

# Community Bulletin

District 14 Aiewa Heights · Kalihi · Kalihi Valley · Kapalama · Moanalua Gardens & Valley · Red Hill · Ft. Shafter

Legislature  
Opening Day  
January 15, 2025



## Aloha, Friends and Neighbors

A very Happy New Year to you and yours.

I trust the past year was a rewarding one and wish you a prosperous, healthy and fulfilling 2025.

### COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

The 33rd Legislature convenes on January 15 and we will have our hands full with legislative challenges and opportunities to further the progress of our community.

I will continue to serve as chair of the Senate Committee on Higher Education, which has purview over the University of Hawai'i and Community Colleges. I am Vice Chair of the Committee on Education, which oversees the public schools, as well as a member of the Ways and Means and Energy, Economic Development, and Tourism committees.

### LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

This year is a budget session, meaning we'll be reviewing the state government's spending proposals for the next two fiscal years.

In addition to assessing the operational money requests submitted by the Governor and his executive agencies, the Judiciary, and others, I anticipate the consideration of additional funding for the Lahaina recovery, supplementing our rainy day fund to compensate for pandemic and firestorm emergencies, adding to the \$1 billion we appropriated for affordable housing, approving money for the repair and maintenance needs of our public schools and facilities, pay raises for public employees, and a host of other items.

### INCOME TAX CUTS AHEAD

When you file income tax returns for 2024, you should notice a significant increase in your standard deduction, a tax measure the Legislature passed last session.

Beginning with the just-concluded 2024 tax year, the standard deduction for Hawai'i taxpayers will double from \$4,400 to \$8,800 for joint filers, and from \$2,200 to \$4,400 for a single filer. That deduction will increase every even-numbered filing year until it reaches \$24,000 for a joint return and \$12,000 for a single by 2031.

Additionally, the tax brackets have been adjusted to lower rates for taxpayers; higher tax rates will only apply to those with higher incomes. By 2031, lower-income families will see a 71-percent decrease in their income tax liabilities.

This will help taxpayers cope with our high cost-of-living and generate more spending to support local businesses.

### INTERIM TASKS

Following the conclusion of the 2024 session, I was involved in a number of initiatives relating to my legislative responsibilities.

As a member of the National Conference of State Legislatures' Task Force on Higher Education, I represented this body at a meeting of 30 states to map a strategy to address some of the major issues affecting college attendance. With the collective student debt in the nation reaching \$1.8 billion, making it the second-largest form of debt after home mortgages, our group will seek a bipartisan approach to the issues of affordability and the value of higher education.

I also serve on WICHE, or the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, on similar issues.

Lastly, with our Department of Education considering a plan to centralize public school kitchens, I joined a group that toured the Sacramento, California, model to see how other jurisdictions are working under a similar system. The Legislature is expected to evaluate such a proposal this year. (See the Community Survey for a question on this topic.)

If you have concerns about the issues before the Legislature, or want to alert me to some pressing situation in our community, please don't hesitate to contact me.



Senator Kim's 2025 Staff

Left to right: Kathy (Legislative Aide), Savannah (Committee Clerk), Kalo (Office Manager), Crystal (Communications), Gregg (Communications [not pictured]).

Best wishes to you,

Donna Mercado Kim

# community survey 2025



**LEGISLATURE  
2025**



Senator Kim is seeking your input on legislation that may be considered during this session of the Legislature, as well as on other issues. The results will be published in the next edition of the Community Bulletin.

## PUBLIC SCHOOL KITCHENS

The Department of Education is considering the establishment of centralized or regional kitchens to prepare meals for public school students. This proposal calls for the consolidation of meal preparation at a handful of sites instead of having cooking operations at individual schools, in order to improve efficiency, food standards, budgeting, and other factors.

Do you favor centralization of food operations?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

## MOBILE PHONE BANS IN SCHOOL

Teachers and parents complain that the widespread use of mobile phones by students hinders learning, creates classroom distractions, exposes very young children to harmful material, and produces other problems not conducive to a healthy learning environment.

Some schools elsewhere have banned the use of mobile phones and other electronic devices on campus, subject to exceptions for specified education, health, or emergency purposes.

