



Aloha,

This July, I met with Jennifer Gutowski, Director of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Pacific Islands Health Care System. Our meeting was productive and focused on the importance of community engagement and outreach and how the VA needs to improve communication and services for veterans in Hawaii.

During our meeting Ms. Gutowski shared that the VA approved new lease agreements to build Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) on the islands of Maui and Kauai. These facilities are long overdue and will play a critical role in helping to ensure our veterans have access to the health care services they've earned.

Earlier this year, I met with Maui veterans who expressed their deep, continuing frustration on the lack of clear information for a CBOC facility on Maui. I am pleased with this announcement that the design and construction of this important facility will move forward.

The Maui CBOC will neighbor Maui High School, through a partnership between the VA and the Hawaii Department of Education, and is the preferred location for Maui veterans. The Kauai facility will be built next to the Kauai Veterans Center - creating a true gathering place for our veterans as they address the majority of their needs.

I look forward to working with Ms. Gutowski to ensure the health care needs of Hawaii's veterans are met.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mazie K. Hirono". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Mazie K. Hirono**  
United States Senator



*Senator Hirono meets with VAPIHCS Director Jennifer Gutowski*



## Legislative Update

### **Hirono Provision Included in GI Bill Improvements Passed by Senate**

On August 2, 2017, the Senate passed the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017, legislation cosponsored by Senator Hirono to improve veterans' education benefits and enhance the post-9/11 GI Bill. The bill now goes to the President for his signature. The Act includes the Veterans TEST Accessibility Act, legislation Senator Hirono introduced with Senator Rounds (R-S.D.) to allow veterans to use their GI Bill benefits for tests, certifications, and licenses without losing one month's worth of benefits as is required under current law.

Also included are provisions to restore GI Bill eligibility for nearly 200 Hawaii student veterans enrolled at Heald College, which closed in 2015.

Other major policy changes include:

- Removing time restrictions on future GI Bill recipients so they can use the benefits anytime, instead of before the current 15 year limit expires

- Extended benefits for students who are studying in science, economics, technology, or mathematics fields
- Expanded benefits for reservists, guardsmen, dependents, as well as surviving spouses and dependents
- 100 percent eligibility to post-9/11 Purple Heart recipients regardless of time in service
- Creating a pilot program for veterans to take technology courses

### **Hirono Fights to Safeguard Benefits for Filipino Veterans at the Manila VA**

On July 26, 2017, Senator Hirono introduced the Keeping Our Commitment to Overseas Veterans Act to extend an expiring provision under law that allows the VA to operate the VA Regional Office and Outpatient Clinic in Manila, Philippines. The bill has been endorsed by the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

According to the VA, Manila VA supports over \$19 million per month in disability compensation or pensions to around 13,000 beneficiaries. In addition, it serves approximately 6,000 enrolled patients through its Outpatient Clinic. The Manila VA also plays a key role in processing WWII veteran claims under the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation fund. Without extension by Congress beyond September 30, 2017, the VA would no longer have authorization to maintain the facility.



*Senator Hirono speaks with Filipino World War II veteran Domingo Los Banos (center) and other veterans at the USS Missouri Memorial*

Senator Hirono has made fighting for Filipino veterans a top priority during her time in Congress, as the need to reunite these aging veterans with their loved ones grows more urgent every year. In 2016, Senator Hirono led the successful effort to enact her Filipino Veterans of World War II Congressional Gold Medal Act, which collectively awards Filipino World War II veterans with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor from Congress, in recognition of their dedicated service to the United States.

### [Filipino Veterans of WWII Congressional Gold Medal Registry](#)

The Filipino Veterans Recognition and Education Project is currently working to register Filipino WWII Veterans and surviving relatives for the purposes of receiving an official bronze replica of the Congressional Gold Medal that will be awarded collectively in their honor. If you or someone you know may qualify, [please click here to learn how you can apply](#).

### [Hirono Leads Effort to Fund Homeless Veteran Support Programs](#)

Senators Hirono and Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) led a bipartisan group of 28 Senators urging for greater funding for the Supporting Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), Grant and Per Diem, and Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing programs for Fiscal Year (FY) 2018. These important federal programs provide critical services and housing for Hawaii veterans and their families experiencing homelessness. On July 13, 2017, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved S. 1557, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act which includes an increase of \$20 million for SSVF.



