

O'ahu County Legislative Survey Summary January 2021

Background

The O'ahu County Legislation Committee conducted a survey in Fall 2020 which continued the work of the preceding year in which the following five issues were identified as priorities: (1) affordable housing; (2) climate change; (3) economic inequality; (4) healthcare; and (5) public education. This year's survey was conducted through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic, which created a ripple effect through each of these issue areas and will have a long-term impact on government budgets.

250 O'ahu County Democrats responded to the survey [note that most of the responses were received prior to October 2020 – this context should be kept in mind when reviewing the results].

Overview of Results

Respondents ranked the issues in order of urgency in which the Legislature should address them as follows:

1. Affordable Housing
2. Economic Inequality
3. Healthcare
4. Public Education
5. Climate Change

Over 80% responded that they agreed or strongly agreed that the pandemic:

- Dramatically altered their daily routines
- Weighed heavily on their minds
- Offers an opportunity to make significant changes in the way state government operates

Housing

- Approximately 33% were mildly concerned to very concerned that they or an immediate household member would not be able to pay their housing payment in the next three months.
- Approximately 79% agreed or strongly agreed that they were concerned that housing was going to become even more unaffordable.
- Approximately 91% agreed or strongly agreed that they were concerned about the homeless problem on O'ahu.

Comment highlights and emerging themes:

- *Concerns that people may be in jeopardy of becoming homeless as a result of job loss and inability to pay rent.*
- *Suggested relief includes rent subsidies, rent/mortgage moratorium, and building workforce housing.*

Economic Impacts

- Approximately 40% responded that they or an immediate household member lost their job or suffered from reduced hours/income as a result of the pandemic.

- Approximately 30% responded that they were concerned that they or an immediate household member may be in jeopardy of losing their job as a result of the economic impacts of the pandemic.

Comment highlights and emerging themes:

- *Concerns regarding potential reduction in essential services and programs and impacts on government workers.*
- *Concerns regarding the high unemployment rate, providing jobs and job training for the unemployed, developing workforce sectors, and diversifying the economy.*

Healthcare/Kupuna

- Approximately 43% responded that they or an immediate household member did not receive or delayed medical care/treatment because of the pandemic.
- Approximately 77% had an above average level of concern about mental health impacts.
- Approximately 55% had an above average level of concern/impact regarding concerns/responsibilities with kupuna in their family or that they are close to.

Comment highlights and emerging themes:

- *Concerns about loss of healthcare coverage and provision of healthcare for kupuna.*
- *Concerns regarding inadequate action to address the spread of COVID-19 and lack of compliance with health guidelines.*
- *Concerns related to increased domestic abuse, social isolation, mental and physical health, and hunger.*

Education

- Approximately 29% of respondents or their immediate household members are an employee of an educational institution impacted by the pandemic.
- Approximately 85% somewhat or strongly agreed that they were concerned that Hawaii's youth would suffer as a result of changes to instruction and learning as a result of the pandemic.
- Approximately 84% somewhat or strongly agreed that they were concerned about the health and safety of students (K-12 and university) returning to school campuses in Fall 2020.

Comment highlights and emerging themes:

- *There is a need for more broadband access and broadband at reduced rates for students.*
- *Concerns regarding impact on learning.*

Climate Change

- Approximately 67% agreed or strongly agreed that climate change was being neglected because of the pandemic.
- Approximately 85% agreed or strongly agreed that the pandemic helped the environment/climate because more people were staying at home and/or working from home.

Comment highlights and emerging themes:

- *Interest in the environmental impacts of decreased tourism.*
- *Incentives should be provided to maintain work-from-home initiatives.*