

# HAWAI'I BUDGET PRIMER



2024-25

FOR CANDIDATES, ELECTED OFFICIALS AND  
CONCERNED MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC



[www.hiappleseed.org](http://www.hiappleseed.org)

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Cover Image: Lo'i kalo at Waipao in He'eia mauka on O'ahu, cared for by Papahana Kuaola. // Will Caron

Hawai'i Appleseed is committed to a more socially and economically just Hawai'i, where everyone has genuine opportunities to achieve economic security and fulfill their potential. We change systems to address inequity and foster greater opportunity by conducting data analysis and research to address income inequality, educating policymakers and the public, engaging in collaborative problem solving and coalition building, and advocating for policy and systems change.

The work of Hawai'i Appleseed is about people. The issues we work on—housing, food, wages, mobility, the state budget and taxation, and racial and indigenous equity—are important because they ensure people have access to shelter, sustenance, and the means to survive and thrive individually and collectively. Addressing these issues requires the knowledge and expertise of the people that have first-hand experience and live with the adverse consequences of our flawed systems.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Budget Basics</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Funding the Budget</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Opportunities for Investment</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Hawai'i Government Branches Snapshot</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>32</b>

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# BUDGET BASICS

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**THE STATE BUDGET** is a statement of our values. It's where we invest in programs that increase fairness, opportunity and wellbeing for all. It reflects the state's priorities as it addresses the operational and capital needs of Hawai'i's three branches of government and the semi-autonomous agency responsible for the wellbeing of Native Hawaiians:

- The Executive Branch
- The Judiciary
- The Legislative Branch
- The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA)

## Budget Proposals & Decision-making

The state budget is a plan for spending based on available resources. Each branch of government provides a proposed budget for its operations and capital needs to the legislature for the upcoming fiscal period.

The legislature considers, amends, and appropriates funds for these budgets during legislative sessions. In most years, the legislature also authorizes grants-in-aid—usually to specific nonprofit organizations—which are included in the operating budget. The legislature introduces a variety of other bills for projects that require one-time spending.

The governor may change legislatively-approved spending by vetoing or amending line items in appropriations bills. In 2024, Hawai'i Governor Josh Green used his veto power to reduce Executive Branch spending for FY25 by \$1 billion, primarily by:

- Slashing new appropriations to the Rainy Day Fund from a proposed \$300 million to just \$1.00, and likewise cutting a prepayment to the state pension fund from \$135 million to \$1.00;

- Eliminating \$460 million in one-time appropriations for Maui and wildfire risk management; and
- Selectively reducing operating budgets for six different Executive Branch departments by a combined total of \$74 million.

Authorized spending falls into one of the following three categories:

- **The Operating Budget.** OHA and our three branches of state government each has a budget for ongoing operations that is approved by the legislature. Usually, the operating budget is described in a single detailed budget bill for each branch.

For FY25, the budget bill for the Executive Branch is House Bill 1800. The budget bills for the Judiciary's and the Legislature Branch's budgets are HB1911 and HB2520, respectively. The legislature subsidizes a small part of OHA's budget (OHA's other funding comes from revenues from the public land trust, investments, fees and contributions). OHA's biennial budget was approved in 2023 as HB133 and was not updated in 2024.

- **Other Appropriations.** Short-term or one-time funding for needs outside of ongoing budgets are approved in separate appropriations bills. The legislature may also approve emergency appropriations (EAs) to cover unexpected operating shortfalls occurring in the current fiscal year. An unusually large amount of EA funding was approved in 2024.
- **Capital Improvement Projects.** CIP funds pay for developing and improving infrastructure, roads, facilities and more. CIPs are often carried out over more than one year, and paid for with money borrowed through bonds.



## **The Fiscal Year & Biennial Budget**

Hawai'i's state government operates on a two-year fiscal biennium. The current biennium started July 1, 2023, and ends June 30, 2025. Each fiscal year is identified by its end date. That's why the year that starts on July 1, 2024 and ends on June 30, 2025 is called FY25.

In odd years, the legislature passes a fiscal biennium budget; but it reviews and amends the proposed budget for the second year in even years. In 2024, the legislature amended the FY25 budget and also authorized emergency appropriations for FY24 to cover unanticipated costs, most of which were related to the 2023 Maui wildfires and to the 2020 pandemic.

## **Getting the State's Work Done**

State services are provided by public employees directly and through contracts with private sector businesses. For example, the state provides half a billion dollars in direct services through contracts with local nonprofits that improve the health and wellbeing of Hawai'i families. Even more is spent to purchase specialty services, such as professional consultation, security, repairs and capital improvements from local for-profit businesses and professionals.

## **The Budget's Contributions to Hawai'i's Economy**

State spending plays a critical role in Hawai'i's economic stability—one that is particularly important in periods of economic crisis, such as during the pandemic. Maintaining government spending means supporting public programs, the state workforce, and entities that provide contractual services for the state. This keeps money circulating throughout the economy as people pay for housing, food and other services.

State government, itself, is a big part of Hawai'i's economy. Hawai'i's gross domestic product in 2023 was \$87 billion. In comparison, total state spending approved in 2024 for current and future operating and capital needs amounts to \$25.1 billion. The state is a major employer with a payroll that covers nearly 70,000 people, and additionally pays out pensions for nearly 54,000 public worker retirees.

## **How State Spending is Distributed**

Spending in all categories authorized for FY25 amounts to \$23.9 billion. An additional \$1.1 billion for FY24 emergencies brings total spending to \$25.1 billion. Funding is shown by category in the table on the next page. Executive Branch figures reflect reductions totaling \$1 billion vetoed by the governor.

	Executive Branch	Judiciary	Legislative Branch	Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA)	Total
Operating Budget	\$19.1 billion	\$210.7 million	\$48.7 million	\$6 million	\$19.4 billion
One-Time Appropriations	\$57.7 million	\$420,000	\$150,000	\$0	\$58.2 million
Emergency Appropriations	\$1.1 billion	\$30.5 million	\$8 million	\$0	\$1.1 billion
Capital Improvement Projects*	\$4.4 billion	\$17.0 million	\$0	\$0	\$4.4 billion
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$24.7 billion</b>	<b>\$258.6 million</b>	<b>\$56.8 million</b>	<b>\$6 million</b>	<b>\$25.0 billion</b>

\*Hawaii's four counties received an additional combined \$85.5 million in CIP subsidies, bringing the CIP total to \$4.5 billion and the total for all spending to \$25.1 billion.

**Figure 1.** Operating Budgets, Other Appropriations and CIPs by Government Branch, FY25

■ Executive Branch   
 ■ Judiciary   
 ■ Legislative Branch   
 ■ OHA



**Figure 1.** The distribution of spending broken down by branch of government. Some 99% of the \$25 billion total supports the executive branch, while the OHA subsidy accounts for just .02% of spending.



## Operating Budgets

The state’s FY25 operating budget for all branches and OHA totals \$19.4 billion, of which \$19.1 billion supports the executive branch. This is the budget for the governor’s and lieutenant governor’s offices and 19 state departments including the University of Hawai’i System.

According to Article V, Section 6 of the [Hawai’i State Constitution](#), the executive branch is allowed up to 20 departments, so creating a new department is a very rare occurrence. The most recent change in departments was in 2022, when the Department of Law Enforcement was created and the name of the related “Department of Public Safety” was changed to the “Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.”

The budget for each department varies widely in size, as shown in **Figure 2**. The four largest are:

- The Department of Budget & Finance, which has the largest budget because it is responsible for retirement costs and debt service for all state agencies, as well as the Emergency Budget Reserve Fund;
- The Department of Human Services, which manages Medicaid (Med-QUEST), the state’s largest single program;
- The Department of Transportation, which has the largest CIP budget; and

- The Department of Education, which has the largest payroll because it employs teachers across the state.

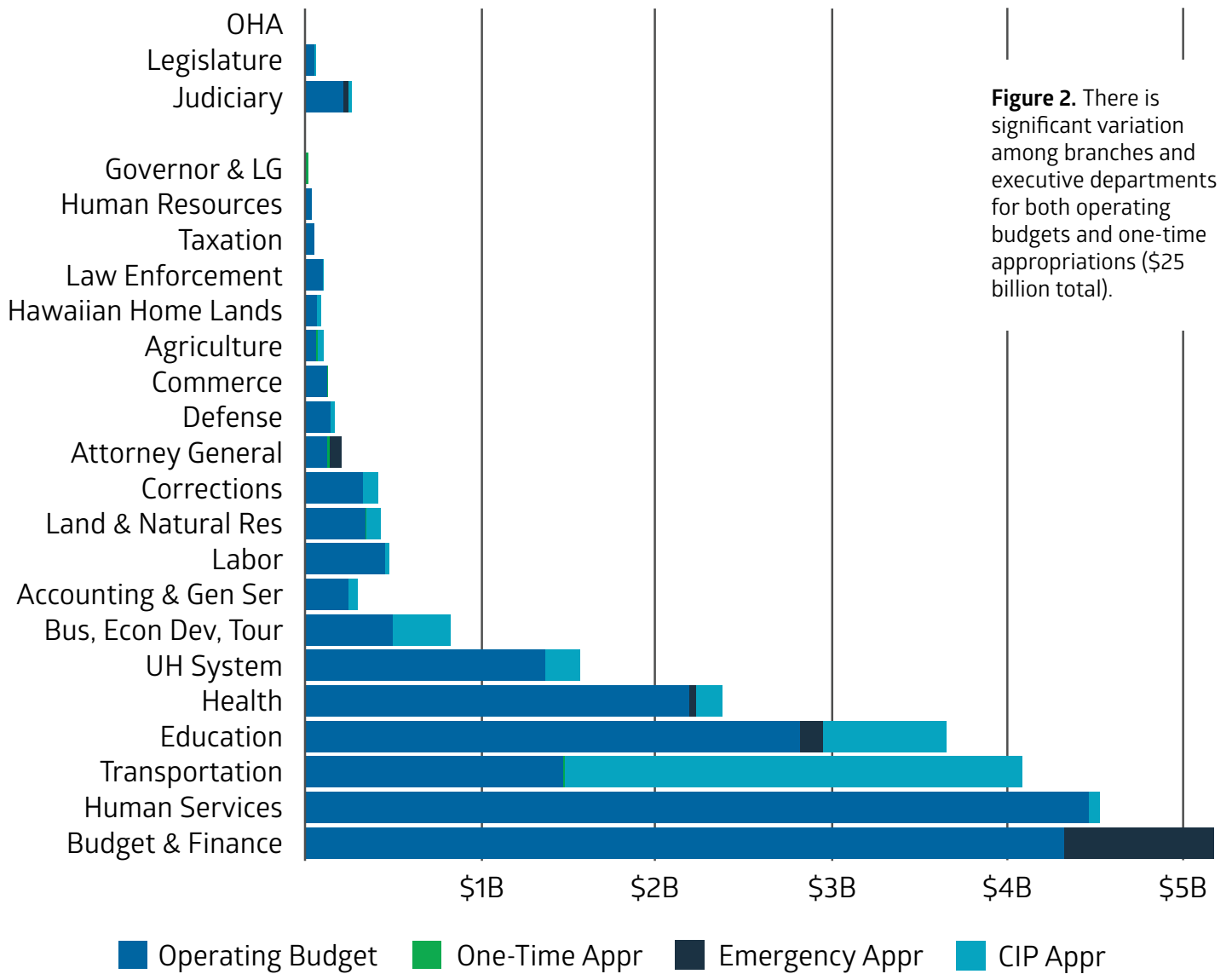
A summary of the operating budget for each branch and executive department for FY25 is included in the Hawai’i Government Branches Snapshot section on **page 17**.

