



For Immediate Release: February 24, 2016

HTA Release (16-09)

Statement by George D. Szigeti, President and CEO, Hawai'i Tourism Authority
RE: Impact of Reducing HTA Funds on Tourism Marketing, Community Programs

HONOLULU – George D. Szigeti, president and CEO of the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA), issued the following statement on the impact that reducing HTA's funding will have on the State of Hawai'i.

"HTA brings a holistic approach to marketing Hawai'i, showcasing culture, unique experiences and sports events to share our islands with the world. Our budget is primarily allocated to promote Hawai'i tourism in North America, Japan and other markets internationally.

"We are also supporting local nonprofits that present 162 events, festivals and programs statewide to perpetuate Hawai'i's culture, environment and community spirit. These are nonprofits that rely on our funding support.

"Last week, a bill, SB83, was proposed in the state senate to reallocate \$3 million of HTA's tourism marketing funds to subsidize travel expenses incurred by University of Hawai'i athletic teams. The next senate committee hearing on SB83 is scheduled for this Friday at 9:30 a.m.

"Reducing HTA's budget will force us to make funding cutbacks to community programs valued by residents statewide, and to our tourism marketing. Making such cutbacks would put Hawai'i's visitor industry in a more vulnerable position when vying for global travelers, especially when competing against international destinations with far greater tourism marketing funds at their disposal.

"HTA is not requesting additional funding support from the legislature. We appreciate and honor the State's need to be prudent with how taxpayers' funds are expended. We are currently operating with a fixed budget of \$82 million that has remained unchanged for several years. Yet, in each of the past four years, Hawai'i's tourism industry has achieved record high totals in visitor arrivals and expenditures, and, today, we have the most diverse air access network in the State's history.

"Despite this recent record of success, HTA needs to stay aggressive with Hawai'i's tourism marketing and have its entire budget available. Everyone knows how quickly outside forces, such as an economic downturn, can affect how travelers spend their money and where they choose to vacation.

"HTA's sports marketing efforts have consistently contributed to Hawai'i tourism's overall success. In this fiscal year, we have already committed \$9 million in funds to support 19 sports events statewide with a projected economic impact of \$144 million for Hawai'i. We are also evaluating several proposals to support additional sports events that will showcase Hawai'i's brand.

"Cutting HTA's budget will weaken our tourism marketing on behalf of Hawai'i's visitor industry, the State's largest economic driver and provider of jobs. We respectfully oppose any proposal that takes away funds from our budget."

About HTA

The [Hawai'i Tourism Authority](#) (HTA) is responsible for strategically managing the State of Hawai'i's marketing initiatives to support tourism. HTA's goal is to optimize tourism's benefits for Hawai'i, while being attentive to the interests of travelers, the community and visitor industry. Established in 1998 to support Hawai'i's leading industry and largest employer, HTA continually strives to help ensure the sustainability of tourism's success.

For more information about HTA, please visit www.hawaiiauthority.org. Follow updates about HTA on Facebook, Twitter (@HawaiiHTA) and its YouTube Channel.

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Media Contacts:

Charlene Chan

Director of Communications
Hawai'i Tourism Authority
808-973-2272 (o)
808-781-7733 (m)
Charlene@gohta.net

Patrick Dugan

Senior Vice President
Anthology Marketing Group
808-539-3411 (o)
808-741-2712 (m)
Patrick.Dugan@AnthologyGroup.com

Ashley Nagaoka

Account Supervisor
Anthology Marketing Group
808-539-3479 (o)
808-238-1724 (m)
Ashley.Nagaoka@AnthologyGroup.com