LEGISLATIVE BILLS IMPACTING HAWAII FAMILIES AND BUSINESS STILL IN PLAY

As we pass the halfway mark of the 2019 Legislative Session, several bills that would have significant consequences for Hawaii families and our state’s ability to do business remain in play.

Minimum Wage — We continue to raise concerns regarding several measures to raise the minimum wage. The Legislature is currently considering three separate proposals that include increases to as high as $15 an hour—HB96 HD1, HB1191 HD1 and SB789 SD1. We hear from members every day that raising the minimum wage would drive up prices and the cost of living—the opposite effect of what these measures aim to do. Restaurants, retail businesses and even the non-profit community shared that an increase in the minimum wage would necessitate cutting jobs and employee hours, raising prices and would force some businesses to close altogether.

Taxes — SB1474 SD1, would raise taxes on all goods and services to create additional funding for public education—at a time when Hawaii taxpayers are already subject to the second highest tax burden in the country. Raising the GET would disproportionately hurt Hawaii families who are already struggling to meet ends meet.

Education — While the Chamber opposes increasing the GET, we support several other measures to strengthen our state’s public education system. HB1465 HD1 would set aside funds to close the lengthy Department of Education repair and maintenance backlog. SB850 would mandate an independent audit of the DOE to ensure that existing funds are being used responsibly.

Airports — Hawaii’s airports are the first introduction that many tourists have to our state. We support SB660 SD1, which would create an independent Hawaii Airport Corporation, which would be better able to manage capital improvement projects and create an improved travel experience for both visitors and Hawaii residents.

Innovation — The Chamber also supports several bills that would support innovation. HB340 HD1 and HB338 HD1 would ensure that Hawaii’s manufacturers continue to receive the support they need to remain on the cutting-edge of technology and product development.

Regulations — The Legislature is considering several measures that would ban the distribution of polystyrene and plastic utensils, containers, bags and other items. SB11 SD1, SB522 SD1 and SB367 SD1 would impose burdensome new regulation on Hawaii’s food service and retail industries. The business community would also bear the brunt of implementing HB389 HD1, which would change Hawaii’s Workers’ Compensation laws, and HB1192 HD1 which would change Hawaii’s equal pay laws.

Our future is our business because a strong business community will benefit Hawaii’s economy and future. As new hearings are held on these bills, your voice is more important than ever. For more information on how to have your voice heard, visit the 2019 Legislative Updates link at cochawaii.org.