## Emergency and One-Time Appropriations

The legislature occasionally makes emergency appropriations (EAs) to address unexpected needs for the fiscal year in which it is meeting. In 2024, the legislature appropriated an unprecedented \$1.1 billion in emergency appropriations to be spent by June 30, 2024. Of the total, \$362 million was directed to Maui wildfire-related needs, \$561 million covered retroactive pandemic hazard pay for state workers, and \$179 million paid out accumulated mass transit special funds.

While the legislature also authorized \$968 million in one-time appropriations for FY25, the governor’s vetoes reduced that total to \$58 million. These extra appropriations provide specific one-time funds for state needs outside of the operating budget. General funds supported 76 percent of EA and one-time appropriations with most of the remaining balance coming from special funds. The distribution of these appropriations can be seen in **Figure 3**.

**Figure 2.** Distribution of Operating Budgets, One-Time Appropriations & CIP for FY25 and EAs for FY24



**Figure 3.** Distribution of FY25 One-Time & FY24 Emergency Appropriations by Purpose (\$ Millions)



## BUDGET BASICS

### Capital Improvement Projects

CIPs are completed and paid for over multiple years and go toward improving the environment and recreational, health, and social services facilities (among others).

The largest shares, as shown in **Figure 4**, go to:

- Transportation (highways, harbors and airports);
- Formal education (public schools and the University of Hawai'i System);

- Economic development (housing investment, technology development, agribusiness development); and
- Healthcare facilities.

The FY25 CIP budget amounts to \$4.5 billion and includes \$85 million for counties. Two-thirds of its funding will be borrowed through bonds.

### Understanding the State's Obligated Costs

Before the legislature can make any other spending decisions it has to address the state's non-negotiable obligations. These costs are:

- Interest on borrowing (debt service);
- Health benefits for current employees;
- Health costs and "other post-employment benefits" (OPEB) for retirees;
- Pension and social security contributions for public workers; and the
- State share for Medicaid.

These obligations make up a quarter of the whole state operating budget and use nearly half of the state's general funds. In aggregate, obligated costs—sometimes called "fixed" costs—grew from \$3.1 billion to \$4.7 billion over the past 10 years. In total this was a 53 percent increase, but retiree health and pension benefits together increased by 78 percent, and debt service payments increased by 72 percent. The smallest increase—23 percent—was for the state's share of Medicaid costs, while social security contributions and health premiums for active employees grew by 26 percent and 27 percent, respectively. For more information about public worker pension, health and OPEB, see our 2019 in-depth report "[A Public Investment](#)."

Only in the last several years have annual general funds increased more than obligated costs, but this is likely to change. In 2024, legislators passed a major income tax overhaul that will reduce individual income tax collections by more than \$1 billion per year. This will almost certainly result in a big decrease in general fund revenues since income tax receipts make up nearly 40 percent of the general fund. As a result, obligated costs will absorb a greater percentage of general funds, leaving very few resources for emerging needs and other state priorities, such as housing and public preschool. See "Funding the Budget" on **page 10** for more information. The trend in obligated costs is shown in **Figure 5**.



Figure 4. Distribution of Capital Improvement Project Funding, FY25 (\$ Millions)

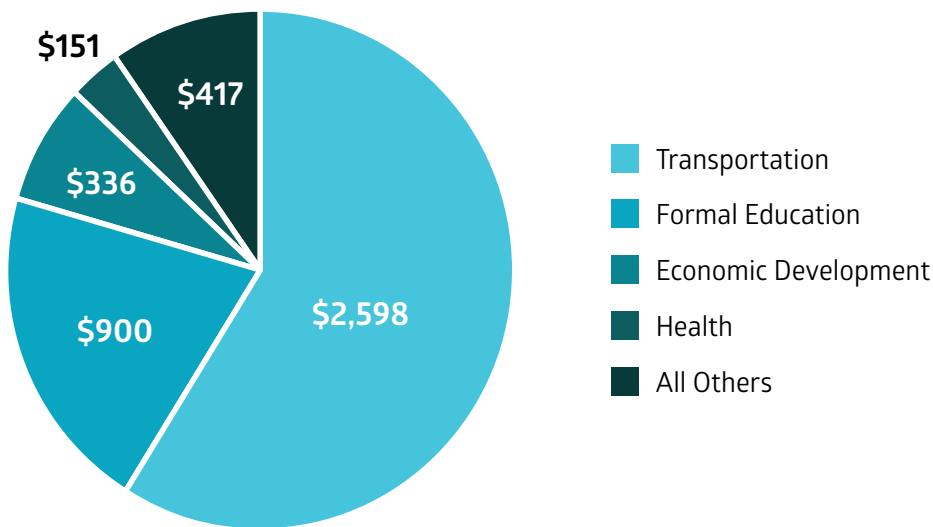


Figure 4. 59% of the CIP budget supports transportation infrastructure and another 20% is spent by the Dept. of Education and the University of Hawai'i System. In total, CIP funding for FY25 amounts to \$4.4 billion.

Figure 5. Growth in Obligated Costs, 2016–2025 (\$ Billions)

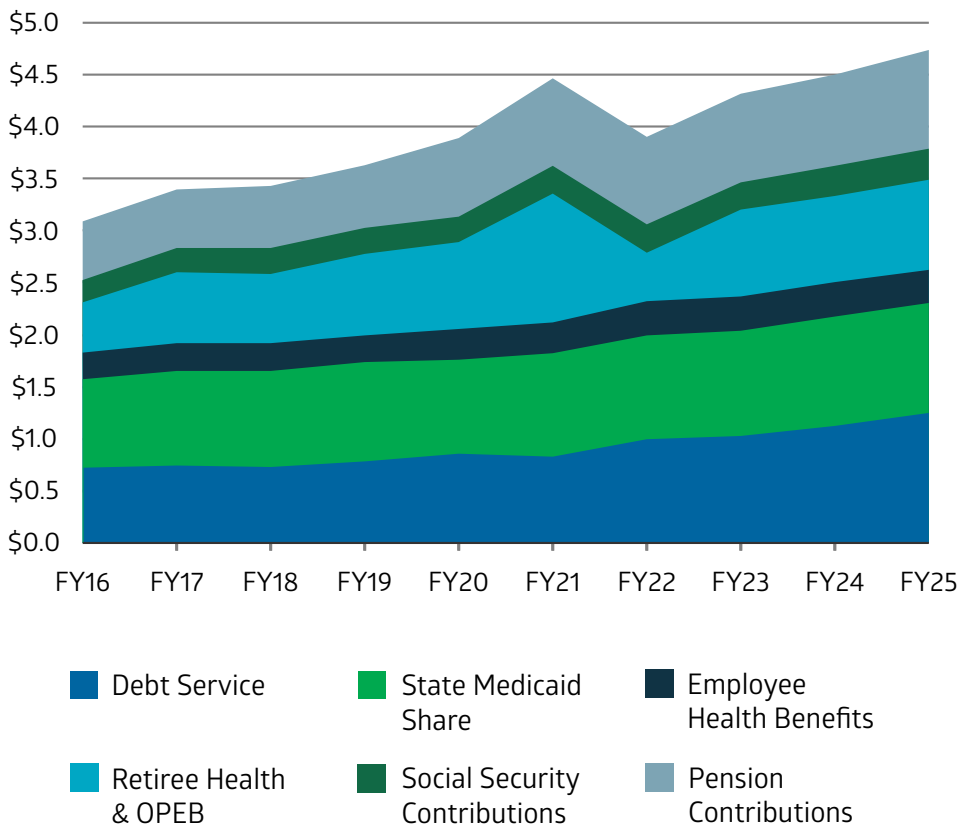


Figure 5. Overall, Hawai'i's obligated costs have increased by 53% over the past 10 years. However, categories grew at different rates. For instance, retiree health and pension costs increased by 78% and Medicaid costs grew by only 23%. These obligations are supported almost entirely by general funds. The state covered only a portion of its obligation for retiree health and OPEB in 2022, as shown in this figure, because of pandemic-related budget concerns. However, financing for these costs was back on track by FY23.

# FUNDING THE BUDGET

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The state budget depends on taxes. The legislature not only decides where money is spent, but also makes many of the decisions about who pays how much to support the budget. These decisions reflect our values as much as our decisions about spending, since the majority of funds come from a system of taxes and fees authorized by the legislature. Additional funds include federal grants and other revenues that are tied to specific spending.

## General Excise Tax

Hawai'i's largest source of tax revenue is the general excise tax (GET). This is a broad-based tax applied to virtually every purchase and service and is paid by both residents and visitors. It has made up 49 percent of general fund revenues over the past 10 years. The GET is considered a regressive tax because lower income households contribute a greater percentage of their income to the tax than do higher income households. Low-income households have to spend almost all their income on goods, rents and services, which are all subject to excise taxes. Higher income households, on the other hand, put more of their incomes into investments and savings that are not subject to GET.

## Individual Income Tax

Hawai'i's individual income tax generally follows the federal definitions for determining taxable income. It is a progressive tax in that it takes a larger percentage from higher-income households, and has contributed 38 percent of general fund revenues over the past 10 years.

The 2024 legislature passed House Bill (HB)2404, which substantially reduces individual income taxes by raising the standard deduction (this reduces the amount of income that is taxable), and by lowering tax rates. By 2030, the standard deduction will increase from \$2,200 to \$12,000 for an individual, and from \$4,400 to \$24,000 for a couple.

Tax rates will also be decreased. While almost all taxpayers will see a reduction in taxes owed, those with the highest incomes will benefit far more than lower-income households. That's because the legislation also changed the tax brackets for higher-income taxpayers. Currently, the top marginal rate of 11 percent is applied to taxable earnings of \$200,000 or more for individuals and \$400,000 or more for couples. When HB2404 is fully implemented in 2030, the new tax code will apply the top 11 percent rate to taxable earnings of \$475,000 or more for individuals and \$950,000 or more for couples.

