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### MESSAGE FROM KALANI

The mandatory five day recess is when legislators return home to visit constituents. This year it's February 25 to March 3. With social distancing mandates in place, video conferencing platforms like Zoom make it possible for us to meet with our constituents and stay engaged with the community.

# SENATOR J.KALANI ENGLISH

## HAWAI'I STATE SENATE 7TH DISTRICT

### HĀNA, EAST AND UPCOUNTRY MAUI, MOLOKA'I, LĀNA'I AND KAHO'OLAWÉ



## BILL TO PROVIDE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE RELIEF TO HAWAI'I EMPLOYERS HEADS TO GOVERNOR

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented financial hardships for employers statewide, causing many businesses to fold. Skyrocketing unemployment has led to the State's depletion of the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund (UCTF) to pay out on claims and required a loan of \$700,000,000 to keep the fund afloat. Since employer tax contributions to the State UCTF are ordinarily calculated based on the overall health of the fund and the claims history of the employer, under the existing schedule, the depleted fund would prompt the highest statutory rate to apply, at a time when employers can least afford the increase.

**House Bill 1278 HD1** was unanimously passed by both the House and Senate on February 24 to address this problem and to provide critical unemployment insurance relief to Hawai'i employers. After passage, the bill was promptly transmitted to the Governor.

The bill will help to contain the economic fallout from COVID-19 by temporarily reducing the unemployment insurance contri-

but ion rates. **HB 1278** would in part: amend the definitions of benefit year and week; conform the method of filing claims for partial unemployment benefits to those for total or partial unemployment benefits; provide relief to certain reimbursable employers with regard to unemployment benefit reimbursement payments; and require the Director of Labor and Industrial Relations to modify the annual contribution rate computation for 2021 and 2022, by omitting from the calculation, benefits charged against their accounts to address the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; and sets the employer contributions to the unemployment contributions to the unemployment insurance trust fund schedules for 2021 – 2022.

"After a year of Covid-19 restrictions placed upon businesses causing dire economic consequences for many of them," states Sen. English, "Enactment of this bill will provide the relief they need at this critical time."

More information can be found at: [www.capitol.hawaii.gov/measure\\_indiv.aspx?billtype=HB&billnumber=1278&year=2021](http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/measure_indiv.aspx?billtype=HB&billnumber=1278&year=2021)

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PREPARES TO OPEN COVID-19 VACCINATIONS TO THOSE 70 AND OLDER

Hawai'i State Health Director Dr. Elizabeth Char today announced on February 19 that the State will soon open COVID-19 vaccinations to those 70 and older. Currently, kūpuna 75 and older are eligible to get vaccinated.

The Department of Health will announce when sites are prepared to accept registration for this new age group.

However, vaccine availability continues to be impacted by weather-

related delays. 27,700 doses of the Moderna vaccine originally expected the week of February 15 are delayed because of ice storms on the mainland. DOH is awaiting news on when shipments will resume and when Moderna will send the backlogged doses. The state anticipates receiving more than 50,000 doses for the week of February 22.

Click here to download broadcast quality video of Dr. Char discussing opening vaccine availability to those 70 and older.

## B.1.429 VARIANT ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASED COVID-19 CASES ON MAUI

The Hawai'i Department of Health's State Laboratories Division has confirmed a variant of concern, associated with an increase of COVID-19 cases on Maui.

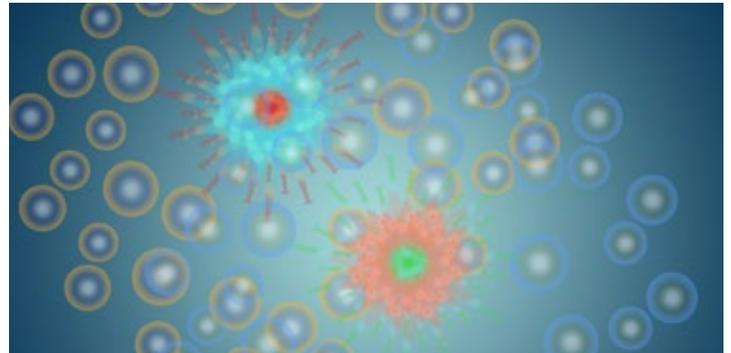
The B.1.429 variant, previously called L452R, was first detected in Hawai'i in early January. The Department of Health (DOH) indicated that there have been 19 cases of the B.1.429 variant on Maui, 17 on O'ahu, four on Hawai'i Island and one on Kaua'i.