Should public schools ban the use of mobile phone and other personal digital devices by students?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

## MORE POLLING PLACES

Recent elections have resulted in extremely long lines at in-person polling sites on O'ahu, with voters standing in line for hours. The reason there are fewer locations is because of the popularity of mail-in voting. The City and County of Honolulu, which operates the voting on O'ahu, accepts in-person voting at Honolulu Hale, Kapolei Hale, and two other sites for about two weeks before each election; more than a dozen droboxes are also available island-wide.

Should the City and County of Honolulu and the State open several more in-person voting sites on election days?

- Yes
- No

## RED-LIGHT CAMERAS

The Hawaii Department of Transportation has been operating red-light cameras at 10 intersections in Honolulu. For February 2024, the last month for which figures were released, more than 1,000 citations were issued to motorists who violated the law.

Additionally, the 2024 Legislature passed Senate Bill 2443, approved as Act 112, which permitted the enforcement of speed laws at intersections with red-light cameras.

Should these red-light cameras be installed at all major intersections?

- Yes
  - No
  - No opinion
- If yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_

Should speeding detection cameras also be installed at these intersections and the freeway?

- Yes
  - No
  - No opinion
- If yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_

## DEMENTIA CARE

Health care for people suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's Disease has become a major concern in the islands, with the state's Medicaid program spending \$285 million a year for the care and treatment of these patients.

Would you support legislation to improve the early detection and treatment of Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias by mandating cognitive assessments for Medicare beneficiaries, aged 65 or older, during annual wellness visits covered by Medicare, Part B?

- Yes
- No
- No opinion

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

*Optional:*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please send your completed survey to:*

Donna Mercado Kim  
Hawaii State Capitol  
415 S. Beretania Rm 218  
Honolulu, HI 96813

*Mahalo for taking the time to respond!*

Scan the QR code to submit your survey online!





# Senator Kim on the hot seat

*In this edition, Senator Kim responds to questions about the firing of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa's athletic director.*

***There's been a lot of controversy over the surprising dismissal of Craig Angelos, the athletic director of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Can you shed any light on what happened?***

For those who haven't heard, Manoa's Athletic Director Craig Angelos was abruptly fired, just 19 months into his tenure. The decision was made by UH President David Lassner, who left his post in December. Alumni, students, and sports fans have questioned the timing and rationale behind the move.

As chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee, I was immediately contacted by the news media for a comment. I refrained from responding given their criticism of what they describe as my "micromanaging" of UH.

To be very clear, I am taking no position on the firing. Legislators have no authority over personal matters - my concern is broader and focuses on the process and transparency of the hirings and firings of UH executives. As examples, consider the controversies surrounding Tom Apple, M.R.C. Greenwood, Evan Dobbelle, Herman Frazier, Greg McMackin, Jim Donovan, and Todd Graham, to name a few.

The entire process, resulting in the hiring of Angelos, was flawed from its inception. The selection committee was handpicked by President Lassner, with a requirement that candidates had to have three years' experience in collegiate athletic administration, preferably at the NCAA Division I level. By this measure, even then-current Athletic Director David Matlin would not have qualified for his job. Many believe this qualification was added to favor a certain candidate.

Additionally, the initial five-member committee was criticized for not adequately representing key stakeholders, including the community, student-athletes, and cultural perspectives unique to Hawai'i. So the president added members to legitimize the process and minimize dissent. Ultimately, these adjustments only contributed to lingering doubts about the transparency of the hiring process—a factor that resurfaced after Angelos' unexpected dismissal. The controversy has since reignited a broader debate about governance, decision-making, and leadership accountability within the UH system, including the hiring process for the new UH president.

I should point out that during the approval process for AD Angelos, three Regents voted against his hiring, signaling concerns about the selection. Their reasons included lack of a strong local connection, a mixed track record, and transparency and process concerns.

The regents, and others, questioned whether Angelos truly understood Hawai'i's unique cultural, social, and economic conditions. The regents felt a candidate with stronger local ties or roots would be better suited for the demanding job. While Angelos had a notable record, his tenure at Florida Atlantic University was not without controversy, including criticism over financial management and his departure. Moreover, some believed the hiring process lacked transparency, with questions about whether other qualified candidates were given sufficient consideration.

The fact that Angelos had no contract and was told he could not fire anyone, led me to believe that it was the intent of President Lassner to fire Angelos before he retired, allowing his favored candidate to become the interim AD. I shared this belief with Angelos when I first met with him when he was hired.

