



*Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515*

*Anna G. Eshoo  
Eighteenth District  
California*

August 19, 2020

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

Dear Governor Ige,

I write to express my concerns about the worsening outbreak of COVID-19 in the state of Hawaii and the recently reported information about the status of contact tracing and testing in your state and I'm including questions to bring greater clarity regarding these issues.

As you know, less than two months ago, Hawaii had the lowest number of COVID-19 cases per capita of any state in the nation. However, this trend has reversed and now Hawaii has the highest infection rate in the United States<sup>1</sup>. From early June through the end of July, your state's cases more than tripled to 2,111 confirmed infections, and from July 31 through August 14, the state's cases doubled and now stand at 5,042 positive cases. At the same time, your state has implemented a 14-day travel quarantine for travelers visiting the islands, which suggests that the cause of the recent resurgence of Hawai'i COVID-19 cases is attributable to widespread community transmission. On August 14<sup>th</sup> a whistleblower came forward to describe the challenges Hawai'i's Department of Health in partnership with the University of Hawaii have faced in carrying out tracking, testing and tracing programs.<sup>2</sup> Since those reports, you have taken swift action to name a new head of contact tracing for the state.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Warner, Melanie. "How Hawaii Became a Rare Covid Success Story." *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 20 June 2020, [www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/06/19/hawaii-covid-success-story-322919](http://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/06/19/hawaii-covid-success-story-322919).

<sup>2</sup> Mahealani Richardson. "Whistleblower Describes a Health Department 'struggling to keep up'", *Hawaii News Now*, 14 Aug. 2020, [whistleblower-describes-health-department-struggling-keep-up](https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/story/news/2020/08/14/whistleblower-describes-health-department-struggling-keep-up/)

<sup>3</sup> Dan Nakaso and Allison Schaefer. "Hawaii Health Department has new contact tracing leader", *Star Advertiser*, 13 Aug 2020. [www.staradvertiser.com/2020/08/13/hawaii-news/health-department-has-new-contact-tracing-leader/](https://www.staradvertiser.com/2020/08/13/hawaii-news/health-department-has-new-contact-tracing-leader/)

Congress appropriated significant funding to states to ensure adequate resources to track, trace and respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. Hawaii has received over \$50 million in federally appropriated funds through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Epidemiology and Lab Capacity Grants program. This funding was intended to be used to develop, purchase, administer, process and analyze COVID-19 tests, scale-up laboratory capacity, trace contacts, support employer testing, and support other testing-related activities, which are essential to containing the virus.

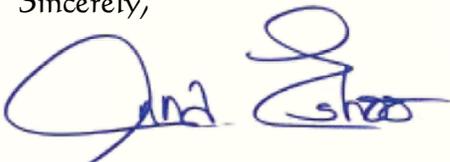
To better understand the exponential increase in COVID-19 cases in Hawaii, I request complete responses to the following questions on or before August 28, 2020:

1. To date, how many contact tracers are and have been on staff weekly since COVID-19 was declared an emergency by your office?
  - How many contact tracers have been trained?
  - How many have volunteered?
  - What is the training process and qualifications for contact tracers?
  - What are the duties of contact tracers as outlined by the state?
  - What are the benchmarks that must be achieved with contact tracing of each case, i.e. ideal and maximum period of time to reach all contacts for each case, testing of all contacts, other services offered for those in isolation, etc.?
2. What is the State's response to the whistleblower's allegations regarding the discrepancy between currently active contact tracers and the Department of Health reporting false numbers to the public?
3. To date, exactly how much federal funding has been received by the state for the purposes of testing and contact tracing, and how it has been used?
  - How many COVID-19 tests has the state administered?
  - How many COVID-19 diagnostic testing platforms has the state purchased to increase its testing capability?
  - What amount of these dollars remain unspent, and why?
4. What guidelines are the Department of Health and Governor's office using to test, quarantine, and trace visitors, residents, medical professionals and staff? Please provide us with the State's current guidelines and policies related to COVID-19, testing, healthcare workers treating COVID-19 patients, and quarantine policy for positive cases.
5. Provide a detailed timeline of testing rates administered by the state, contact tracing records, and amount of funds allocated toward these efforts.
6. What specific actions will be taken to bring your State's testing and contact tracing efforts up to nationally recommended standards? Please include your plan and your timeline to reach the national standard.

7. What oversight and accountability actions will be implemented to ensure key performance indicators in your contact tracing program are met?
8. Due to numerous instances of conflicting and false information being released to the public by your Department of Health regarding the number of contract tracers employed and their capabilities, what specific actions will you take to restore the integrity of the Department of Health?

Congressional oversight is essential to ensure that states have the resources they need to adequately respond to the ongoing pandemic and that taxpayer dollars are being spent responsibly to serve the public health interest. I thank you in advance for your cooperation and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Anna G. Eshoo, Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Health  
House Energy and Commerce Committee

cc: The Honorable Tulsi Gabbard, Member of Congress  
The Honorable Ed Case, Member of Congress  
The Honorable Brian Schatz, United States Senator  
The Honorable Mazie Hirono, United States Senator