

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



I am very thankful to Governor Ige for the opportunity to serve as the Director of the Department of Human Services.

I would also like to thank our former director, Rachael Wong, for her outstanding contribution and service to the Department of Human Services. Director Wong was instrumental in developing the 'Ohana Nui framework to serve our families in a streamlined, efficient, and holistic manner.

As a Department, we strive to provide timely, efficient, and effective benefits, programs, and services to achieving our purpose – working with Hawai'i residents to expand their capacity to achieve self-sufficiency, self-determination, independence, healthy choices, quality of life, and personal dignity.

We are committed to this work through four main priorities:

1. Investing in children and families;
2. Improving health and safety;
3. Increasing departmental capacity and efficiencies; and
4. Improving systems.

These also align with Governor Ige's core commitments to effective, efficient, and open government, education, affordable housing, health (and access to healthcare), and Hawai'i's economy.

We are also working diligently at DHS to incorporate a new multigenerational approach, 'Ohana Nui, that invests early and concurrently in children and families to improve health, education, employment, and other outcomes. We will do so with other state departments and community stakeholders, and this will also allow us to more efficiently align programs and funding to make a greater impact on those whom we serve.

As I begin my tenure, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize our team – those who have already been serving our clients as well as my new partner in this journey.

Thank you to our DHS colleagues across the department for the passion, commitment, and dedication with which you serve children, individuals, and families of our state. It is not lost on me that the path we have chosen - to provide human services as civil servants - comes with challenges. It often requires long hours of work, time away from our loved ones, grappling with detailed and complex administrative rules and procedures, federal requirements, and competing priorities. At times, it feels like an overwhelming task, but we continue to meet and overcome these challenges on a daily basis because we care about and want to make a difference in the lives of those who are working hard to make ends meet and need a little bit of encouragement to move themselves and their families toward a better and more secure future.

What we do and accomplish every day as employees is deeply embedded in the very mission of our department and divisions.

I would also like to introduce our team and our community to the newest addition to DHS leadership: Bridget Holthus, our deputy director. Bridget brings with her a wealth of knowledge and experience serving Hawai'i's people in various government and non-profit settings that will serve our clients greatly. One trademark of Governor Ige's administration is teamwork and collaboration across programs, departments, sectors, and communities. I look forward to working with Bridget to continue the collaborative work we began at the start of Governor Ige's administration and to build our vision for the future.

Thank you for your support of DHS, our team, and our shared community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pankaj Bhanot". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Pankaj Bhanot
Director, Department of Human Services