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HAWAII NEWS

Delay in state funds to aid homeless pains tourism industry

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These are some makeshift shelters that line Kakaako Mauka Gateway Park along Ala Moana Blvd.

Several Waikiki leaders are frustrated by the holdup in the release of \$1 million earmarked this year by state lawmakers to address homelessness in tourist areas, which many say is contributing to the district's security concerns.

Gov. David Ige has asked the state attorney general to review Act 214, which became law July 12 without his signature. Ige told lawmakers he agreed with the bill's intent, but said in a July 12 letter to Senate President Ron Kouchi and House Speaker Scott Sakai that the bill was unconstitutional "because the title does not match the contents of the bill."

The bill's title, "Relating to Taxation," belonged to an earlier measure that was gutted and replaced during a legislative conference. The new language appropriated \$1 million in general revenues to the Hawaii Tourism Authority to release in conjunction with the Hawaii Lodging & Tourism Association through a dollar-for-dollar, private-sector matching program.

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"There are still conditions that must be met before funding can be released," said Cindy McMillan, Ige's spokeswoman. "The bill required a one-to-one match, and we hope the private sector can provide funds to supplement the state's efforts."

Hawaii Tourism Authority President and CEO George Szigeti and HLTA President and CEO Mufi Hannemann said they hope so, too.

"We've reached out to the city and to HLTA, but we can't move forward," Szigeti said.

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State Sen. Glenn Wakai, chairman of the Economic Development, Tourism and Technology Committee, said he doesn't understand the holdup. "(Gov. Ige) had five months to tell us his concerns. The bill passes and now he's hung up for whatever reason while we've got crimes being committed. He's got to be able to see the greater good," Wakai said.

McMillan said the state added services this year that connect additional homeless people to outreach, rapid re-housing, legal services, and mental health and substance-abuse treatment. In February, the state Department of Human Services awarded a contract to the Institute for Human Services to serve East Honolulu, including Waikiki, she said.

But Hannemann said more could be done. "We are dumbfounded that the constitutionality question wasn't raised when we were lobbying," he said. "We aren't lacking for people who need the money. The funds should be released."

Problems caused by the mentally ill homeless individuals and street youth in Waikiki are among the top complaints of the district's tourism security sector, said Jerry Dolak, Hawaii Hotel and Visitor Industry Security Association president.

"We've got crazy, out-of-control homeless people. You can hear them screaming at the top of their lungs," Dolak said. "They'll walk into a convenience store without any fear and grab things right off the shelf. We've got them half-dressed on the streets, losing their minds. It doesn't seem kind to leave them there."

State Rep. Tom Brower, who was beaten in 2015 by teens living in a large Kakaako encampment, said illegal campers and those who disobey Waikiki's sit-lie laws must be removed through enforcement and outreach.

"When laws are routinely broken in a neighborhood, it sends a message that crime and lawlessness are welcome," he said.

Homeless minors, who can't get admitted into shelters without permission from a parent or guardian and don't qualify for supplemental aid, are another major Waikiki concern, said Kimo Carvalho, IHS community relations director. "Some of the kids do drugs at night to stay awake because they are afraid to sleep. Some go crazy and commit crimes," he said. "We aren't surprised by the crimes that people have been seeing."

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