SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION
REQUESTING A JOINT STUDY FOR THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE THIRD SENATORIAL DISTRICT.

WHEREAS, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, that has resulted in a world-wide pandemic, infecting almost three million people across the globe resulting in over 300,000 fatalities within the United States and has put an overwhelming strain on medical and government resources; and

WHEREAS, to protect Hawai‘i's citizens from the present threat to human life, Governor Ige and all four county mayors in Hawai‘i imposed a state of emergency and issued rules and orders restricting daily activities of residents and businesses. The Governor subsequently issued sixteen proclamations mandating statewide safety measures in an effort to curb the spread of the disease; and

WHEREAS, changes in the way that health care is delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic have been implemented to reduce medical staff exposure to ill persons, preserve personal protective equipment, and minimize the impact of patient surges on facilities, including adjusting the way healthcare systems triage, evaluate, and care for patients by using methods that do not rely on in-person services. Additionally, telehealth services provide necessary care to patients while minimizing the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus; and

WHEREAS, a broad body of research links social isolation measures utilized to contain COVID-19 to poor mental health, and individuals sheltering in place reported negative mental effects resulting from worry or stress related to COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, additionally, research demonstrates that job loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is associated with increased depression, anxiety, distress, and low self-esteem and may lead
to higher rates of substance use disorder and suicide. Poor mental health due to burnout among front-line workers and increased anxiety or mental illness among those with poor physical health has also been noted; and

WHEREAS, as of December 22, 2020, Hawai‘i Island had 1,836 confirmed cases of persons affected with COVID-19, resulting in forty-four deaths; and

WHEREAS, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many small businesses in the State, including businesses subject to mandatory capacity restrictions, small, minority-owned businesses, and businesses reliant on tourism have suffered severe declines in revenue; and

WHEREAS, the closure of small businesses in the State has a devastating effect on employees of those businesses, further strains the State's unemployment insurance program, and has other ripple effects throughout the State; and

WHEREAS, in 2020, Hawai‘i County reported 51,948 weekly unemployment claims compared to 9,711 claims in 2019, a 435 percent increase in claims; and

WHEREAS, in the second quarter of 2020, eleven thousand six hundred Hawai‘i County residents lost their jobs as a result of the economic recession; and

WHEREAS, many residents have been unable to pay for their household expenses as a result of income disruption from COVID-19, including food, rent or mortgage, transportation costs, broadband access, medical expenses, or student loans; and

WHEREAS, Governor Ige issued and extended a moratorium to forestall any eviction from a residential dwelling for failure to pay rent or lease or other related charge if a resident fails to pay all or any portion of the rent or lease, maintenance fees, utility charges taxes or other fees required by the rental agreement or lease until at least December 31, 2020; and

WHEREAS, because many individuals who are homeless are older adults or have underlying medical conditions, they may be
at increased risk for severe illness than the general population and may require access to essential services including childcare, education services, employment assistance, outpatient health services, mental health services, substance abuse treatment services, and transportation; and

WHEREAS, those who experienced food and housing insecurity as a result of the pandemic reported a significant prevalence of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner compared to those who did not experience food and housing insecurity; and

WHEREAS, domestic violence survivors are especially vulnerable to homelessness due to the dynamics of power and control present in a domestic violence situation, economic instability resulting from the abuse, the effects of trauma, and the need for safety and confidentiality, as well as housing. While sheltering in place slows the spread of COVID-19, it increases rates of domestic violence and sexual assault, especially since victims of domestic violence shelter in place with the person who is harming them; and

WHEREAS, police departments within the State, including the Hawai'i County Police Department have expanded their citation issuance in lieu of arrest policies or are limiting arrests within already established statutory limits in an effort to reduce person-to-person contact between an individual and law enforcement and the likelihood of COVID-19 being brought into correctional facilities; and

WHEREAS, the Judiciary has responded to COVID-19 by postponing matters if necessary, moving proceedings to a remote format when feasible, restricting entrance into courthouses, granting extensions for court deadlines, and adjusting in-person operations in each circuit based on public health circumstances to protect court users and Judiciary personnel; and

WHEREAS, Hawai'i Community Correctional Center is currently operating at one hundred eighty-five per cent of capacity and present efforts to safeguard against COVID-19 outbreaks within correctional facilities are inadequate to allow the inmate population to comply with social distancing standards; and
WHEREAS, a COVID-19 outbreak at Hawai‘i correctional facilities would have the potential of placing the inmates at risk of death or serious illness, and endangering the lives and well-being of staff and service providers who work within at these facilities, their families, and members of the community at large; and

WHEREAS, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated well-documented gaps that put low-income students at a disadvantage relative to their wealthier peers in areas, including access to devices and broadband, food and nutrition, housing, health insurance and care, and financial relief measures; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature finds that research regarding online learning and teaching shows that they are effective only if students have consistent access to the internet and computers and if teachers have received targeted training and supports for online instruction; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature finds that in quarter one of the 2020-2021 school year, students in the Third Senatorial District have higher rates of "well-below" marks in English and Mathematics than the state average for elementary school quarterly grades; higher rates of "well-below" marks in English, mathematics, science, and social students for both middle and high school quarterly grades than the state average; higher rates of being at risk of chronic absenteeism than the state average; and higher rates of being behind grade level expectations for both elementary and middle school students than the state average; and

WHEREAS, the Legislature recognizes that the Third Senatorial District remains particularly vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19 with a higher than average rate of the population that may face underlying conditions that may exacerbate severity or probability of contracting the disease. Additionally, rural healthcare infrastructure is limited, including emergency medical services, service of large geographical resources, and limited use of telemedicine due to
absent or unreliable broadband and internet connections; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-first Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2021, the House of Representatives concurring, that the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism in collaboration with the Judiciary, Department of Education, Department of Health, Department of Human Services, and the Office of the Mayor of Hawai‘i County is urged to conduct a needs and gaps analysis that identifies the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on programs in the State that provide services to residents of the Third Senatorial District relating to the economy, health care capacity, education, and public safety; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the analysis is requested to identify programs in the Third Senatorial District that provide medical, economic, educational, and other social services to residents including:

(1) The amount of funding the program receives each year and funding sources for the program;

(2) The number of persons the program serves each year, disaggregated by race and gender;

(3) Limitations on the length of the provision of services for the programs;

(4) If applicable, reasons for the unavailability for the data; and

(5) Recommendations for improving the services available to residents of the Third Senatorial District, including any proposed legislation; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism is requested to submit a report of its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the Legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the Regular Session of 2022; and
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this Concurrent Resolution be transmitted to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Chief Justice of the Judiciary, Director of the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, Chairperson of the Board of Education, Superintendent of the Department of Education, Director of the Department of Health, Director of the Department of Human Services, and Office of the Mayor of Hawai‘i Island.

OFFERED BY: ________