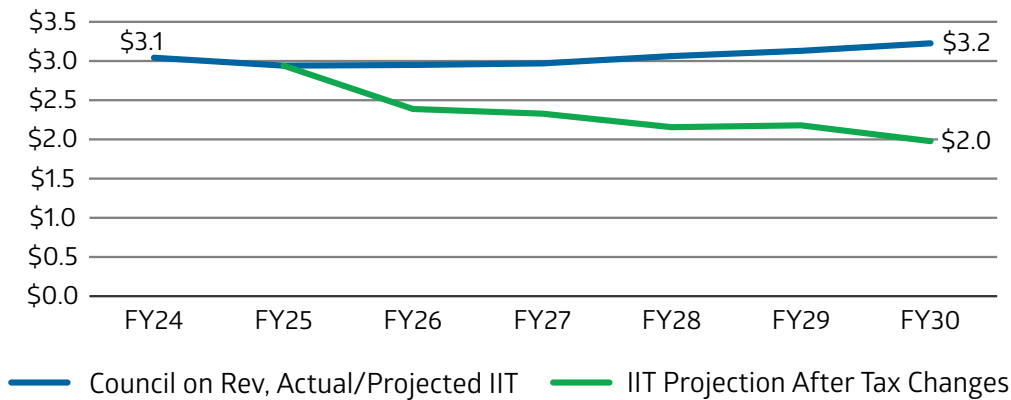
The resulting income tax reductions will almost certainly result in significant state spending cuts to balance the budget. The Department of Taxation estimates that income tax collections will decrease by \$4.4 billion over the next five years. When fully implemented in 2030, this will reduce state revenue by more than \$1 billion every year. This decline in general fund revenue conflicts with spending trends: over the past decade, general fund expenditures have increased by an average of more than half a billion dollars per year.

Moreover, the loss of revenue from the amended tax code will be exacerbated by the growing number of taxpayers who are 65 years of age or older. These taxpayers pay less because they qualify for age exemptions and because they are more likely to rely on pension and social security distributions—sources of income that are taxed at the federal level, but not at the state level in Hawai'i. Between 2012 and 2021, the number of older taxpayers grew by one-third, compared to just a 10 percent increase in all taxpayers. **Figure 6** and **Figure 7** show the projected effects of the HB2404 tax cut on revenues and the contrasting trends for general funds raised and general fund expenditures.

## Other Taxes

**Figure 8** shows the relative value of various state taxes that contributed to the general fund in fiscal year 2023.

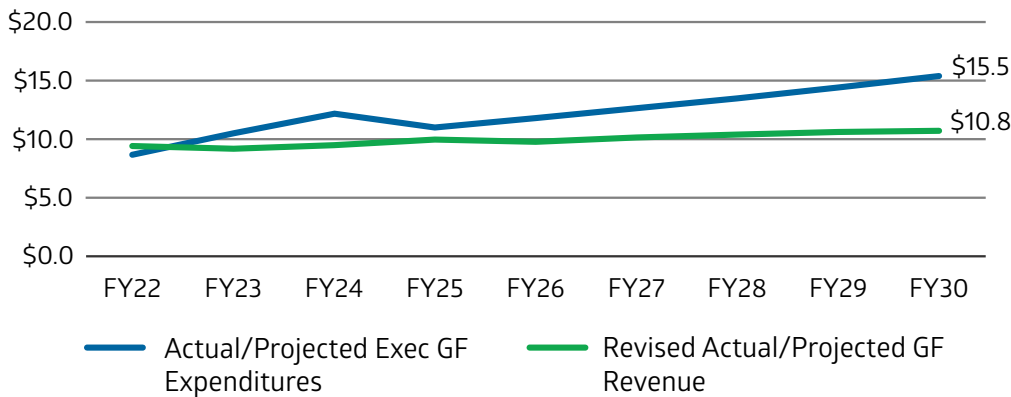
**Figure 6.** Actual and Projected Individual Income Tax (IIT) Revenue (\$ Billions)



**Figure 6.** Projections of individual income tax revenues before and after the passage of legislation that slashed rates show that, by 2030, annual revenues will be down by \$1.2 billion.

Sources: Council on Revenues, Attachment 1, May 29, 2024, and revenue estimates prepared for HB2404 by the state Dept. of Taxation.

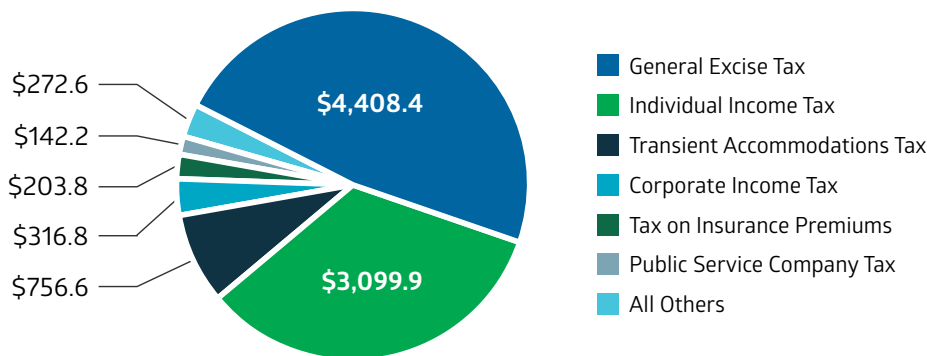
**Figure 7.** Actual and Projected Growth in General Fund Revenue and Executive Branch General Fund Expenditures (\$ Billions)



**Figure 7.** Projections of general fund expenditures and revenues show significant divergence when income tax collections drop. By 2030, there will be a \$5 billion gap.

Sources: Dept. of Budget & Finance Budget Details Appendix 3. Estimated expenditures based on past performance.

**Figure 8.** Tax Revenue Contributing to the General Fund, FY23 (\$ Millions)



**Figure 8.** GET and Individual Income Taxes together make up 82% of general fund tax revenue. About 87% of Transient Accommodations Taxes go to the general fund, contributing 8% of the total, and Corporate Income Taxes contribute another 3%.

## FUNDING THE BUDGET

### Who Pays Hawai‘i’s Taxes

Taxes are paid by all residents, but the tax burden is not equally distributed among households. Although higher-earning taxpayers pay a larger dollar amount in taxes, the weight of taxes falls more heavily on lower-income taxpayers who pay a larger proportion of their earnings in taxes. This is shown in **Figure 9**. Visitors also contribute tax revenues, especially through the GET and TAT.

### Funds Support Budgeted Expenses

The state’s revenue goes into various funds from which it is allocated to support the budget. The three largest fund types are general funds, special funds and federal funds. The FY25 budget for operations and one-time appropriations for all branches and OHA amounts to \$19.5 billion (after vetoes). In addition, the legislature approved \$1.1 billion in emergency spending for FY24.

The “means of financing”—the funds authorized to pay for each expense—for the \$20.6 billion in approved expenditures is shown in **Figure 10**. There are 13 “means of financing” (or MOF) codes listed in full at the beginning of the Executive Branch budget bill. The budget bills and worksheets identify the specific MOF code associated with each authorized expense.

### General Funds

The general fund consists mainly of tax revenue, as shown in **Figure 10**. Additional money comes from investment earnings and money from fines, licenses and permits.

General funds are the only flexible money that budget-makers have at their disposal. All other kinds of funds are used exclusively for specific purposes. This is important because funding for emerging needs or innovative programs typically must come from general fund appropriations. At the moment, however, almost all general funds are already being used to pay for basic

operating costs, including the state’s ever increasing obligated costs.

General funds are expected to pay for 55 percent of FY25 operations and one-time appropriations, and 76 percent of emergency appropriations for FY24.

### Special Funds

The legislature establishes special funds with revenues from specified sources that are dedicated to supporting a need that is related to the revenue source. They are restricted funds that may not be used for any other purpose. Examples of special funds include tuition paid to the University of Hawai‘i System and fees for services provided by the hospitals that are part of the Hawai‘i Health Systems Corporation.

### Federal Funds

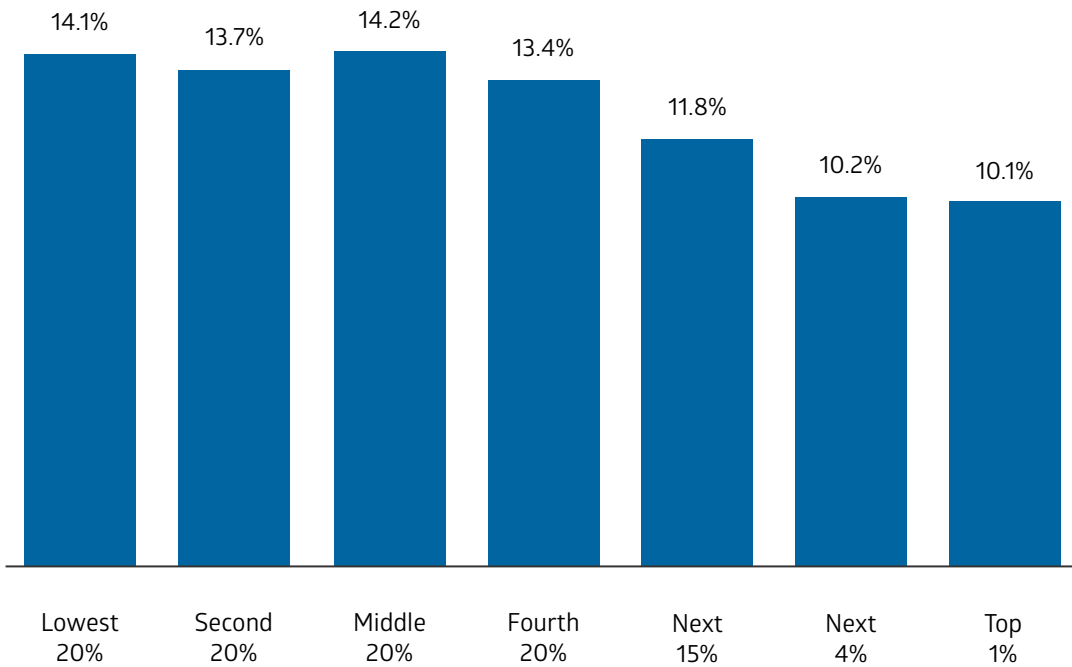
On average, one in every five dollars that supports the state executive budget comes from the federal government. Some 75 percent of these funds pay for health and human services. Medicaid (Med-QUEST) is the state’s single largest program, with a budget of \$3.4 billion. Of that amount, more than \$2.3 billion is supported by federal funds.

### Council on Revenues General Fund Estimates

Hawai‘i’s State Constitution established a Council on Revenues that estimates how much revenue will be available to support the state budget. These estimates guide the governor when proposing the executive budget and the legislature when it passes a final budget.

