

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Rapid Response Program Launched to Flatten Eviction Curve

*May 1, 2020 (Hawai'i Island)* – The COVID-19 pandemic has left a significant number of Hawai'i's employees without work, wondering how to cover rent or mortgage while they wait for unemployment benefits, SBA loans, and other financial assistance to arrive.

In order to flatten the eviction curve, a multi-sector stakeholder team convened to develop a Rapid Response Landlord Tenant Mediation Program. The program will be offered through West Hawai'i Mediation Center and Ku'ikahi Mediation Center, with the goal of providing timely conflict prevention and resolution services to commercial and residential landlords and tenants.

"Everyone is concerned about meeting their financial obligations in these tough economic times," said Council Member Ashley Kierkiewicz. "There is incentive for everyone to work together. By encouraging communication on the front end and finding ways to work it out, we can ensure some level of stability and prevent a tsunami of evictions and foreclosures."

Under the Rapid Response program, WHMC and KMC mediators will assist both landlords and tenants by brokering frank dialogue about finances before bills pile up and situations escalate.

"We know from the 2008 recession that economic downturns lead to an overwhelming influx of housing related challenges that often rely on our judicial system to manage," said Eric Paul, Executive Director of WHMC. "We don't want to wait for the courts to reopen. We want to help our community members get ahead of these challenges now."

Governor David Ige issued a moratorium on evictions through May 31. There is a temporary moratorium on eviction filings through July 25 for residential properties that participate in federal affordable housing programs including properties with Section 8 vouchers, or are financed by federally backed mortgage loans from HUD, the VA, the USDA, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac.

"There is a lot of confusion about the state proclamation and the federal CARES Act regarding eviction moratoriums," said Kehau Costa, Executive Officer of Hawai'i Island REALTORS®. "Despite the moratoriums, rent still accrues for tenants and mortgage payments still accrue for landlords. We encourage proactive conversations to prevent misunderstandings, explore available options, and create agreements to avert further financial hardship or the need for later legal action."

Mediation looks for mutually satisfying solutions for all parties. The Rapid Response program is geared towards providing education about available resources to assist both landlords and tenants, and helping negotiate positive outcomes for all involved.

"I've heard several real-life stories of people in some touch and go situations," said Julie Mitchell, Executive Director of KMC. "One is a usually self-employed friend who is now relying on a rental home for income. When one of her tenants lost his job, she creatively suggested a 3-month temporary agreement cutting the rent in half. The tenants got to stay in place and she got to keep getting much-needed partial rent."

"Another story I heard was of a colleague's mom, who has been in business over 40 years. Due to the closure of all non-essential businesses in Hawai'i, she had to shut her doors and lay off her staff. She reached out to her landlord to ask for rent forbearance or reduction. The landlord told her if she didn't pay, she was going to have to face the consequences," said Mitchell. "An alternative would be for our mediators to act as a go-between to help this businesswoman and her landlord talk it out."

The mediation centers are offering the Rapid Response program free of charge to any commercial or residential landlord or tenant in Hawai'i County. While social distancing remains in place, all mediations take place via phone or video conferencing.

In East Hawai'i, call Ku'ikahi Mediation Center at (808) 935-7844 or visit [hawaiimediation.org](http://hawaiimediation.org). In West Hawai'i, call West Hawai'i Mediation Center at (808) 885-5525 or visit [whmediation.org](http://whmediation.org).

The Rapid Response Landlord Tenant Mediation Program is supported by initial funding from the County of Hawai'i, Hawai'i Community Foundation, Hawai'i Island REALTORS®, and West Hawai'i Association of REALTORS®.

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