



Aloha Neighbors!

We have just passed the halfway point of this year's legislative session. House bills have crossed over to the Senate, and the Senate bills are now in the House. Below is an update on some of the issues we have been working on, as well as highlights from the House Draft of the budget bill.

As always, please feel free to contact me if you have questions or if I can help you with anything.

With warmest aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole".

Representative Nicole Lowen

State House District 6

Norht Kona: Kailua-Kona, Holualoa, Kalaoa

2017 MID-SESSION-UPDATE

Thursday, March 16, 2017

Budget:

With a downgraded forecast from the Council on Revenues at the beginning of this year, the House Finance committee had the difficult task of making \$400 million in cuts to the Governor's proposed budget.

- We passed out a practical budget that preserves core government programs like education, kupuna care, health, homelessness, transportation and environmental protection. We decreased the amount of bonds being issued for capital improvements, but were still able to include some important projects for West Hawaii. Below are some highlights.

Capital Improvement Projects for District 6:

Kealakehe High School: \$3.6M to improve the track to an all-weather synthetic surface.

- West Hawaii Veteran's Center: \$850K to provide funds for the planning and design of a new facility.
- Palamanui Community College: \$700K for site improvement for the Trade and Apprenticeship Program and the creation of a Physics Lab.
- USDA Agricultural Inspections Station at Kona Airport: \$8.7M (authorized from DOT's special fund)
- Saddle Road Extension to Queen Ka'ahumanu Hwy.: \$89M (in Federal funds & Revenue Bonds)

Other Budget Highlights:

- \$5.6M to expand the Hawaii Keiki Healthy and Ready to Learn Program
- \$1.04M to expand Pre-K programs in DOE schools
- \$9M for Early College programs in High Schools
- \$3M for the Excelsior Programs to stimulate economic growth
- \$10.3M for Homeless programs including Rapid Re-Housing, Housing First, homeless outreach, shelters, and housing.
- \$50M to capitalize the Rental Housing Trust Fund
- \$4M for the Hawaii Invasive Species Councils
- \$6.2M for Forest Reserve Management, Native Resources, and Fire Protection operations.

Legislative Highlights:

Energy:

As Vice Chair of the Energy and Environment Committee, Rep. Lowen and the committee continue to consider ways to support our transition to 100% renewable energy. Measures being considered include:

- incentives for energy storage
- incentives for electric vehicles and EV charging stations
- facilitating the development of microgrids
- developing training for employees of the county on new energy technology to help to accelerate the approval process for energy systems.

Education:

Measures that passed the House and crossed to the Senate include several to reduce the cost of higher education:

- Hawaii Promise Program, which would provide full scholarships for students with financial need to community colleges in the UH system.
- a bill that would provide for an income tax deduction on state taxes for student loan interest.
- facilities funding for Charter Schools (HB533) would provide funds to capital projects to charter schools.
- the budget bill also includes funds for Early Childhood Education, Early College Programs, and Keiki Health (see above).

Environment:

Measures that are still alive include:

- a bill to limit the use of sunscreens containing oxybenzone, a chemical which has been proved to cause damage to the reef and increase risk of coral bleaching.
- a bill that puts a moratorium on the issuance of any new permits for aquarium fish collecting.

Environmental and Energy Measures that are no longer active this session, but that Rep. Lowen supported include:

- measures that would reduce/ban the use of polystyrene foam (styrofoam)
- measures to better regulate pesticide use
- a bill to ban the use of chlorpyrifos in hawaii, a pesticide that has been banned in some other countries due to concerns about its impact on health, especially to children
- reform of the statewide qualifying definition of renewable energy as clean energy sources only

Invasive Species:

Invasive species have been a hot topic this session, and we have a record number of bills on the subject, including several that Rep. Lowen authored. Among those still moving are bills that would:

- provide additional funding to combat Little Fire Ants, Rapid Ohia Death, and Coffee Berry Borer Beetle.
- grant the County greater authority to access private property to treat for little fire ants or other invasive species that pose a threat.
- establish the Hawaii Invasive Species Authority, a step recommended by the recently created Biosecurity Plan. This is an important first step towards a more proactive approach to these issues.

Housing/Homelessness:

In addition to funding in the budget for the rental housing trust fund, Rapid Re-Housing, Housing First, and other programs to address homelessness, the following measures are still moving:

- bills to expand the low-income household renters tax credit
- a bill that would provide down payment assistance to first-time home buyers who qualify. (HB 530)
- various bills to create greater incentives for affordable housing development
- HB 1471 that would require Air B'n'B to automatically collect transient accommodations taxes and remit them to the State. It would also allocate an additional \$1M to each County for enforcement of ordinances relating to transient vacation rentals.

Health:

In addition to programs funded through the budget, the House passed a bill that would provide vision screening for keiki in partnership with the DOE.

We are also moving HB 552, which will preserve in State law some elements of the Affordable Care Act that we would like to maintain even if the Act is repealed by Congress.