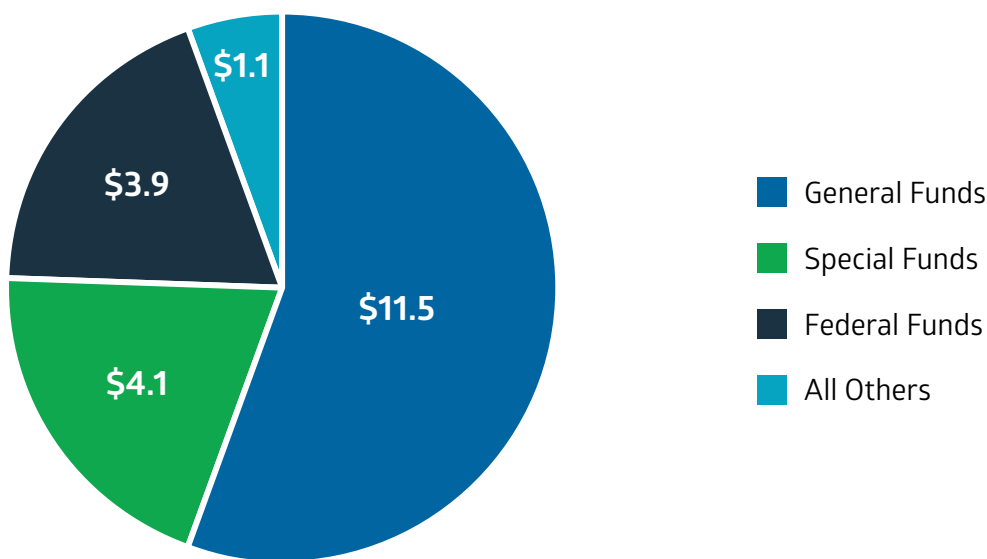
The legislature’s FY25 budget exceeds the Council’s estimated general fund revenues. Accordingly, each appropriation bill that expended general funds included a declaration to that effect and states the reasons for doing so. For more information about state constitutional budget provisions, see “Legal Requirements For Hawai‘i’s State Budget” on **page 31**.

Figure 9. Percentage of Income Paid in State and Local Taxes by Income Bracket



**Figure 9.** Lower-income households pay a greater proportion of their income in taxes than more affluent households. This is due largely to Hawai'i's broadly-applied General Excise Tax. The data here comes from the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP)'s "Who Pays" report (7th edition) and does not factor in the recent changes to the tax code as adopted in House Bill 2404 (2024).

Figure 10. Means of Finance for Operations and Other Appropriations (\$ Billions)



**Figure 10.** Sources of financing for Hawai'i's \$19.5 billion FY25 budget, for FY25 one-time appropriations, and for FY24 Emergency Appropriations. 56% percent of the total amount is supported by general funds.

## FUNDING THE BUDGET

### Tax Credits

In 2021, Hawai‘i granted \$430 million in tax credits, a sum equal to 15 percent of all individual and corporate income taxes collected that year.

Tax credits are among the tools the state uses to invest in people, businesses and the environment. Instead of appropriating state funds for these investments through the budget process, tax credits meet the state’s objectives by reducing the tax liability of qualified individuals and businesses in order to:

- Promote social welfare;
- Encourage certain industries or economic activities; or
- Avoid double taxation or pyramiding of Hawai‘i taxes.

Tax credits enable taxpayers to reduce their tax liability on a dollar-for-dollar basis (unlike tax deductions, which reduce the amount of income that is taxable).

A tax credit may be “refundable,” meaning the government sends a payment to the taxpayer if the tax credit is more than the amount of taxes owed. Alternatively, a tax credit may be “nonrefundable,” in

which case it can be used only to offset the tax liability. Most nonrefundable credits can be carried forward for use against tax liabilities in future years.

State tax credits are passed by the legislature and signed into law by the governor. They cover a variety of situations and may be used to reduce tax liability for individual and corporate income taxes, as well as the taxes on insurance premiums, financial corporations, fiduciaries and exempt organizations.

Certain tax credits are aimed at assisting lower-income households by leaving them with more after-tax income. These are the Refundable Food/Excise Tax Credit, the Low-Income Household Renter Tax Credit, the Child & Dependent Care Tax Credit, and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

These tax credits assisted 340,000 Hawai‘i taxpayers in 2021, but accounted for only 13 percent of all tax credits by dollar amount. In combination, these four tax credits provided an average of \$165 per eligible household, a sum dwarfed by other tax credits.

For more information about tax credits, see [“Tax Credits as Tools to Advance Prosperity.”](#)

Top 5 Tax Credits in 2021	Total Amount	Number of Claims	Average per Claim
1. Income Paid to Another State or Country	\$180.5 Million	11,154	\$16,182
2. Renewable Energy	\$67.3 Million	9,313	\$7,228
3. Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)	\$53.1 Million	47	\$1,130,638
4. Motion Picture, Digital Media, and Film Production	\$29.6 Million	23	\$1,285,130
5. Capital Goods	\$29.3 Million	4,306	\$6,806

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTMENT

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Hawai‘i is facing multiple critical challenges that will require significant state investment to overcome. If we are going to build a vibrant and sustainable community for all the islands’ families, we need truly affordable homes that create stability for working families, a well-resourced public education system that sets our keiki up for success, and economic supports that help people meet their basic needs.

The governor’s line item vetoes to the 2024–2025 state budget will reduce funding for public priorities that are essential building blocks for a thriving local economy that works for local families. These cuts<sup>1</sup> include:

- A \$56.4 million reduction in funding for affordable housing through the Hawai‘i Housing Finance and Development Corporation (HHFDC);
- A \$30.36 million reduction in the Department of Education’s investment capital for school-based budgeting; and
- A \$39.87 million reduction in funding for the University of Hawai‘i to construct, modernize, and maintain its facilities.

## **Affordable Housing**

Hawai‘i’s housing costs are the highest in the nation. There are few available homes, and every year more people lose their homes. The median home price in Hawai‘i is about \$810,000—much higher than the national average of \$438,000.<sup>2,3</sup> Rental prices are also high, with a one-bedroom apartment in Honolulu

costing around \$1,700 per month compared to the national average of \$1,200. Because of these high costs, about 55.3 percent of renters spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing.<sup>4</sup>

The state will need about 50,000 new housing units by 2025, and a significant portion of these units have to be affordable. As the lead state agency for financing the construction of affordable housing, the HHFDC is a key player in addressing this challenge. Additional government funding is essential for HHFDC to increase the supply of affordable units, while preserving existing ones.

Fortunately, the state already has a mechanism to increase revenue for affordable housing construction. The state’s real-estate transfer tax or “conveyance tax,” levies a tax on the sale of homes. The tax dedicates a portion of revenues to affordable housing construction and land conservation, with remaining revenues dedicated to the state’s general fund. This is the state’s only dedicated source of revenue for affordable housing construction, and should be seen as a critical tool in addressing our housing crisis.

This year, legislators had an opportunity to increase the conveyance tax on high value homes worth over \$4 million with House Bill 2364. If implemented, the measure would have generated over \$270 million in revenue each year.<sup>5</sup> The legislature should pursue an increase in the conveyance tax on high value homes, while levying even higher rates on homes purchased by non-residents.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTMENT

### Public Education

Hawai'i's public education system—including both the Department of Education (DOE) and the University of Hawai'i (UH)—requires continued investment to adequately prepare Hawai'i's youth for economic success in the 21st century.

Hawai'i's K–12 students underperform in key subjects compared to national averages, with only 29 percent of fourth graders and 26 percent of eighth graders being considered proficient in reading.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Hawai'i has a persistent shortage and high turnover rate of teachers, partly due to the high cost of living.

Although it is unclear which projects the vetoed funds would have gone to, Hawai'i cannot afford to pull back on funding for education in a year where many of the DOE's needs went underfunded. For example, the Legislature declined to pass bills that would have subsidized child care providers and made school meals free for all students.<sup>7</sup>

For FY2023–2024, UH had an operating shortfall of \$57.1 million, and in 2022 it had a maintenance backlog of \$680 million.<sup>8,9</sup> Without adequate funding for construction and maintenance at community colleges and universities across the state, UH cannot provide its intended standard of high-quality teaching with modern facilities and equipment. This puts UH students at a disadvantage when it comes to earning degrees that boost their professional success—helping them earn high wages to support themselves and their families once they graduate.

### Child Tax Credit

Tax credits give families money that they can freely use for their expenses. Hawai'i's most important tax credit for struggling families is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which pays out an average of \$269 each year to over 80,000 households.<sup>10</sup> This payment can make the difference between whether or not a family can afford their rent for the month, or provide assistance for things like back-to-school supplies and clothes.

The Child Tax Credit (CTC) is a federal payment to low- and middle-income parents that helps with the high cost of raising children. In 2021, in the middle of the pandemic recession, the expanded federal Child Tax Credit lifted about 5.3 million people—including 2.9 million children—out of poverty nationwide.<sup>11</sup>

In 2024, House Bill 1662 would have created a new state-level CTC for Hawai'i. It would have provided \$650 per child to households earning under \$40,000, with the amount phasing out to a maximum income of \$115,000. This credit would have reached 176,000 children in Hawai'i, further helping struggling families with keiki to afford the cost of living.<sup>12</sup>

Hawai'i could fund this new economic support for low-income working families by reforming the state's tax on investment income or "capital gains," so that it is levied at the same rate as regular income from wages. Currently, Hawai'i levies a top rate of just 7.25 percent on investment income from the sale of capital assets, such as stocks, bonds, art and real estate. That's considerably less than the top rate of 11 percent for income from wages and salaries.

Most of this capital gains income is being generated by the state's wealthiest households, with 79 percent of all income from capital gains going to households earning over \$400,000 annually.<sup>13</sup> These households have to pay a reasonable 11 percent on any wage or salary income over \$200,000, but can earn any amount from capital gains and pay just 7.25 percent. What's more, a sizeable chunk of the total income of these very wealthy people comes from capital gains, not wage or salary income, giving them a significant preferential tax rate on a very large share of their overall income.

Closing this loophole would generate between \$88–\$132 million annually—revenues that could be reinvested in the working families that drive our economy, but still struggle with our high cost of living. Hawai'i is one of only nine states that gives this kind of tax break to capital gains income. Hawai'i lawmakers have an opportunity to ensure that those who earn the most pay their fair share by closing the capital gains loophole.



