

# CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT

**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE & CONSUMER AFFAIRS**  
**DIVISION OF CONSUMER ADVOCACY**



## Executive Director's Message

By: Dean Nishina



Community and individual input play a necessary role in regulated utility matters because the Division of Consumer Advocacy also considers consumer input from statements received at public hearings, comments submitted to the Public Utilities Commission, and written or emailed statements

submitted to our office. By using these methods, the Division is able to look out for consumer interests and ensure that they are well protected.

This newsletter informs of the upcoming 988 hotline number for suicide prevention and the resulting changes that will be taking place. Also featured are details on the status update of Hawaiian Electric's Interconnection Process and Transition Plans for Retirement of Fossil Fuel Power Plants. Lastly, the Consumer Advocate provides more COVID-19 related updates and continues to encourage consumers to contact their utility for payment arrangements and keep an eye out for bill assistance programs.

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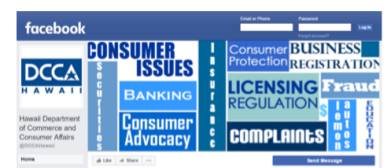
- 988 Suicide Prevention Hotline
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### HOW CAN I GIVE COMMENTS ON UTILITY MATTERS?

The Public Utilities Commission accepts public comment on open dockets and other matters before the Commission.

By submitting a public comment, you grant the Commission permission to file your message and any identifying information you provide as a part of the public record for the docket in which your comment is filed, or to post your message and identifying information on the PUC website for non-docketed matters.

To submit a public comment, visit: <https://puc.hawaii.gov/contact/public-comments/>



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## 988 and Suicide Prevention Hotline

The Federal Communications Commission has recently adopted rules designating this new phone number for Americans in crisis to connect with suicide prevention and mental health crisis counselors.

The transition, which will take place over the next two years, will result in phone service providers directing all 988 calls to the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by July 16, 2022. Under the new rules, calls to 988 will be directed to 1-800-273-TALK, which will remain operational during and after the 988 transition.

Starting Oct. 24, 2021 Hawaii residents will need to dial area code 8-0-8, followed by the telephone number. Following this change, local calls dialed with only seven digits may not be completed, and a recording will inform you that your call cannot be completed as dialed.

# Hawaiian Electric's Interconnection Process and Transition Plans for Retirement of Fossil Fuel Power Plants

The Commission's primary objective with Docket No. 2021-0024 is to transparently review and track the status of new renewable energy projects, identify near-term interconnection process improvements to facilitate timely completion of renewable projects, and elicit the best solutions to ensure a cost-effective retirement of the AES coal plant on Oahu, Kahului Plant on Maui, and other fossil fuel power plants, as needed.

Hawaiian Electric has filed its initial status update regarding the current status and timelines for all projects in the community renewables (CBRE) program and the projects resulting from recent competitive procurements.

The key status updates discussed include:

- Executed and filed amended purchase power agreements for all eight Stage 1 RFP projects reflecting updated technical information based on Interconnection Requirements Study ("IRS") results.
- Through process improvements, the interconnection process has been shortened by five months compared with Stage 1, even though more projects were procured in Stage 2.
- The 135 MW Kapolei Energy Storage I, EEC ("KES") project will largely replace the power capacity that AES represents for Oahu. The KES project is still scheduled for commercial operation in June of 2022, prior to the retirement of AES.
- With respect to CBRE, the Companies plan to incorporate lessons learned from previous procurements and adopt "quick win" improvements identified through the CBRE stakeholder process.
- Contingency plans have been refined and proposals provide supplemental cost-effective contingency options.
- As operation of the grid becomes more complex as the State moves closer to a 100% renewable future, all parties involved in this process must share responsibility to carefully plan and execute their duties to ensure success of future procurements.

For more details on the near-term retirements of Oahu Fossil Fuel Units, Contingency Plans, Current Status of Project Timelines, and Steps to Improve Timelines click [here](#). Hawaiian Electric has also submitted a copy of the [presentation](#) that was discussed at the March 16, 2021 Status Conference.