The dismissal comes as President Lassner ends his tenure, leaving many to question whether a lame-duck president should have made such a decision when the new president takes office on January 1st. It also raises questions about having an interim AD making major decisions before the new president begins work.

I agree with community members who are demanding transparency. "This isn't just about Angelos. It's about accountability and respect for the fans, donors, and athletes who make UH athletics what it is," said Emily Wong, a UH alumna and former student-athlete.

Lassner's decision casts a long shadow over the UH leadership transition. The new president will not only face the challenge of finding a new athletic director but also the task of rebuilding trust with a disheartened community.

In the meantime, with major projects underway and the athletic department's reputation hanging in the balance, stakeholders are urging UH's Board of Regents to intervene.

I have to admit that I'm not surprised by these events. This is typical of the UH decision-making that I've been questioning for years—and been criticized by UH administrators, the faculty union, and media in return—all dismissing my concerns and continuing to operate "as usual" until another controversy arises and scores of people contact me to launch an investigation.

For now, one thing is certain: the fallout from this decision will continue to reverberate far beyond the Clarence T.C. Ching Complex. While many have asked that I investigate Angelos' firing, legislators have no authority of the hiring and firing of personnel.



donna mercado  
**kim**  
STATE SENATOR

Hawaii State Capitol  
415 S. Beretania St., Rm. 218  
Honolulu, HI 96813

[www.facebook.com/SenatorDonnaMercadoKim](http://www.facebook.com/SenatorDonnaMercadoKim)

# SENATE DISTRICT 14 UPDATES

## Red Hill Fuel Facility

As of December 2024, the U.S. Navy Closure Task Force-Red Hill has reported that the Navy is continuing preparations for the removal of 10 miles of pipeline and conducting environmental and remediation efforts, has submitted a plan to reactivate the 'Aiea-Halawa shaft, and held an open house.

The 'Aiea-Halawa shaft project seeks to improve water security for the Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam and surrounding community. The plan, which has been submitted plan to the Department of Health, calls for a second shaft for the Navy's drinking water system that now relies solely on the Waiawa shaft.

The Navy submitted its pipeline removal work plan to the Environmental Protection Agency and Health Department in October. The Navy has begun staging equipment and installing required utilities and infrastructure to support the removal and anticipates starting removal in spring 2025. The removed 1940s-era steel piping will be shipped to the mainland for recycling.



Senator Kim takes part in Moanalua Middle School's annual Genki Ball Toss on Friday, December 20 at Moanalua Gardens.

## Moanalua Rockfalls

In a previous bulletin, Senator Kim reported that U.S. Senator Brian Schatz did not pursue funding for rockfall remediation in the Moanalua area slopes below Tripler Army Medical Center.

She and Representative Aiu then sought support from the state, City and County of Honolulu, and other sources to help with the problem. In October, they met with officials of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and military seeking hazard-prevention funding, which require a match from the receiving entity.

Senator Kim is working with Councilmember Radiant Cordero to partner with the city in applying for these grants.



Senator Kim joined Lieutenant Governor Sylvia Luke and Representative Takenouchi for a visit to the Ready Keiki preschool at Lanakila Elementary and with Representative Aiu to Red Hill Elementary.

The visiting legislators read to the children and distributed backpacks filled with essential school supplies.



The National Foundation for Women Legislators (NFWL) presented Senator Kim with the prestigious Dean McManus Spirit of NFWL Award on November 24 for the example she has established for women legislators across the nation.

## Aloha Stadium

Construction of a new Stadium has been delayed for several years, due to indecision and a lack of consensus on the best path to pursue.

Finally, this past October, the state announced that it had reached an agreement with Aloha Halawa District Partners to develop the Aloha Stadium Entertainment District, featuring a 25,000-seat stadium with housing and mixed-use projects near the rail line. Partners was the only bidder.

This partnership of companies include Development Ventures Group, Stanford Carr Development, Ameresco, and Aloha Stadium Community Development/Cordish Company. Hawaiian Dredging and AECOM Hunt will do the construction.

Once the agreement is finalized, the developers will present their plan to the community. Barring no other delay, the stadium should be ready for the University of Hawai'i's 2028 college football season. Demolition of the original stadium should begin this summer.