



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

Representative Gene Ward issued the following statement in response to the Honolulu Star-Advertiser (12/27/16) article entitled, “Lawmaker issues map of Hawaii Kai homeless”

We all care deeply about the plight of the homeless. As a state and a community, we remain sympathetic but perplexed by the lack of progress in solving the growing homeless problem. Hawaii has the highest percentage of homeless in the nation but allowing illegal homeless camps to exist in Hawaii Kai, or any other neighborhood, is not the answer. It must be solved; kicking the can down the road to some future date is no longer acceptable.

If we continue in Hawaii Kai to do nothing, we could be overrun by illegal camps as has occurred in some other locations on Oahu. We have seen transients turn public and private land into trash-dumps and toilets, creating an unacceptable health risk and damaging the environment. Campfires and camp stoves in densely wooded areas of Hawaii Kai also create a danger of wildfires. Expropriation of public spaces by the homeless also interferes with the rights of others and hurts tourism. And that’s why we created the Hawaii Kai Homeless Task Force, not to do anything illegal, or unconstitutional as the Star-Advertiser article intimates, but to protect the health and well-being of our community.

We have worked with various agencies and the Honolulu Police Department who helped us to inventory and identify just every homeless encampment in Hawaii Kai. We sent outreach workers to each campsite, but all the homeless have refused the social services and aid offered to them. We have worked with Hawaii Kai’s biggest property owner, Kamehameha Schools, and the Hawaii Kai Marina Association have learned they have spent over \$100,000 in the past 3 months to clean up their properties and erect barriers so the homeless don’t continually return to their properties.

Public health and safety concerns are very real and I personally realized this when my daughter told me she had to navigate between the urine and the feces smells at the Hawaii Kai “Park and Ride” only to have a homeless man lurch out of the bushes and stare at her until her bus arrived. This and the chorus of phone calls to my office by constituents citing erratic, suspicious or eccentric behavior by homeless persons made this a very urgent issue and a task force was formed.

Our true intent of creating the Task Force was/is not to have illegal homeless camps in our neighborhood, nor in any other neighborhood, but the ultimate reason for its creation was to work at the local level to come up with a state-wide solution. We truly believe we have come up with some solutions to “managing” not “solving” the

homeless crisis in Hawaii. A summary of these initiatives was best stated in the Star Advertiser Island Voices (12/25/16) article written by the Director of the Hawaii Kai Task Force, Mike Goodman and entitled, "Why is homelessness so hard to fix?"

<http://www.staradvertiser.com/2016/12/25/editorial/island-voices/bold-actions-could-ease-homelessness/>

Lastly, let me assure you that there is nothing unconstitutional about the homeless map published in my November Newsletter, particularly because no specific names were given of homeless people. Also, the map identified illegal encampments and illegal activity. There is nothing unconstitutional about a map identifying the location of illegal activity. If that were so, the HPD crime map would be unconstitutional. So, the constitutional concerns raised are rather spurious, nonetheless, I have written a letter to the Attorney General asking for a legal opinion regarding the map of the homeless encampments on the front page of my November 2016 Newsletter which was sent to my 15,000 Hawaii Kai constituents.

If you have any questions about the Star-Advertiser article, our Hawaii Kai Homeless Task Force, or other community concerns, please don't hesitate to call me on my cell phone, (781-9931) and I will gladly attempt to clarify or answer any of your questions or concerns. (Texts are preferable, but emails work just as well to repward@capitol.hawaii.gov.)

Aloha and Happy New Year 2017!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gene Ward". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Representative Gene Ward
Minority Leader Emeritus