April 22, 2020

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

Dear Governor Ige,

The Hawaii State Teachers Association, while recognizing the unprecedented circumstances created by the coronavirus, urges you to maintain the salaries of state government employees, including teachers. Similar proposed cuts have not been announced by any other governor in the country and would only worsen this crisis. Instead, those governors are calling on Congress to support states as they struggle with revenue problems.

As the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization (UHERO) recently said, “We cannot overstate the tremendous adverse impact that a sharp contraction in government spending will have on the Hawaii economy, and the corresponding positive effects that sustaining public spending will confer.” It found that cutting salaries would have a multiplier effect that would “lead to a drop in GDP of $3.3 billion over the 2020-2022 period.”

In addition to economic consequences, a reduction in teachers’ salaries would devastate Hawaii’s public schools. We’re hearing from our veteran educators that they would retire, and from our new and experienced teachers who would be forced to leave the profession. Hawaii currently suffers one of the worst teacher shortages in the country with more than 1,000 classrooms lacking a qualified teacher. If your salary cuts are implemented, Hawaii’s teacher shortage crisis will only get worse.

As governor, we urge you to consider the following options:

- Follow UHERO's recommendations to borrow up to $3 billion from the Federal Reserve’s Municipal Liquidity Facility;
- Wait for the federal government’s next stimulus funding supported by President Trump and Democratic congressional leaders, which will support lost revenue for state and local governments;
- Use the $1.1 billion in cash surplus and rainy day fund for the interim period;
- Use the $53 million allocated to Hawaii schools and colleges under the CARES Act;
- Take advantage of the significant savings from school buildings being closed in the spring semester.

Governor, we cannot stress enough—the decisions you make in the next few days will have long-term and potentially permanent impacts for Hawaii’s teachers, our keiki, and our economy. HSTA asks, on behalf of Hawaii’s teachers and the keiki that we serve, that you take the right actions, and not rush immediately to the wrong ones, during this crisis.

Sincerely,

Corey Rosenlee
President
Hawaii State Teachers Association