(Docket No. 2021-0024)

PUC Docket Numbers are included in these articles for further, in depth reading. PUC public filings are accessible online via the PUC's Document Management System (DMS). Visit: <http://dms.puc.hawaii.gov/dms>



## COVID-19 Utility Update

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has extended the suspension of termination or disconnection of regulated utility services due to non-payment and/or assessment of other charges to **May 31, 2021**.

By the same order, the PUC continues to require utilities to develop payment plans for customers who have past due payments of greater than sixty days and prohibits utilities from charging customers interest on past due payments, or impose any late payment fees, through May 31, 2021.

In anticipation of the termination of the disconnection suspension on June 1, 2021, utilities are required to:

- Notify all customers by May 1, 2021 that the disconnection suspension is being lifted as of June 1, 2021.
- Establish minimum and maximum term lengths for payment plans.
- Retroactively waive all late payment fees and any interest on late payments incurred between March 5, 2020 and May 31, 2021.
- By May 1, 2021 submit a one-time, additional Pre-Disconnection Suspension Termination Report.

The Division of Consumer Advocacy encourages customers to contact their utility to work out payment arrangements, continue paying their bills to the extent possible during this time, and continue to be on the lookout for opportunities for bill assistance.

If you've fallen behind on utility bills or are struggling to make the payments each month, then you may be eligible for programs available from your utility companies, community agencies, or government programs. There has been ongoing work across the nation and in Hawaii to develop bill assistance programs.

### Utility Bill Assistance Programs

Gov. David Ige announced in early February that the latest funds from the December stimulus package will provide assistance to help residents with payments for rent and utility bills.

The Department of Hawaiian Homelands Rent Relief Program is providing financial assistance to native Hawaiians on the DHHL Waiting List who experienced financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are renters in the state of Hawai'i.

Planning for county assistance programs is underway. The City and County of Honolulu is developing the Rent & Utility Relief Program with \$114 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds which should open in early April. Details on other county programs will be forthcoming.

Programs such as the Aloha United Way's COVID-19 Rent & Utility Assistance Program and Hawaii Bill Assistance Program provide financial relief but have quickly reached capacity.

Federal programs in the works include the Emergency Broadband Benefit - a program to help U.S. households that are struggling to pay for internet service.

Stay up to date with available programs on our Division's website at <https://cca.hawaii.gov/dca/covid-19-utility-assistance-programs/>.

## Upcoming Dates of Interest

- **April 1, 2021: April Fools' Day**
- **April 2, 2021: Good Friday** (State holiday, our office will be closed)
- **April 4, 2021: Easter**
- **April 12, 2021: Beginning of Ramadan**
- **April 22, 2021: Earth Day**

### MYTH NO. 2

Smart meters are a health threat because they communicate using wireless signals.

## MYTHS VS. FACTS: THE TRUTH ABOUT SMART METERS

**TRUTH:** In-depth review of the scientific literature by the World Health Organization (WHO) revealed that the small amount of radio frequency (RF) energy produced by smart meters is not harmful to human health.

**TRUTH:** RF emitted by smart meters is well below the limits set by Federal Communications Commission and it is below levels produced by other common household devices like cell phones, baby monitors, satellite TVs, and microwaves. In fact, you would have to be exposed to the RF from a smart meter for 375 years to get a dose equivalent to that of one year of 15-minutes-per-day cell phone use.

No credible evidence shows any threat to human health from RF emissions at or below RF exposure limits developed by the FCC. With over 25,000 articles published on the topic over the last 30 years, scientific knowledge in this area is now more extensive than for most chemicals.

STAY TUNED FOR MORE MYTHS VS. FACTS

## Consumer Spotlight

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We also welcome feedback and story ideas. Email us at [dca@dcca.hawaii.gov](mailto:dca@dcca.hawaii.gov).

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