In total, there have been 50-60 cases of the B.1.429 variant on Maui, 28 of them found in January and February of 2021 and the rest occurring last year. Maui cases make up about half of all B1249 cases in the State to date, according to health officials.

"While we may be seeing a decrease in the number of COVID-19 cases, we must continue to be cautious and adhere to the social distancing protocols that are in place," noted Sen. English. "This new strain is highly contagious, and we must do what we can to prevent further spread."

The B.1.429 variant was first detected in California in December. It has become the dominant strain in California and is found in more than 40 other states.

For more information, visit <https://bit.ly/2O1SAPK>



## HAWAII STATE SENATE LAUNCHED A NEW TELEVISION PROGRAM – “INSIDE THE SENATE”

The Senate launched “Inside The Senate” a new program that featured live, moderated discussions with members of the Senate on the issues, legislation, and topics of importance to the State.

“Inside The Senate” is being produced by 'Ōlelo Community Media and streams live every other Wednesday at 6:30 pm on channel 49 as well as on the 'Ōlelo Facebook page and 'Ōlelo App.

Viewers can participate by:

- Emailing questions/comments to [scomm@capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:scomm@capitol.hawaii.gov).
- Engaging with the Senate on social media by tagging @HawaiiSenate on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
- Using the hashtag #InsideTheSenate.

The first show aired live on Wednesday, February 24 at 6:30pm and featured Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi. Click here to watch the first episode. <https://bit.ly/3bsHDjp>



## SENATOR ENGLISH INTRODUCES BILL THAT WOULD MAKE HIKERS PAY FOR THEIR OWN RESCUE

## DOE ALLOWS LIMITED IN-PERSON COMMENCEMENT EVENTS FOR GRADUATING CLASS OF 2021



In response to the unprecedented numbers of hikers needing rescues, Sen. English introduced a bill that would require government entities to seek reimbursement for the search and rescue expenses for persons who require rescue after leaving a hiking trail to enter a prohibited area or hiking on a trail closed to the public.

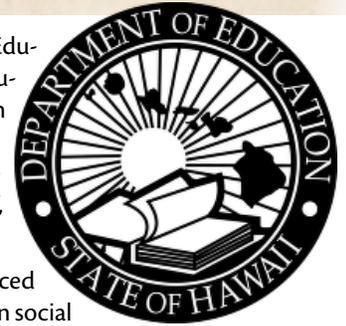
**SB 700** passed out of the Senate Committee on Public Safety, Military and Intergovernmental and the Senate Committee on Judiciary. The bill is headed to the Senate floor for a final floor vote before crossing over to the House for consideration.

“With the recent incidents in Hāna, we need to let visitors know that the signs posted in the various hiking areas are there for the sake of their own safety,” said Sen. English. “I introduced this bill to help keep everyone safe and I’m hopeful that my colleagues will continue to support this measure.”

The Hawai'i State Department of Education released guidelines on February 28 to allow for limited, in-person school commencement and transition ceremonies that ensure the health and safety of students, staff, and families.

The Department previously announced the cancellation of all large, in-person social gatherings for the remainder of the school year. Commencement ceremonies were excluded from that announcement while the Department collaborated with partner agencies, the Governor's office, county mayors and schools on safe and viable in-person and virtual options to honor and celebrate the graduating class of 2021.

In addition to standard school health and safety protocols, commencement events must adhere to guidelines that include: The ceremony must be held outdoors or in a venue with adequate ventilation; Third-party venues are allowed; Graduates will be allowed to bring a maximum of two members from their household; No additional guests will be allowed; Schools also have the authority to reduce this number based on venue restrictions and ceremony formats; Larger schools that may experience



## IMPORTANT REMINDERS BEFORE FILING 2020 TAX RETURNS

Following an unpredictable year with many changes and challenges, the Internal Revenue Service recently shared important reminders for taxpayers who are about to file their 2020 federal tax returns.

### Choose direct deposit

The safest, most accurate and fastest way to get a refund is to electronically file and choose direct deposit. Direct deposit means any tax refund is electronically deposited for free into a taxpayer's financial account.

Eight out of 10 taxpayers get their refunds by using direct deposit. It is simple, safe, and secure. This is the same electronic transfer system used to deposit nearly 98% of all Social Security and Veterans Affairs benefits into millions of accounts.

### Earned Income Tax Credit

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) can give qualifying workers with low-to-mod-

erate income a substantial financial boost. EITC not only reduces the amount of tax someone owes but may give them a refund even if they don't owe any taxes or aren't required to file a return.

