

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 9, 2020

Mr. Peter T. Gaynor
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Gaynor:

We write to urge you to reconsider recent policy changes made by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that severely limit expenses eligible for reimbursement through the Public Assistance Program. FEMA's recent policy change hamstringing Hawaii's effort to reopen safely, making it more difficult for state and local governments to provide essential services during the pandemic, and for businesses, nonprofits, and schools to operate.

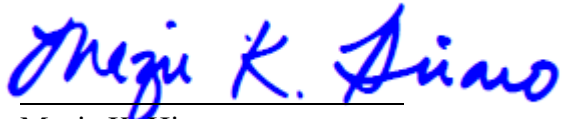
On March 19, 2020, FEMA issued a Fact Sheet for the Public Assistance Program that allowed for broad reimbursement of personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning costs for entities responding to the pandemic. This policy was reversed on September 1, 2020, when FEMA issued a new interim policy, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic: Work Eligible for Public Assistance (FP 104-009-19). This policy change placed new restrictions on the Public Assistance Program, preventing state and local governments from seeking reimbursements for the purchase of PPE, testing equipment and supplies, and other materials and services for non-medical uses. Private nonprofit organizations that provide critical nonmedical community services are also now ineligible for reimbursement.

The Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE) alone spends approximately \$1 million per month to purchase PPE and disinfecting supplies. These costs will only increase as the state works to restore in-person learning. Federal funds are necessary to ensure that classrooms in Hawaii can reopen safely for students, teachers, principals, and other school personnel, and to combat learning loss caused by the pandemic. The more resources states like Hawaii have to dedicate to essential PPE, for example, the less they can provide for programs like mobile learning hubs that have expanded access to broadband for low-income students in rural and underserved communities. Without access to broadband, achievement gaps that existed before the pandemic could be further exacerbated—especially for students considered at-risk and marginalized.

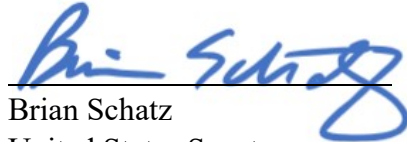
HIDOE is not alone in having to expend additional resources to maintain essential governmental services during the pandemic. This policy change negatively affects governmental services ranging from public transportation to election services. State and local governments in Hawaii

and throughout the nation are working tirelessly to maintain essential services during the pandemic. Their efforts to do so are already hindered by declining revenues that have been felt nationwide. During these challenging times, we urge you to support their efforts by reversing the restrictions put in place by FEMA's updated policy.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Ed Case
United States Representative



Tulsi Gabbard
United States Representative