



HAWAI'I LODGING & TOURISM
A S S O C I A T I O N

NEWS RELEASE

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Courtesy: Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association

SIXTH ANNUAL VISITOR PUBLIC SAFETY CONFERENCE DISCUSSES PRESSING COMMUNITY ISSUES

Safe and Sound Waikiki Program and Crime Prevention highlighted

HONOLULU — The sixth Visitor Public Safety Conference was held on Wednesday at the Hawai'i Convention Center, providing a productive platform to address public safety issues for both tourists and kama'āina. The annual event was organized by the Visitor Public Safety Coalition, comprised of the Hawai'i Lodging & Tourism Association (HLTA), Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA), Waikiki Improvement Association (WIA), Waikiki Business Improvement District (WBID), Hawai'i Hotel Visitor Industry Security Association (HHVISA), and the Visitor Aloha Society of Hawai'i (VASH).

"This conference is crucial because it brings together all the organizations and stakeholders that strive to make Waikiki, and our state, a safer place for everyone," stated Mufi Hannemann, HLTA's president and CEO. "If Hawai'i is not a safe place, people from all over the world won't want to visit, and locals and residents won't want to work or live in Waikiki and other areas that are gathering places for visitors. This directly impacts our largest industry, as tourism provides over a quarter million jobs and \$19 billion in visitor spending." Hannemann also stated that the timing of this year's conference in December gives an opportunity for the community to discuss public safety issues as a collective, especially with a month before the opening of the Hawai'i State legislative session in January when bills that can address the issues brought up during the conference, can be drafted.

One example of a law that was recently passed with the prompting of discussions from the annual conference was [HB1366 \(now Act 94\)](#), which established a three-year pilot program through the State Department of Human Services that assists eligible homeless individuals with being reunited with family and relatives in their home state. This program was modeled after repatriation programs that HLTA has helped coordinate since 2014, working with organizations such as the Institute for Human Services,

Kauai Economic Opportunity, Inc., and Maui Family Life Center. Using funds provided by HLTA, this program paid half the cost of the travel fare for these individuals to return to their home, with the balance of the fare being paid by the individual, a family member, or another person connected to the homeless individual. Pre-pandemic, it was reported that nearly 800 people participated and just two percent have returned to Hawai'i. The new law has the state providing funds to support the program.

The 2023 event's agenda included updates from the Honolulu Police Department, a panel discussing progress on the Safe and Sound Waikiki program that was launched in 2022, a presentation from the Honolulu Emergency Services Department (HESD), and a panel focused on Preventing Crime and Incidents.

Representatives from different organizations attended the morning conference, and attendees had the opportunity to bring up with HPD as well as the panelists, their questions and concerns regarding crime prevention and safety.

Some highlights from the conference:

HPD Chief Joe Logan discussed personnel shortages within the department, along with programs that encourage elementary and high school students to join the police force after graduation.

Paul Mow, chief of staff from the prosecuting attorney's office talked about geographic restrictions, which set boundaries to keep offenders out of Waikiki.

Rick Egged, WIA president, brought up the need for additional camera coverage in Waikiki, as well as adding more lockers at Kuhio Beach to prevent property theft on the beach.

WBID President and Executive Director Trevor Abarzua and his team went over how the Safe and Sound program's progress is tracked through outreach work and statistics.

IHS' Executive Director Connie Mitchell mentioned the focus on adding mental health resources for homeless individuals, and the need for more education on the topic.

Dr. Jim Ireland, director of Honolulu Emergency Services Department (HESD) went over the PulsePoint App, a 911-connected mobile app that can immediately inform people of emergencies occurring in their communities and can also request nearby CPR and AED help when needed. Ireland also discussed updates with the City and County of Honolulu's CORE program and the launch of a mental health crisis center.

Jessica Lani Rich, VASH president and executive director, moderated a panel focused on preventing crime. Rich and her organization partnered with HHVISA to create informational visitor safety placards that were made available to the conference attendees.

HHVISA President Jerry Dolak reminded the audience to be more vigilant about keeping track of valuables while on the beach, as thieves target unattended items.

Tina Yamaki, president of the Retail Merchants of Hawai'i provided some tips to retailers this holiday season, like using signage or greeting customers – an additional touch point to remind them that they are being watched by store employees – to deter thefts.

The Department of the Attorney General, Missing Child Center Coordinator Amanda Leonard brought up the importance of being vigilant when it comes to catching juveniles committing crimes, as they may be in dangerous situations themselves.

In his closing remarks, HLTA President and CEO Mufi Hannemann emphasized the importance of addressing habitual violent crime as a group, and working on changing how repeat offenders are charged through proposed legislation, to hold these individuals accountable for their actions.

Photo captions:

1. *(L-R) Amanda Leonard (Department of the Attorney General, Missing Child Center – Coordinator), Katie Kaahanui (WBID/Safe & Sound Waikiki – Executive Coordinator), Jessica Lani Rich (VASH – President/Executive Director), Trevor Abarzua (WBID – President/Executive Director), Mufi Hannemann (HLTA – President/CEO), Rick Egged (WIA – President), Jerry Dolak (HHVISA – President), and Jared Higashi (HLTA – Vice President, Government and Community Affairs)*
2. *The Safe and Sound Waikiki discussion panel was moderated by Trevor Abarzua (WBID), and included Katie Kaahanui (WBID – Safe & Sound Waikiki Executive Coordinator), Paul Mow (Department of the Prosecuting Attorney – Chief of Staff), Major Randall Platt (HPD/District 6), Connie Mitchell (IHS – Executive Director), and Rick Egged (WIA – President).*
3. *(L-R) The panel on Preventing Crime and Incidents was moderated by Jessica Lani Rich (VASH – President/Executive Director), with panelists Jerry Dolak (HHVISA – President), Amanda Leonard (Department of the Attorney General, Missing Child Center – Coordinator), and Tina Yamaki (Retail Merchants of Hawai‘i – President)*
4. *HLTA President/CEO Mufi Hannemann addressed the crowd at the conference.*

About the Hawai‘i Lodging & Tourism Association

Established in 1947, the Hawai‘i Lodging & Tourism Association (HLTA) is the state’s largest private organization representing hotels, condominiums, timeshares, other lodging entities, suppliers, and related firms and individuals with a connection to tourism. A 501(c)(6) association with over 700 member organizations, HLTA is dedicated to supporting the tourism industry through education, advocacy, and philanthropy. For more information, visit HLTA’s [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or website at www.hawaiilodging.org.

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Media Contact:

Kathleen Lee, Director of Communications & Public Affairs

Email: klee@hawaiilodging.org

Phone: 808.923.0407

Mobile: 408.315.4569