Mayor Kawakami requests to opt-out of Safe Travels program after dozens of known COVID-19 cases reach Kaua‘i

LĪHU‘E — On Tuesday, Mayor Derek S.K. Kawakami forwarded to Gov. David Ige proposed Mayor’s Emergency Rule 23, which would temporarily pause Kaua‘i’s participation in the state’s Safe Travels pre-travel testing program and require incoming travelers to Kaua‘i to quarantine for the full 14 days regardless of testing.

“We are facing alarming COVID-19 numbers on our island as well as across the nation,” said Mayor Kawakami. “This is not just a tourist problem. Nearly half of our recent travel cases are Kaua‘i residents who returned home. We know that a single, pre-travel test has not stopped the virus from reaching our island and we are saddened to report our first on-island death. We must take action to prevent the further spread of disease here.”

In an attempt to avoid reverting back to a mandatory 14-day quarantine, Mayor Kawakami proposed Rule 21 last Monday, which would have required incoming Kaua‘i travelers to take a post-travel test after 72 hours on island with a shorter quarantine period. However, this second-test proposal has not received approval, further prompting the Mayor to propose Rule 23 to temporarily opt-out of the state’s Safe Travels program.

“Since the launch of the single pre-travel testing program on October 15, we have confirmed 58 new cases and our first on-island death,” said Dr. Janet Berreman, Kaua‘i District Health Officer. “Forty-eight of those cases were travelers—27 visitors and 21 residents. Most of them had a negative pre-travel test, but still came down with COVID here on Kaua‘i. The other
10 cases, in residents who did not travel, are an even greater cause for alarm. Four of these are residents who were in close contact with travelers. The other six are residents for whom we cannot identify any link to a traveler—these are cases of community transmission. We have not seen sustained community transmission in our county since July, so these cases are very concerning. It is clear that the Safe Travels program is not adequately protecting Kaua‘i from an alarming rise in cases.”

Mayor Kawakami added that a temporary opt-out of the Safe Travels program would allow the island to remain in Tier 4 – the least restrictive tier – for as long as possible.

“Opting out of the Safe Travels program would be independent of our tier system, which means we could stay in Tier 4 for a longer period of time,” said Mayor Kawakami. “It makes no logical sense for us to move tiers while still allowing more travelers. We shouldn't penalize our local people by restricting activities, such as youth sports, when that’s not the current source of infection.”

“I don’t propose to know how to best manage the other counties or the state as a whole. But our small, rural community here on Kaua‘i needs to take pause from an influx of travelers, and once again gain control of this virus as we had for so many months before. I will gladly repeal the rule once we achieve this goal,” added Mayor Kawakami.

If approved, Rule 23 would take effect on December 1, 2020, at which point all incoming travelers, including residents and visitors from the mainland and neighboring counties would be subject to a 14-day mandatory quarantine, regardless of testing.

The county’s modified quarantine program would remain in place for critical infrastructure workers, essential medical travel, or other special circumstances. To apply for a modified quarantine, please visit www.kauai.gov/COVID-19 and click on the “modified quarantine request” button at the top of the page.
To view the Kaua‘i COVID-19 tier tracker, post-travel testing information, and general information, visit kauai.gov/COVID-19. For more State of Hawai‘i case tracker and information on the Safe Travels program, visit hawaiicovid19.com.

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