# HAWAI‘I GOVERNMENT BRANCHES SNAPSHOT

## Judicial Branch

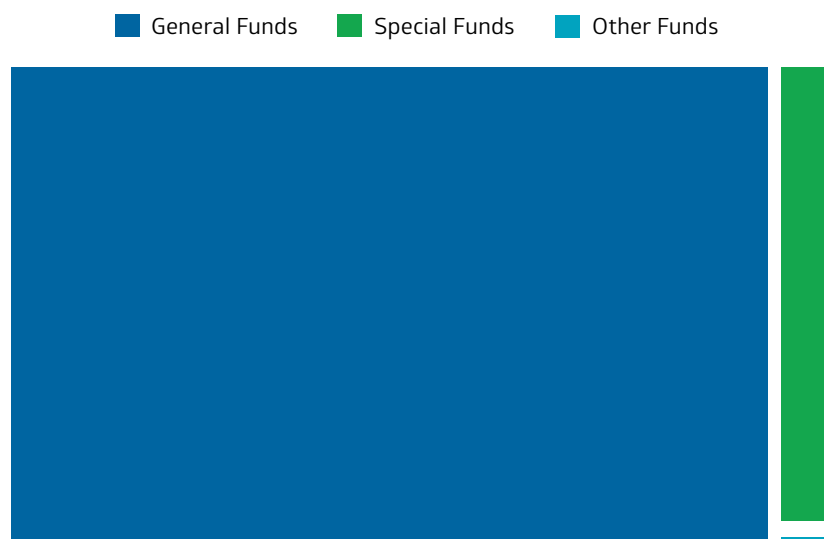
The [Judiciary](#) is an independent branch of state government whose mission is to “administer justice in an impartial, efficient and accessible manner in accordance with the law.” The Judiciary consists of the Supreme Court, Intermediate Court of Appeals, Land Court, Tax Appeal Court, Circuit Courts, Family Courts, District Courts, Environmental Courts, and the Office of the Administrative Director of the Courts.



Ali‘iōlani Hale, with a statue of Kamehameha the Great fronting its main entrance, is the location of the Supreme Court of the State of Hawai‘i.

<b>FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$210.7 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$197.8 Million
Special Funds:	\$12.5 Million
Other Funds:	\$343,261
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$420,000
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$17 Million
FY24 Emergency Appropriations:	\$30.5 Million

**Figure 11.** Judicial Branch Operating Budget



## Legislative Branch

The [Legislature](#) is an independent branch of state government responsible for making laws and approving the state budget. It is made up of the State Senate, State House of Representatives, Office of the Auditor, Office of the Ombudsman, and the Legislative Reference Bureau. This branch is funded largely by general funds.



The open-air rotunda of the Hawai'i State Capitol building was designed by architect John Carl Warnecke to evoke a Hawaiian volcano cone.

## Office of Hawaiian Affairs

The [Office of Hawaiian Affairs](#) (OHA) was added as an essential part of state government during the 1978 Constitutional Convention. It is “a semi-autonomous state agency responsible for improving the wellbeing of Native Hawaiians (regardless of blood quantum).” An elected board of trustees sets organizational policy while a Chief Executive Officer manages the staff and work of the agency. In its mission to improve Native Hawaiian wellbeing, OHA engages the community and researches issues related to education, health, housing and economic stability. Legislative appropriations represent only a small portion of OHA’s resources.

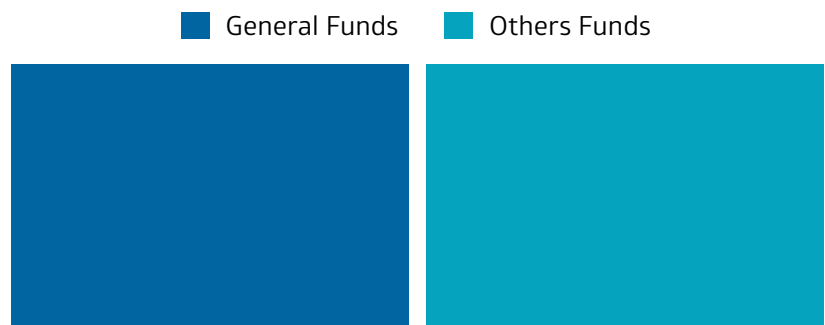
<b>FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$48.7 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$42.3 Million
Other Funds:	\$6.3 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$150,000
FY24 Emergency Appropriations:	\$8 Million

**Figure 12.** Legislative Branch Operating Budget



<b>FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$6 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$3 Million
Other Funds:	\$3 Million

**Figure 13.** Office of Hawaiian Affairs Operating Budget





**Executive Branch**

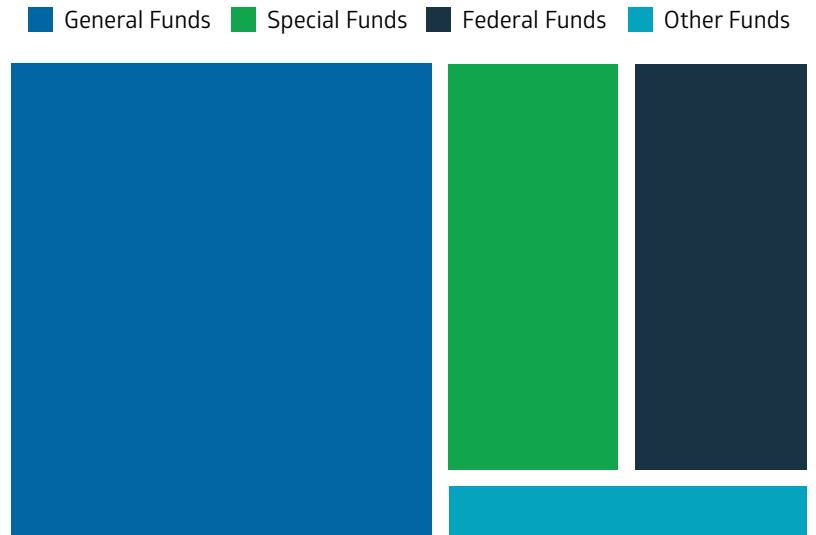
The [Executive Branch](#) ensures that the state’s laws are executed. It is made up of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, State Departments and the University of Hawai’i System. The governor proposes the executive budget and legislation, approves or vetoes bills, appoints cabinet officials and judges, and issues executive orders.



Hawai’i Governor Josh Green speaks at the bill signing for Senate Bill 1 (2023), a reproductive health care shield law that became Act 2 (2023).

<b>FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$19.1 Billion</b>
General Funds:	\$10.3 Billion
Special Funds:	\$3.8 Billion
Federal Funds:	\$3.9 Billion
Other Funds:	\$1.1 Billion
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$57.7 Million
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$4.4 Billion
FY24 Emergency Appropriations:	\$1.1 Billion

**Figure 14.** Executive Branch Operating Budget



## The Department of Agriculture (AGR)

This department carries out programs to conserve, develop, and use lands and resources for agricultural use. It continues to help Hawai'i transition from plantation-era agricultural practices toward a diversified agriculture model, and supports the development of new programs such as aquaculture. The department is also responsible for plant and animal pest and disease control, including managing animal quarantine. AGR received a one-time appropriation for FY25 to address a variety of biosecurity hazards, such as Little Fire Ants, Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle, and to build up capacity to identify and address invasive plants and animals.

AGR FY25 Operating Budget:	\$60.5 Million
General Funds:	\$27.2 Million
Special Funds:	\$12.9 Million
Federal Funds:	\$9 Million
Other Funds:	\$11.4 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$10 Million
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$31 Million

Figure 15. AGR Operating Budget

■ General Funds ■ Special Funds ■ Federal Funds ■ Other Funds



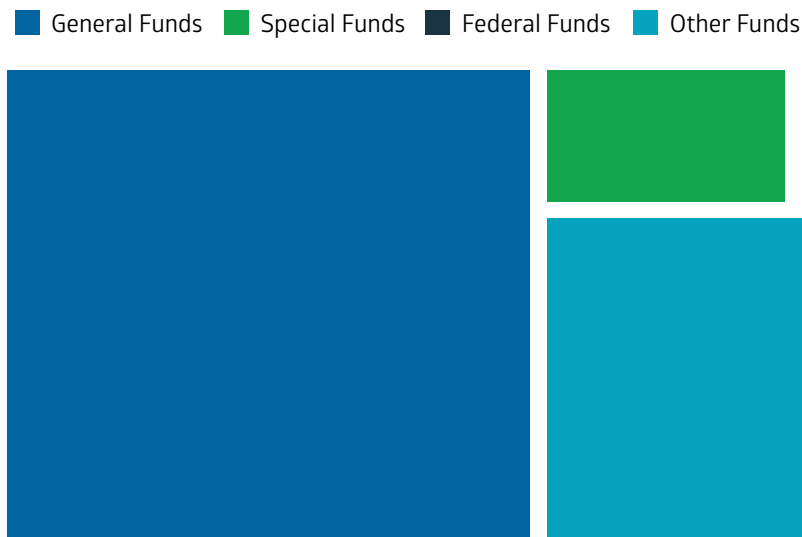
Counter-clockwise from top: Lo'i kalo at Hoi in He'eia; student-farmers work at Ma'o Organic Farms in Wai'anae; Seedlings grow in a plot at the UH Mānoa Center for Tropical Agriculture & Human Resources research plot in Waimānalo, all on O'ahu.

## The Department of Accounting & General Services (AGS)

This department manages statewide functions, including accounting and expenditures, facility acquisition and maintenance, the state motor pool, statewide information technology systems, and risk management. In addition, AGS counts among its programs the Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture & the Arts, the Hawai'i State Archives, and the Hawai'i State Office of Elections.

<b>AGS FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$242 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$160.8 Million
Special Funds:	\$23.3 Million
Federal Funds:	\$1 Million
Other Funds:	\$56.8 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$225,000
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$58.2 Million

Figure 16. AGS Operating Budget

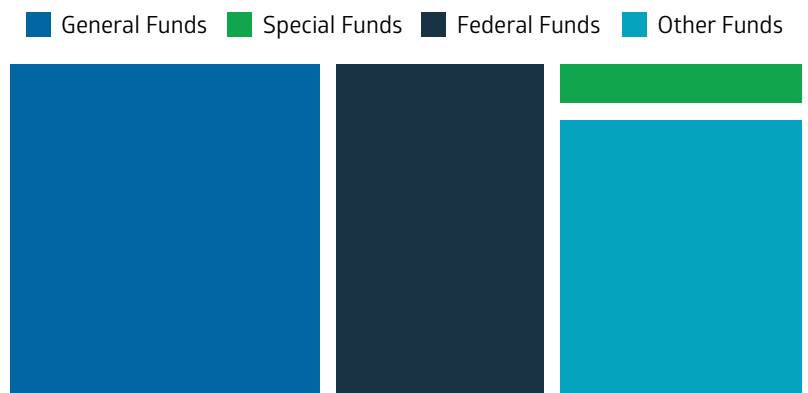


## The Department of the Attorney General (ATG)

This department provides legal support to the state's departments, prosecutes cases of tax and benefit fraud, and oversees fiduciary responsibilities for charitable nonprofits and trusts. The ATG is responsible for enforcing cigarette tax requirements and the tobacco settlement, maintains the system that collects and shares criminal history records, and manages the Child Support Enforcement Program. A \$65 million emergency appropriation made in 2024 gives the ATG funds and the authority to oversee the One 'Ohana Bank Trust account to compensate people harmed by the 2023 Maui Wildfires.

