

**House Select Committee on COVID-19 Economic and Financial Preparedness
Public Health Subcommittee and Strategy & Communications Subcommittee**

November 30, 2020

Proposal to Modify the Safe Travels Hawaii Program

The Strategy and Communications subcommittee and Public Health subcommittee of the House Select Committee on COVID-19 Economic and Financial Preparedness would like to share a proposal to modify the Safe Travels Hawaii program that considers the changing national landscape, while maintaining the positive achievements of the initiative.

By any measure, the first month of Hawaii's Safe Travel pre-arrival testing program was an unqualified success.

From a public health standpoint, it protected us. Statewide, average number of new cases per day (96.7 vs. 94.6), test positivity rate (2.8 vs. 2.0), and both number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients (103 vs. 60) and percent of ICU beds occupied (53% vs. 46%) are all lower on November 27, 2020 than they were just before the launch of the program on October 11, 2020. People participating in the program with a trusted partner but arriving without test results yet in hand represented 6% of the traveling population and those who were ultimately positive represented 0.01% of all travelers, amounting to approximately one person per day.

From an economic standpoint, it jumpstarted us. And to be clear, our view of "economic standpoint" is not a nebulous concept or a profiteering enterprise to help people take vacations; it is our existential lifeblood. It is jobs that put food on the table; salaries for teachers that allow our schools to be open; funding healthcare; decreasing our already skyrocketing homeless problem. In the weeks since the launch of the pre-flight testing program, nearly 230,000 visitors have arrived in the islands compared with just 31,000 in the six weeks before the program began. These visitors are likely to spend close to \$250 million in Hawaii's hotels, restaurants, and retail businesses and have directly contributed to the return of more than 28,000 workers to the labor force and employment statewide. Every county saw improvement with more than 3,000 Hawaii and Maui county workers, and more than 1,000 workers on Kauai returning to employment in October. During the first week of October, there were a total of 246,000 weeks of unemployment benefits claimed across all programs available. By the first week of November, weeks claimed fell to 171,000. Ten thousand of the 79,000 people on Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), (which expires completely on December 26, 2020) went back to work. In aggregate, the UHERO economic index, which measures all the components of economic health rose from 37 to 44 during the initial month of Safe Travels Hawaii.

But things have changed. An uncontrolled surge on the mainland requires us to innovate to adapt the program to continue to keep us safe, while continuing to support our local economy.

The most recent modification to the program, requiring all travelers who have visited a trusted testing partner within the 72-hour window to have a negative result in hand before departure or submit to mandatory 14-day quarantine, has had unintended and unfortunate consequences already. It's caused

confusion and uncertainty amongst travelers, resulting in 300-2,000 room night cancellations per property resulting in millions of dollars in lost revenue and the staffing downsizing that accompanies market contraction just within the past week. It's caused withdrawal of support of large trusted partners due to inability to guarantee results prior to departure, impeding testing access. It's caused concern in City and County of Honolulu that the significant increase in quarantined individuals will make enforcement of quarantine difficult or impossible. It's caused airlines, hotels, and the retail, restaurants, and small businesses that their patrons support to revisit their staffing models just as PUA and CARES dollars expire.

We believe, therefore, that **we must adapt again**. Responding to this new challenge requires teamwork and contributions from all stakeholders, including hotels, airlines, counties (especially with regard for capacity to test and quarantine), and state testing requirements.

Hotels have rallied to support the requirements of the Governor's 16th proclamation and have **fully committed to guaranteeing housing for any COVID-19 positive customer with an existing reservation**.

All **airlines** have committed to **appropriate and timely notification to their travelers about the requirements of testing and quarantine relevant to the Hawaii Safe Travels program**, including travel advisories on their websites, travel advisories during the booking process, pre-departure date communications, check-in communications, gate announcements, and on-board announcements.

Therefore, we believe *the testing program should be modified to allow travelers who have diligently complied with the 72 hour pre-arrival testing requirement with a trusted partner, but do not have a result in hand prior to their departure from their final leg, be subject to and remain in a 14-day quarantine upon arrival unless and until they submit to a rapid test upon arrival at the airport, have a negative result, and then subsequently also have a negative result from their original trusted partner test that they can upload into the State of Hawaii's Safe Travels portal.*

This solution, in partnership with the stakeholders who will support it, is a good plan for this current time because it:

- 1) Adds an extra layer of screening for those who are awaiting results for their trusted partner test, thereby continuing to protect public health.
- 2) Restores confidence to the traveler that they will be treated fairly if they did everything "right" but ended up without a test result prior to departure, maintaining our reputation as a desirable travel destination.
- 3) Limits the burden of significantly larger quarantine numbers for the counties, so adequate enforcement is possible.
- 4) Is logistically possible since it involves point of care testing for only a small percentage of incoming travelers (6% using historical data)
- 5) Allows continued livelihood for the travel industry, supporting jobs and therefore economic recovery and all that means (food, housing, education, health) at the most critical time, expiration of federal dollars.

Mahalo for your consideration of this proposal.