## Fighting for Hawaii

### [Hirono Continues Work to Protect Nursing Home Coverage for Hawaii Veterans](#)

On July 11, 2017, the U.S. Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee heard testimony in support of Senator Hirono's Keeping Our Commitment to Disabled Veterans Act to renew critical nursing services. This bipartisan legislation would extend an expiring requirement under law that the VA provide nursing care for certain veterans with service-connected disabilities. Over **350 veterans in Hawaii** currently receive VA reimbursement for nursing care under this law.



*Click on the photo above to watch video from the hearing*

Hawaii facilities receiving VA nursing care reimbursement funding in FY 2016:

**Oahu**

- VA Community Living Center in Honolulu
- Hale Ho Aloha Nursing Home in Honolulu
- Hale Nani Rehab and Nursing Center in Honolulu
- Maunalani Nursing and Rehab Center in Honolulu
- Aloha Nursing and Rehab Center in Kaneohe
- Ann Pearl Nursing Home in Kaneohe

**Maui**

- Hale Makua Health Services in Kahului and Wailuku

**Hawaii Island**

- Yukio Okutsu State Veterans Home in Hilo

**Kauai**

- Garden Isle Healthcare and Rehab Center in Lihue



## Updates from VA

### [VA Expands Emergency Mental Health Care to Former Service Members With Other-Than-Honorable Discharges](#)

Starting this July, all Veterans Health Administration medical centers now stand prepared to offer emergency mental health care to former service members with other-than-honorable administrative discharges.

### [New Law Decreases Hiring Times of VA Medical Center and Network Director Positions](#)

Thanks to a recent bipartisan measure, the VA now has greater flexibility to hire qualified health-care executives while cutting down on previously time-consuming hiring practices.



## VA Construction & Lease Project Update

Below includes the latest updates on various VA construction and lease agreement projects throughout the state:

### **Kauai Approved Minor Replacement Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) (one stop shopping concept) Minor Project**

The award of the Kauai land lease between VAPIHCS and the Kauai Veterans Center was awarded on July 11, 2017-securing the land and site for the project.

### **Maui Approved Minor Replacement CBOC (one stop shopping concept) Minor Project**

A land donation offer has been received from the State of Hawaii and has been approved by the VA Central Office. VA staff are working towards final award, projected to be in late FY 2017.

### **Oahu ALOHA Multispecialty CBOC**

The VA issued solicitations to offerors on April 6, 2017 for this approved/authorized VA Major Lease Project, which will create a new 66,000 sq. ft. VA Clinic, to be located at a site, yet to be chosen, on the Ewa Plain area of Oahu. A Pre-Bid Conference was held on May 3, 2017 and a Technical Evaluation Board reviewed the offers on June 27-29. The projected lease award will be in early FY 2018.

## **West Hawaii: Kona CBOC Expansion**

The VA has retained the services of a lease broker to assist in the identification of a leasable property of approximately 6,000 sq. ft. The search for suitable sites remains active.

## **East Hawaii: Hilo CBOC New Replacement Lease**

A VA Strategic Capital Investment Program proposal is awaiting VA Headquarters authorization.



## **Upcoming Local Veterans Events**

**August 12:** VA Benefits Workshop/Claims Clinic, Lanai Senior Center, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

**August 15:** VA Town Hall, Veterans Caring for Veterans Center (Molokai), 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

**August 19:** [Na Koa Wounded Warrior Regatta](#), Fort DeRussy Beach, 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

**August 27:** [5th Annual Dive for Life](#), Sharks Cove, 6:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**September 1:** [Veterans Stand Down](#), Waialua Community Center, 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.



## **Casework and Benefits Quick Info**

If you need assistance with a federal agency, my staff will make every effort to help you in obtaining timely and accurate information on the status of your claim. Some of the most common inquiries in addition to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims and services include Social Security claims, immigration petitions, and foreclosure cases.

Please note that Members of Congress cannot request that the agency provide you with anything that is not authorized by federal law or regulation, or pressure the agency for particular outcomes. My office can request, for example, that you are afforded due process, that you receive timely responses, and that errors that may exist in the handling of your request are corrected.

If you or someone you know could benefit from assistance from my office, please visit my

Federal Agency Assistance page by [clicking here](#), call my State Office at 808-522-8970, or email [Hawaiioffice@hirono.senate.gov](mailto:Hawaiioffice@hirono.senate.gov).

In addition, to apply for Veterans' Benefits Online (VONAPP), access VA Payment History, apply for VA Home Loan Certificate of Eligibility, check on Compensation & Pension status and more - Create an eBenefits account online at [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov).

Are you interested in learning more about what's happening with Senator Hirono? Follow her on social media! Like her [Facebook page](#) and [follow her on Twitter](#).

For local and national contacts, please visit my veteran resource page by [clicking here](#).



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