<b>ATG FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$122.1 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$49.2 Million
Special Funds:	\$5.4 Million
Federal Funds:	\$34.3 Million
Other Funds:	\$33.2 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$18.1 Million
FY24 Emergency Appropriations:	\$65 Million

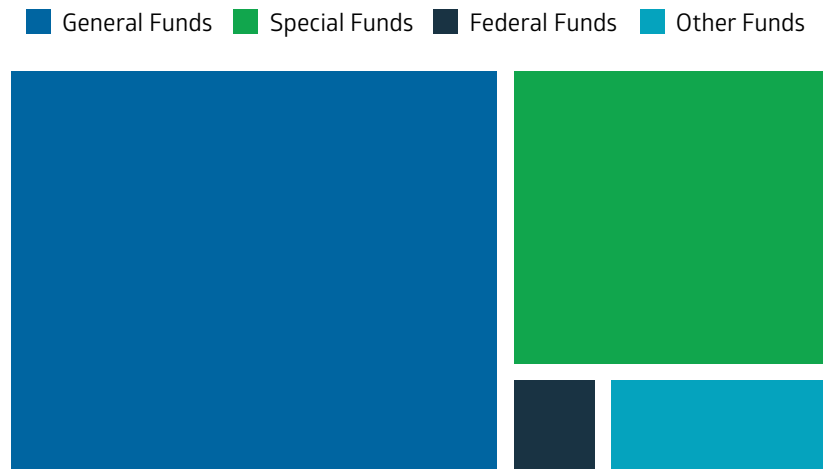
Figure 17. ATG Operating Budget



## The Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (BED)

This department is responsible for a wide array of programs: low- and moderate-income housing development via the Hawai'i Community Development Authority (HCDA) and Hawai'i Housing Finance & Development Corporation (HHFDC); promoting the visitor industry through the Hawai'i Tourism Authority; overseeing the Foreign Trade Zone; and managing the Hawai'i Clean Energy Initiative. The department also researches and publishes Hawai'i census and population data, information about the state's economic performance, and the State Data Book.

Figure 18. BED Operating Budget

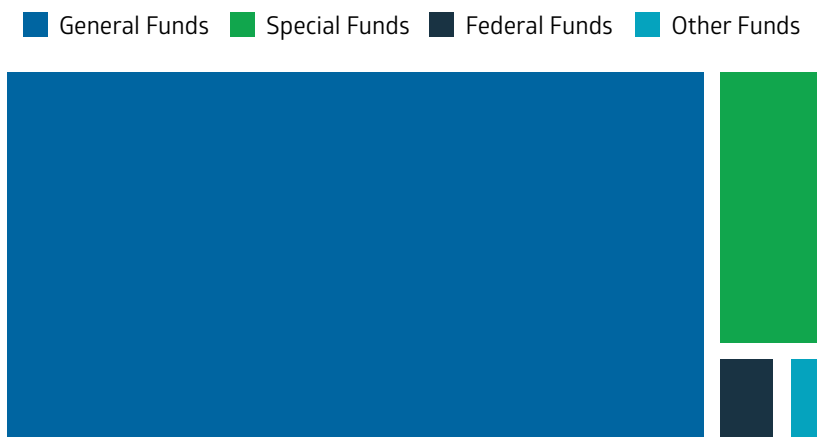


BED FY25 Operating Budget:	\$491.1 Million
General Funds:	\$298.7 Million
Special Funds:	\$146.1 Million
Federal Funds:	\$13.1 Million
Other Funds:	\$33.2 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$1.7 Million
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$336.1 Million

## The Department of Budget & Finance (BUF)

This department coordinates statewide budget forecasting and management, and oversees the state's investments and financing. Agencies in BUF are the Employees' Retirement System (ERS), the Employer-Union Health Care Trust Fund (EUTF), and the Office of the Public Defender. The BUF budget also includes costs related to debt service and all payroll taxes and fringe benefits for state and county employees. In 2024, BUF got a \$297 million emergency appropriation to pay for wildfire-related housing costs not covered by FEMA, as well as \$378 million for retroactive pandemic hazard pay for state workers, and \$179 million to make distributions from the Mass Transit Special Fund.

Figure 19. BUF Operating Budget



BUF FY25 Operating Budget:	\$4.3 Billion
General Funds:	\$3.7 Billion
Special Funds:	\$427.3 Million
Federal Funds:	\$93 Million
Other Funds:	\$51.2 Million
FY24 Emergency Appropriations:	\$854.1 Million



**The Department of Commerce & Consumer Affairs (CCA)**

This department upholds business standards and protects consumer interests. Its programs include the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), the insurance division, business registration and securities regulation, professional and vocational licensing, and the Office of Consumer Protection. CCA has the distinction of being the only executive department that receives no general funds to support its operations.

**Figure 20. CCA Operating Budget**

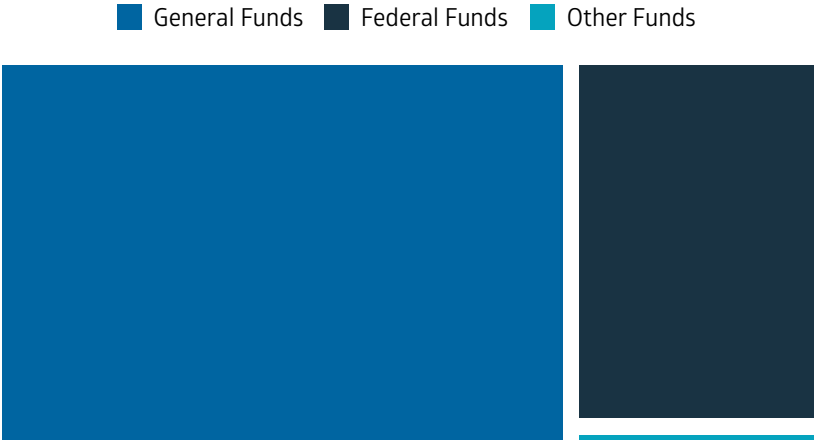


<b>CCA FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$119.5 Million</b>
Special Funds:	\$116.1 Million
Other Funds:	\$3.5 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$171,406

**The Department of Defense (DEF)**

This department coordinates the Hawai'i National Guard and maintains the emergency management system, including planning and communications for disasters. In addition, it administers the Youth Challenge Academy for at-risk young people, and the Office of Veterans Services.

**Figure 21. DEF Operating Budget**



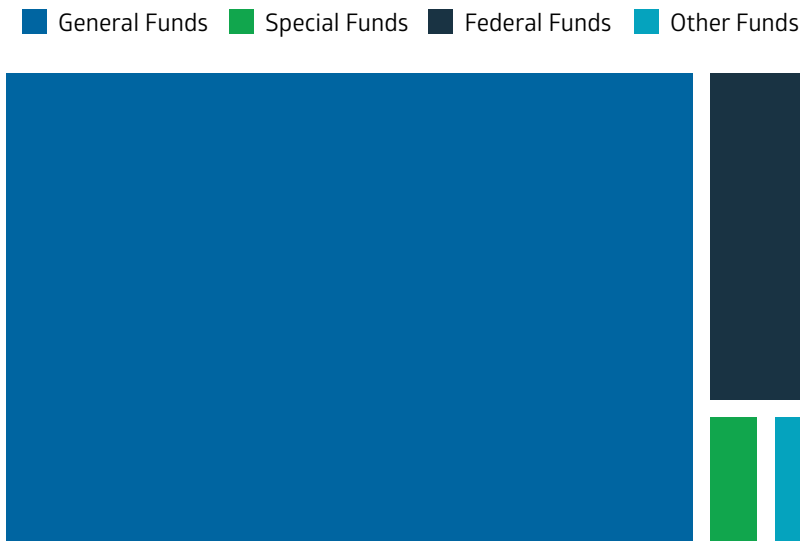
<b>DEF FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$140.3 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$41.2 Million
Federal Funds:	\$98.2 Million
Other Funds:	\$1 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$200,000
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$20.9 Million

### The Department of Education (EDN)

This statewide system delivers public education for K–12, including public charter schools. In addition, the statewide library system is under the administration of EDN. EDN is semi-autonomous, with its own Board of Education. It employs more staff than any other department. In 2024, EDN received emergency appropriations of \$104 million for pandemic hazard back-pay, \$20 million for food programs, and \$6.6 million for charter schools.

<b>FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$2.8 Billion</b>
General Funds:	\$2.4 Billion
Special Funds:	\$60.8 Million
Federal Funds:	\$284.9 Million
Other Funds:	\$62.4 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$6.6 Million
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$697.7 Million
FY24 Emergency Appropriations:	\$130.4 Million

**Figure 22.** EDN Operating Budget

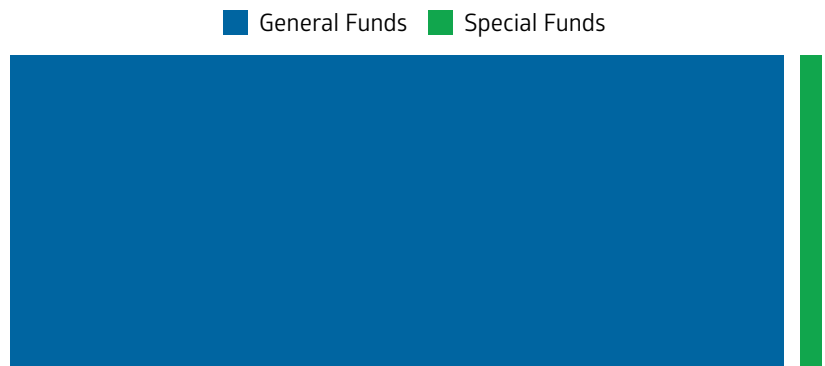


### The Offices of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor (GOV/LTG)

The governor’s office is responsible for the highest level of vision and direction for the state and supports intergovernmental relationships with other states and countries through its executive departments and budgetary resources. The lieutenant governor undertakes projects assigned by the governor, and exercises executive power when the governor is out of state or otherwise unable to carry out their duties.

<b>GOV/LTG FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$8.1 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$7.8 Million
Special Funds:	\$312,000
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$888,000

**Figure 23.** GOV/LTG Operating Budget





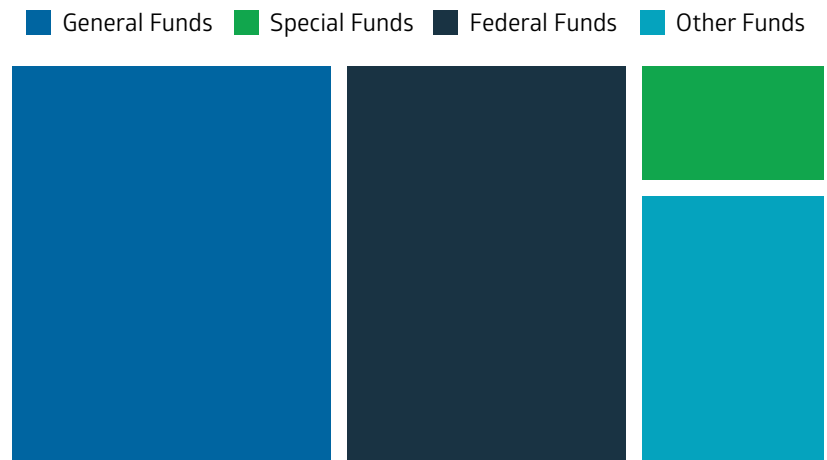
## The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (HHL)

This department manages the Hawaiian Homes Trust. The department identifies beneficiary needs and plans and develops land for homesteading and income-production purposes.

