A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that homelessness is one of the most pressing problems in Hawaii, which requires a robust, comprehensive, long-term solution to address Hawaii's affordable housing and homelessness crisis. One important component of the solution is ensuring that low-income kupuna are not forced into homelessness through a combination of fixed incomes and rapidly rising rents. Therefore, a rent subsidy program targeted toward assisting kupuna in this situation is necessary.

Over the last fifty years, the number of cost-burdened renters, those paying more than thirty per cent of their income for rent, has significantly increased. Today, almost half of renters in the State pay more than thirty per cent of their income for rent. High housing costs have driven more and more Hawaii residents into homelessness and now Hawaii has the highest homelessness rate in the nation.
The legislature finds that by making smart investments in homelessness and housing, using data-driven practices, and improving coordination, Hawaii has gradually begun to turn the tide in the homelessness crisis. In 2017, Hawaii's homelessness rate went down for the first time in years, a trend that continued in 2018. During the regular session of 2018, the legislature made unprecedented levels of investment in low-income housing and homelessness, appropriating $200,000,000 for the rental housing revolving fund, $30,000,000 for ohana zones, and $13,500,000 for proven-effective and promising homelessness programs.

To turn back fifty years of growth in Hawaii's housing and homelessness crisis, investments of this scale must be made consistently in the coming years. Hawaii must prioritize programs that are the most cost-effective and target the most vulnerable populations, such as the State's kupuna. The latest Homeless Service Utilization Report (2017) found that there are 1,386 homeless elders in Hawaii. Many more elders face homelessness as rents skyrocket. Due to the fixed incomes of elders, a long-term rental assistance program is needed.
The purpose of this Act is to establish the long-term rental assistance pilot program for kupuna.

SECTION 2. (a) There is established the long-term rental assistance pilot program to be administered by the department of health. The department of health shall:

(1) Provide long-term rental assistance to individuals who are over the age of sixty who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless;

(2) Ensure that individuals participating in the program will not pay more than fifty per cent of their income for rent; and

(3) Provide housing counseling and landlord assistance to assist elders in obtaining or retaining permanent housing.

(b) The department of health may work with the executive office on aging to merge the long-term rental assistance pilot program with existing programs, if in the opinion of the department of health, it is more efficient to do so.

(c) The department of health may establish rules and qualification standards for beneficiaries of the long-term rental assistance pilot program.
(d) The department of health shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations pertaining to the long-term rental assistance pilot program, including any proposed legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2022.

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of $1,500,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2019-2020 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2020-2021 for the long-term rental assistance pilot program.

The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department of health for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2019.
Report Title:
Kupuna Caucus; Long-Term Rental Assistance Pilot Program; Appropriation

Description:
Establishes the long-term rental assistance pilot program to be administered by the department of health. Appropriates funds for the administration of the pilot program.

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