed fashion.

Business as usual has not worked for our people.

Our landmark legislation will reverse that.

Let's keep our families and the next generation home.

Thank you and have a productive session.