<b>HHL FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$66.5 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$26.8 Million
Special Funds:	\$4.8 Million
Federal Funds:	\$24.1 Million
Other Funds:	\$10.7 Million
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$20 Million

<b>HMS FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$4.5 Billion</b>
General Funds:	\$1.5 Billion
Special Funds:	\$12.1 Million
Federal Funds:	\$2.9 Billion
Other Funds:	\$21.7 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$227,600
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$68.1 Million

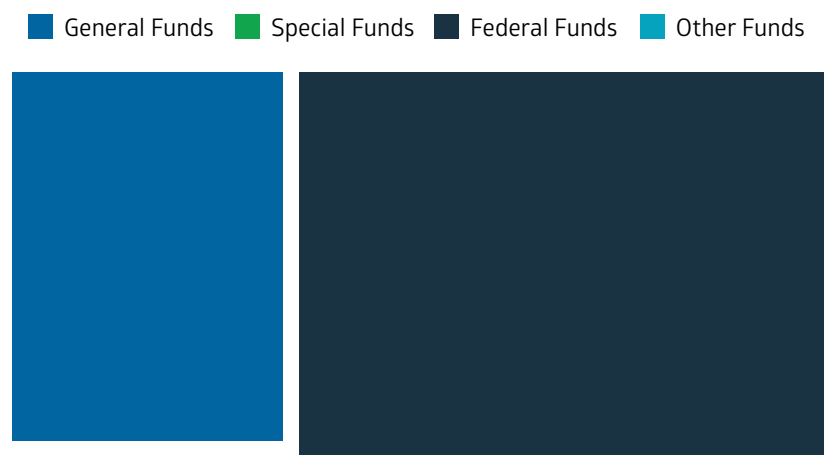
Figure 24. HHL Operating Budget



## The Department of Human Services (HMS)

This department manages public benefit programs including Medicaid (Med-QUEST), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), general assistance, and public housing. Child and adult protective services, in-community youth programs, and the Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility are also overseen by the department. The State Commission on the Status of Women and the Fatherhood Commission are attached to HMS. The department is supported by more federal dollars than any other because most of its programs are partially funded by the federal government.

Figure 25. HMS Operating Budget

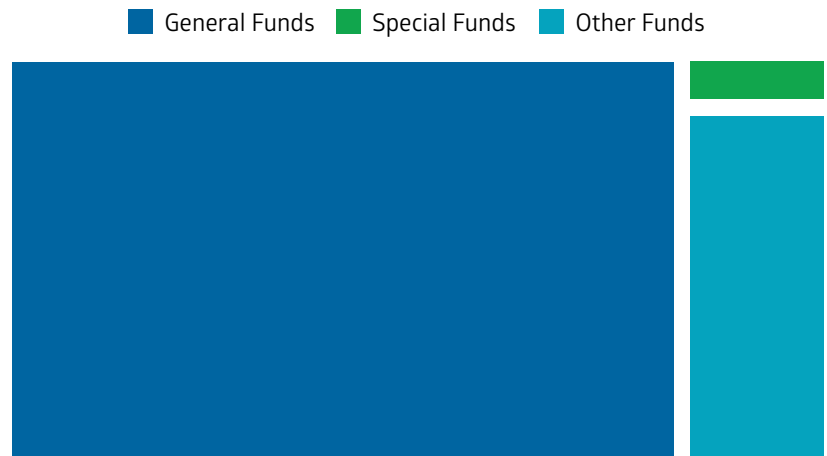


## The Department of Human Resources Development (HRD)

This department provides recruitment and human resources development for the state.

<b>HRD FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$33.4 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$27.5 Million
Special Funds:	\$700,000
Other Funds:	\$5.2 Million

**Figure 26.** HRD Operating Budget

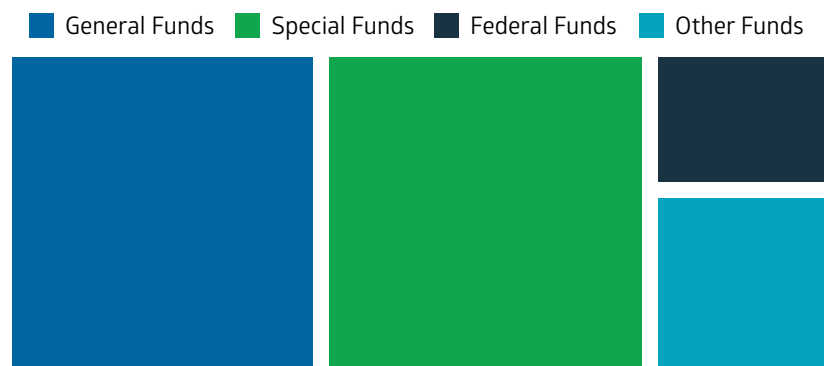


## The Department of Health (HTH)

This department has wide-ranging responsibilities for public health, the environment, food safety, behavioral health, and communicable and chronic disease prevention and control. The Department of Health includes the Hansen’s disease facility at Kalaupapa, the Executive Office on Aging, the State Health Planning and Development Agency, the Disability and Communications Access Board, the Hawai’i Health Systems Corporation, and the Hawai’i State Forensic Mental Health Hospital.

<b>HTH FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$2.2 Billion</b>
General Funds:	\$850.1 Million
Special Funds:	\$864.2 Million
Federal Funds:	\$197.3 Million
Other Funds:	\$271.2 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$979,872
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$150.7 Million
FY24 Emergency Appropriations:	\$40.4 Million

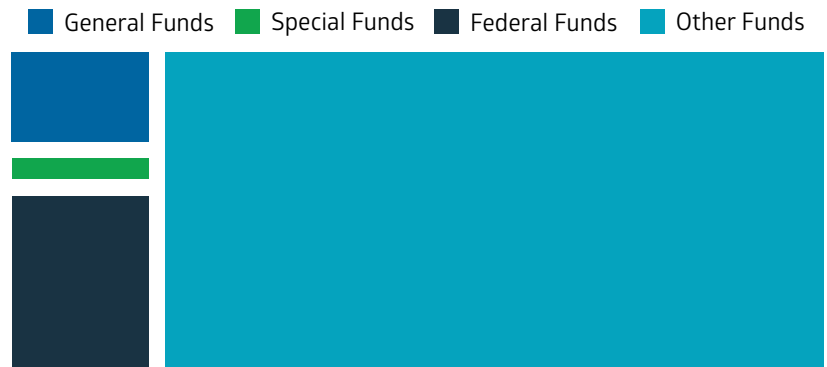
**Figure 27.** HTH Operating Budget



## The Department of Labor & Industrial Relations (LBR)

This department enforces labor laws, and administers the state Unemployment Insurance, Workers' Compensation, and Temporary Disability Insurance programs. Compliance with the state's Prepaid Health Care Act is overseen by this department. LBR's Office of Community Services oversees grants and programs aimed at helping economically disadvantaged residents gain self-sufficiency.

Figure 28. LBR Operating Budget

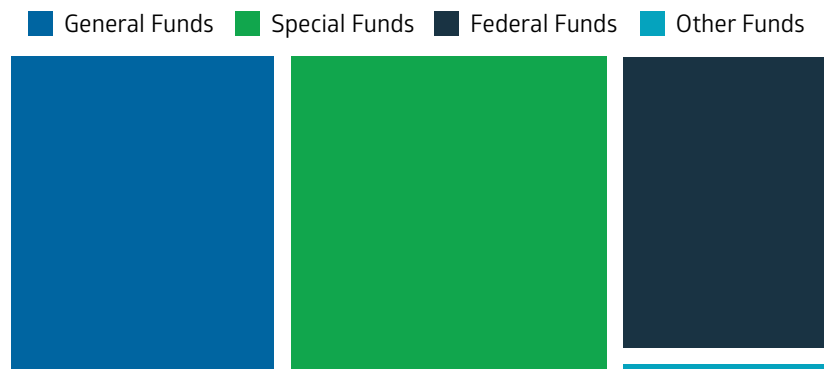


LBR FY25 Operating Budget:	\$452.8 Million
General Funds:	\$26.9 Million
Special Funds:	\$8 Million
Federal Funds:	\$46.7 Million
Other Funds:	\$371.2 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$717,000
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$20 Million

## The Department of Land & Natural Resources (LNR)

This department is responsible for protecting Hawai'i's natural resources, preserving native species, and ensuring safe recreational sites. It oversees historic preservation, manages state parks, and administers land conveyances and recordings. The department is the steward for Kaho'olawe and Mauna Kea.

Figure 29. LNR Operating Budget



LNR FY25 Operating Budget:	\$339.7 Million
General Funds:	\$116.5 Million
Special Funds:	\$135.3 Million
Federal Funds:	\$85 Million
Other Funds:	\$2.9 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$5 Million
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$81.7 Million



Protected land at Kahuku Point, O'ahu, cared for by a public trust.

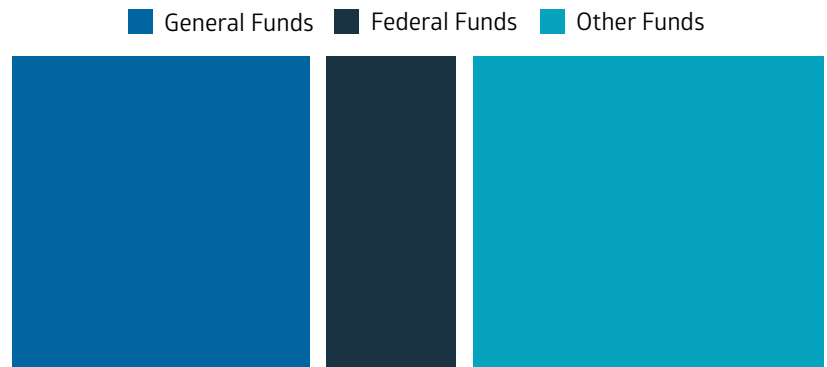
## The Department of Law Enforcement (LAW)

The Legislature authorized a new Department of Law Enforcement during its 2022 session through HB2171. Its purpose is to “consolidate and administer the criminal law enforcement and investigation functions,” and now has responsibility for some programs that were previously administered by other departments. It currently manages Narcotics Enforcement, the Sheriff’s Office, Criminal Investigation, Enforcement Training, and Homeland Security.