People must meet certain requirements and file a federal tax return in order to receive this credit. The EITC assistant on IRS.gov can help people determine if they qualify.

### Taxable unemployment compensation

Millions of Americans received unemployment compensation in 2020, many of them for the first time. This compensation is taxable and must be included as gross income on their tax return.

Taxpayers can elect to have federal taxes withheld from their unemployment benefits or make estimated tax payments, but many do not take these options. In that case, taxes on those benefits will be paid when the 2020

tax return is filed. Taxes can be paid throughout the year. For safe and secure ways to pay taxes electronically go to [IRS.gov/payments](https://www.irs.gov/payments).

### Workers moving into the gig economy

Many people found different employment in 2020, including jobs in the gig economy. Taxpayers must report income earned in the gig economy on their tax return. However, gig-economy workers generally do not have taxes withheld from their pay as salaried workers normally do. The IRS encourages people earning income in the gig economy to consider making quarterly estimated tax payments to stay current with their federal tax obligations.

For more tips and information, visit:

<https://bit.ly/3tcfinc>

## J. KALANI ENGLISH Senate Majority Leader

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Vice Chair, Senate Committee  
on Public Safety,  
Intergovernmental and  
Military Affairs

Member, Senate Committee  
on Transportation

Member, Senate Committee  
on Ways & Means



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### HOW TO REACH US

Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 205  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, HI 96813  
ph 808-587-7225  
fax 808-587-7230

From Maui, toll free 984-2400 + 77225  
From Moloka'i and Lāna'i,  
toll free 1-800-468-4644 + 77225  
e-mail: [senenglish@capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:senenglish@capitol.hawaii.gov)

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## Two Students From Maui County Nominated To Attend United States Service Academies

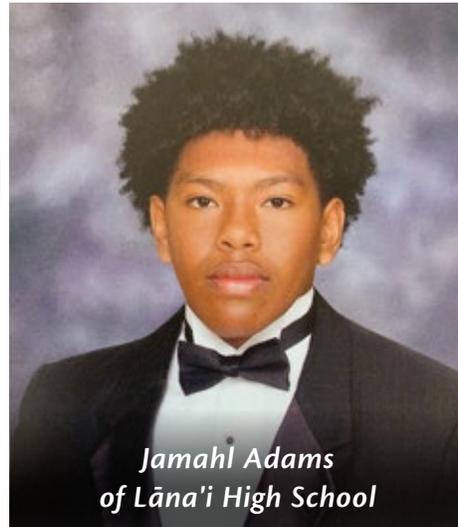
U.S. Senator Brian Schatz announced on February 13, the names of 46 students nominated to attend one of our nation's service academies. The service academies are: the United States Air Force Academy, the United States Military Academy, the United States Naval Academy, and the United States Merchant Marine Academy.

The applicants were selected based on their ability to successfully meet the rigorous demands for undergraduate education and training of officers of the Armed Forces, as well as their leadership skills through athletics and other organizations, and an overall commitment to the military, the commu-

nity and our country. The nominees will now be considered for appointment by the U.S. Service Academies.

The two nominees from District 7 are: Jamahl Adams of Lāna'i City, Lāna'i High School - United States Military Academy (West Point); and Finn Bediamol of Ha'ikū, King Kekaulike High School - United States Merchant Marine Academy.

"The students who attend our military service academies represent some of our nation's elite," said Sen. English. "Jamahl and Finn represent the leaders of our Maui Nui communities and I wish them the best in all future endeavors."



*Jamahl Adams  
of Lāna'i High School*



*Finn Bediamol  
of King Kekaulike High School*

## MAX OTANI CONFIRMED AS DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC SAFETY



The Senate confirmed Max Otani on February 24 as Director of the Department of Public Safety (PSD). His term expires on December 5, 2022.

Otani has more than three decades of experience working in the State's corrections and judicial system. He served as a First Circuit Court probation officer from 1985 – 1987; a manager of the O'ahu Intake Services Center from 2003-2005; administrator for the Intake Service Center Division from 2011-2014; and as PSD's Deputy Director for Corrections from 2013-14. After serving as Deputy Director of Corrections, Otani returned to his

previous position as administrator of the Intake Service Center Division and remained there until his retirement from PSD in 2016. He currently serves as a board member for the Hawai'i Paroling Authority (HPA).

Director Otani is a graduate of Hilo High School. He received his Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Hawai'i at Hilo and a Master of Arts Degree in Social Work from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.