

# United States Senate

September 25, 2020

Governor David Ige  
State Capitol, Executive Chambers  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Governor Ige:

Thank you for your hard work in leading Hawai'i during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

In May, I sent you a letter encouraging you to take additional steps to protect the vulnerable residents and workers of nursing homes and long-term care facilities. At that time, Hawai'i had not yet experienced any COVID-19 outbreaks at nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

Unfortunately, we have now seen outbreaks of the virus at multiple nursing homes and care facilities, including the tragedy at the Yukio Okutsu State Veterans Home. The situation at the State Veterans Home illustrates how quickly COVID-19 can spread in congregate living facilities, how devastating it can be for the elderly and those with underlying health conditions, and how important it is for proactive and strong leadership to put into place the necessary precautions to prevent its spread. This is underscored by national estimates that about 40 percent of deaths related to COVID-19 have been among nursing home residents and staff. However, we cannot accept that these deaths are inevitable – we must do everything we can to prevent them.

As I have not yet received responses to my questions about how the state is preventing the spread of COVID-19 within long-term care facilities, and because I am even more concerned about whether these facilities are well-prepared, I am writing again to request an update on how Hawai'i is protecting residents and staff of long-term care facilities and any additional measures that should be taken.

In particular, I request your response to the following questions:

- I understand that state surveyors have completed reviews of all nursing homes in the state. What are the results of these reviews? Were any deficiencies identified in the reviews, and have they been addressed?
- What is the state's plan to conduct additional reviews and inspections of nursing homes?
- Are you confident that all long-term care facilities are following best practices for infection control?
- The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is now requiring testing of staff and residents in Medicare and Medicaid certified nursing homes. Have nursing homes encountered challenges acquiring an adequate supply of tests?
- How is the state supporting facilities not regulated by the federal government, including assisted living facilities, adult residential care homes, and community care foster care

homes? Do these facilities have adequate access to testing? Has the state provided infection control guidance and training to these facilities?

- Do all nursing homes and other long-term care facilities have the personal protective equipment that they need?
- Have facilities encountered staffing shortages, and what steps are underway to ensure adequate staffing?
- What other resources do long-term care facilities need?

I recognize that more federal funding and support for long-term care facilities is necessary, and I am doing everything in my power to make sure that Hawai'i has all of the federal help that it needs. Thank you for your attention to this matter and for all you are doing to keep the people of Hawai'i safe.

Sincerely,



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BRIAN SCHATZ  
United States Senator

cc: Dr. Libby Char, Interim Director, Department of Health