April 20, 2020

The Honorable David Y. Ige
Governor, State of Hawaii
Executive Chambers
State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Governor Ige,

The Hawai‘i Fire Fighters Association ("HFFA") writes to you during this difficult time in appreciation of your administration’s rapid response to the public health crisis we are all tackling across the State of Hawaii due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we feel it to be our responsibility to our respective members, as their Union, to vehemently express our opposition to any anticipated executive budget proposal cuts that could directly affect our Airport Rescue Fire Fighters ("ARFF") members statewide.

As your administration has reported, our State is facing a revenue shortfall due to the sheer economic impact of the pandemic. We understand that, as a result, budget adjustments must be considered. Nevertheless, we implore you, Governor Ige, to consider other options and alternative funding sources instead of reducing public-sector workers’ pay in order to secure the necessary funds to balance the State’s budget. As you are aware, specifically in regards to our ARFF members’ job positions, they have no direct or indirect impact - good or bad - on the State’s general fund. Their operations are fully funded by Airport revenues and the Airports Special Fund, which currently is not under financial threat as the Airports’ cash and investments; current assets to current liability ratio; and net position are extremely strong. Our members are basically a “non-issue” to the State’s current fiscal problem due to the General Fund balance shortfall. Furthermore, should you authorize a pay cut for our members, its effect would be nothing short of being punitive in nature as there is no correlation between our ARFF members and the General Fund.

The authority and purpose for the Governor’s Emergency Proclamations is the COVID-19 emergency and addressing the negative impact it brings to our State. As such, we feel any matters involving any salary or benefits reduction to our members remain outside the scope of your Proclamation’s purpose and are, therefore, matters to be negotiated.
And finally, as tens of thousands of Hawaii State public employees were ordered to not come to work and shelter-at-home for weeks, our ARFF members as first responders were not only required to come to work but were also required to respond to emergency incidents and deal with this unknown threat whereby so little is known about its nature. Thousands of patients, including healthcare workers and first responders, have died worldwide. As frontline workers, first responders live every day with the constant stress, fear and anxiety of being infected as they perform their jobs and worse, taking this virus home and infecting their families and loved ones. By virtue of HFFA’s collective bargaining agreement (“CBA”), Section 44, HAZARDOUS DUTY and based on the opening sentence of that section, “Temporary Hazardous Duty shall mean the assignment of an Employee to perform duties while temporarily exposed to unusually hazardous conditions not recognized as a factor in the pricing of the Employee’s class,” it raises the question if rather than a proposed pay reduction, should hazard duty pay be a consideration?

As you are aware, Governor Ige, firefighters by nature are team players and put the safety of the public first, many times before our own safety concerns. We are here to help and protect. We also believe in being treated fairly and living with decisions that are just and “Pono”. As much as we empathize with you and State leaders in having to address the unprecedented challenges facing our state, cutting first responders’ pay and benefits is not the “Pono” thing to do as an option.

The HFFA respectfully submits this letter as our opposition to any executive budget cuts and request that we continue to advocate together with your administration and proceed cautiously to assess, to pursue, and to exhaust any and all alternative options for the benefit, protection and well-being of our ARFF fire fighters.

Best Regards and Keep Safe!

Robert H. Lee
HFFA President