<b>LAW FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$96.3 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$37 Million
Federal Funds:	\$16.7 Million
Other Funds:	\$42.6 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$250,000
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$4 Million

<b>PSD FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$319 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$303.6 Million
Special Funds:	\$2.5 Million
Federal Funds:	\$1.9 Million
Other Funds:	\$11 Million
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$97 Million

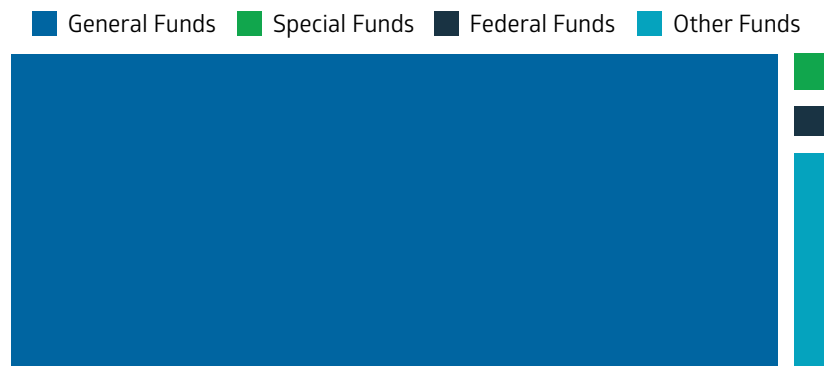
Figure 30. LAW Operating Budget



## The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (PSD)

This department, formerly the Department of Public Safety, was renamed in 2022 when the Department of Law Enforcement was created. It oversees Hawai‘i’s state correctional facilities, health services, the parole board, and the Victim Compensation Program.

Figure 31. PSD Operating Budget

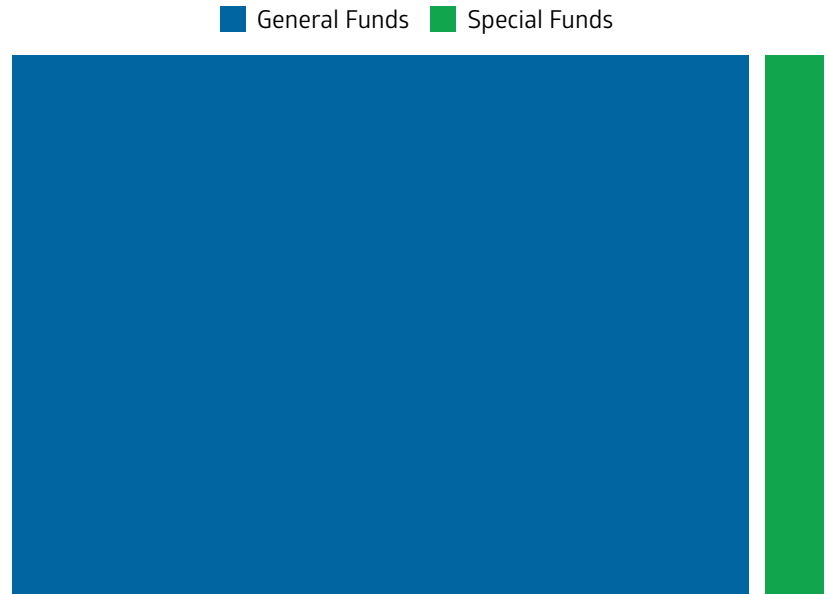


### The Department of Taxation (TAX)

This department administers Hawaii’s taxation system, from enforcing tax laws to collecting taxes and other payments. The department supports the Council on Revenues, which advises the executive and legislative branches on revenue projections, and the Tax Review Commission, which periodically advises on state tax policy.

<b>TAX FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$42.6 Million</b>
General Funds:	\$38.9 Million
Special Funds:	\$3.6 Million

Figure 32. TAX Operating Budget



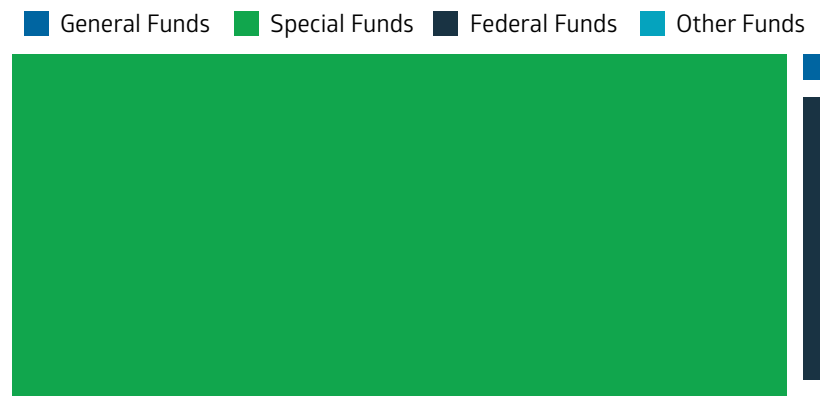
### The Department of Transportation (TRN)

This department plans, develops and maintains transportation systems including highways, airports and harbors. The Aloha Tower Development Corporation is housed within TRN. The department’s capital improvement project budget is larger than its operating budget, and accounts for 60 percent of all executive CIP appropriations.



<b>TRN FY25 Operating Budget:</b>	<b>\$1.5 Billion</b>
General Funds:	\$5 Million
Special Funds:	\$1.4 Billion
Federal Funds:	\$43 Million
Other Funds:	\$743,067
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$10 Million
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$2.6 Billion

Figure 33. TRN Operating Budget



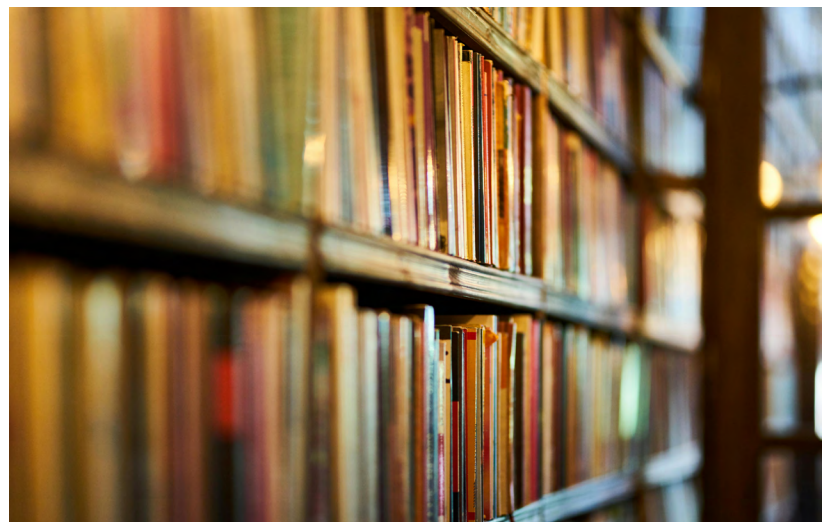
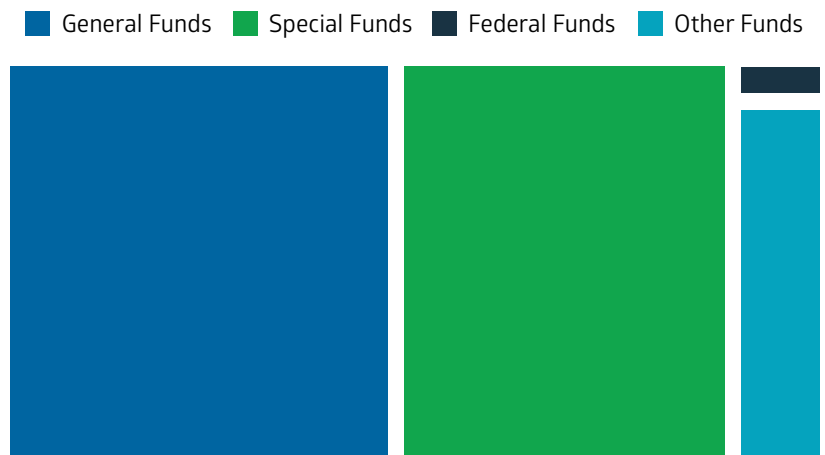
## The University of Hawai‘i System (UOH)

The UOH is a statewide university system that includes the University of Hawai‘i (UH) at Mānoa, UH Hilo, UH West O‘ahu, and the statewide community college system. Other UOH programs include the John A. Burns School of Medicine, the UH Cancer Center and the Waikiki Aquarium. The university system is semi-autonomous and has its own Board of Regents. It also manages its own capital and facilities budgets. Not included in state budget totals or subject to the legislative process are the many competitive grants that the UOH brings in to the state. The university reported that in FY24 it won a record \$616 million in extramural funding from federal agencies, industries and nonprofits to support research, innovation and training carried out by UH faculty and staff.



UOH FY25 Operating Budget:	\$1.4 Billion
General Funds:	\$649.9 Million
Special Funds:	\$563.1 Million
Federal Funds:	\$13.6 Million
Other Funds:	\$134.5 Million
FY25 Other Appropriations:	\$2.6 Million
FY25 Capital Improvement Projects:	\$202 Million

Figure 34. UOH Operating Budget





## Legal Requirements For Hawai'i's State Budget

The State Constitution lays out major provisions for the budget that include the following:

### 1. Funds Must Be Appropriated

Hawai'i's Constitution provides that no public money shall be expended except as appropriated by law. That means that agencies may not expend even non-state funds (federal grants for example) unless the legislature appropriates them.

### 2. The Budget Must Be Balanced

General fund expenditures for any fiscal year shall not exceed the state's current general fund revenues and unencumbered cash balances. An exception can be made when the governor declares that the public's health, safety or welfare is threatened.

### 3. Council on Revenues Forecasts Shape the Budget

The Council on Revenues provides forecasts of revenues to the governor and legislature on or about June 1, September 1, January 10 and March 15 of each year. The governor uses council estimates to prepare the state budget and control expenditures. The legislature uses their projections to appropriate funds and enact revenue measures. The council is attached to the state Department of Taxation and is made up of seven unpaid volunteer members.

### 4. An Expenditure Ceiling Limits Budget Growth

Hawai'i's Constitution provides that "the legislature shall establish a general fund expenditure ceiling, which shall limit the rate of growth of general fund appropriations ... to the estimated rate of growth of the State's general economy as provided by law."

The Council on Revenues provides the estimates to calculate the expenditure ceiling. The legislature may not authorize appropriations that exceed the ceiling unless two-thirds of each chamber votes to do so and they explicitly state the agreed-upon dollar amount and rate by which they are exceeding the ceiling and the rationale for this action.

# ENDNOTES

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12. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, 2024 analysis
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