

Aloha in Transformation

Hawai'i is unique for the care of its residents embedded in our state constitution. Article IX, section 3 mandates the provision of financial assistance, medical assistance, and social services. And it is also seen in the "Aloha Spirit" statute (section 5-7.5, Hawai'i Revised Statutes) that requires government officials to fulfill their duties with the aloha spirit. During my first two years as the Director of the Department of Human Services (DHS), together these provisions have become our north star as we transform our department into one that better serves our residents, families, and communities.

Perhaps nothing in 2018 exemplifies our team's commitment to selfless service more than our response to the emergency management needs during the various severe weather events this year. From flooding on O'ahu and Kaua'i in April, to destruction caused by the most recent Kilauea eruption, to the chaos Hurricane Lane wreaked on Hawai'i Island and Maui, DHS staff were there. We worked collaboratively internally and externally to assess damage, support statewide emergency management functions, and make sure residents had access to much-needed benefits and services. This example of our staff assisting throughout emergency situations and maintaining normal operations is the kind of dedication we bring to residents in need every day.

In line with this aloha spirit, we are working to change DHS into a 21st century integrated delivery system that serves clients more efficiently and effectively in a holistic way. We have spent much of 2018 building on the work of 2017 creating a foundation from

which we will achieve this transformation.

We continue to invest in expanding our IT enterprise platform to improve client experiences when applying for benefits. We have also moved forward with 'Ohana Nui, our multi-generational approach, with micro-adaptations that serve as proofs of concept. We have also identified policy and process improvements to support implementation and improve government efficiency and transparency. Both of these initiatives are supported by our first-ever DHS strategic plan.

As one of the few executive department directors to have emerged through the state's civil service system, my staff and I recognize that we must invest in our human services workforce to sustain this transformation. We are working collaboratively with staff from the Department of Human Resources Development to redesign our hiring processes and rethink how we can liberate talent throughout DHS. Better support of our workforce will result in more positive outcomes for the residents we serve and a healthier and more nurturing community.

DHS leadership and staff are committed to fulfill its mission and responsibilities in collaboration with others and with aloha. Individually and collectively we work to meet our mission to encourage self-sufficiency and support the well-being of individuals, families, and communities in Hawai'i.

We have accomplished a lot this past year, and we acknowledge we have more work to do to become the department that we want to be. Above all, we are committed to improve Hawai'i's human services delivery system so our residents thrive.

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Pankaj Bhanot
DIRECTOR,
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SERVICES

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