December 10, 2020

The Honorable Kirk Caldwell, Mayor
530 South King Street, Room 300
Honolulu, Hawai‘i  96813

AND

The Honorable Ann Kobayashi,
Chair and Presiding Officer
and Members
Honolulu City Council
530 South King Street, Room 202
Honolulu, Hawai‘i  96813

Dear Mayor Caldwell, Council Chair Kobayashi, and Councilmembers:

SUBJECT: Climate Change and Social Equity

Pursuant to the Revised Charter of Honolulu (“RCH”) Section 6-107(h), the City & County of Honolulu Climate Change Commission is charged with gathering the latest science and information on climate change impacts to Hawai‘i. The Commission provides advice and recommendations to the Mayor, City Council, and executive departments as they look to draft policy and engage in planning for future climate scenarios as well as reduce Honolulu’s contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions.

While climate impacts are being experienced globally, they will not be experienced equally. The impacts of climate change will pose the greatest threats to frontline communities, which are typically those who have the fewest resources to respond or have been historically socially and politically marginalized. This is also true in the case of today’s youth, and for future generations who have no representation and have not contributed to the problem yet are likely to be most affected.

The City and County of Honolulu Climate Change Commission acknowledged in its Climate Brief adopted in June 2018 that: The negative impacts of climate change fall disproportionately on disadvantaged groups in a type of “vicious cycle.” Initial inequities or vulnerabilities can be exacerbated by climate change, making it critical to recognize and resolve the impacts on vulnerable populations as the City pivots to meet the multi-
sectoral challenges of climate change. As such, the Commission makes the following recommendations. The City should:

1. **Center Social Equity in All City Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plans.** Analyze the distributional impacts of all climate policies and articulate how such policies will benefit all.

2. **Identify frontline communities** that potentially have, are, or will be experiencing chronic climate or socioeconomic stressors that could worsen the impact of climate change-induced shocks.

3. **Review O‘ahu’s Ola Resilience Strategy** to determine areas that include equity components and where additional focus on equity is needed.

4. **Collaborate with communities** to share resources and information about community risks, needs, and abilities. Encourage holistic, community-scale approaches to building resilience by partnering with communities, nonprofits, allied professionals, and technical experts to identify and communicate about areas of high-risk.

5. **Focus on outreach to underserved communities** through expanding accessibility options and providing information in the preferred format and languages of the island’s diverse communities.

The Commission commends the City and CCSR for establishing social equity as a key component in effectively addressing climate change adaptation and mitigation planning and policies. The Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that, “Social justice and equity are core aspects of climate-resilient development pathways that aim to limit global warming to 1.5 °C as they address challenges and inevitable trade-offs, widen opportunities, and ensure that options, visions, and values are deliberated, between and within countries and communities, without making the poor and disadvantaged worse off.”

If you have questions for the Commission regarding the information presented here, we can be reached at ccc@honolulu.gov.

Sincerely,

Victoria Keener, Ph.D.
Chair, Climate Change Commission

Attachment: Climate Change & Social Equity Guidance Document