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March 11, 2020

Representative Henry J.C. Aquino, Chair
Representative Troy N. Hashimoto, Vice Chair
Committee on Transportation

Dear Chair Aquino, Vice Chair Hashimoto, and Committee Members:

RE: SB 2649, SD1 Relating to Tour Aircraft

Helicopters are a valued component of our tourism industry. They also have been a source of endless complaints from communities that lie in their flight paths, and there should be no doubt that noise can constitute both a nuisance and a health hazard, especially in otherwise tranquil rural areas.

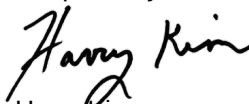
I have met with tour operators and asked them to develop a plan to address noise and safety. They took some initial steps, and I commended them for that. Moreover, I am hopeful that tour operators and community members can work together. However, the history laid out in SCR 183 (2018) is eye-opening:

"In 2000, the National Environmental Policy Act, in conjunction with the National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000, required an Air Tour Management Plan to be implemented at various national parks throughout the country... The objective of an Air Tour Management Plan is "to develop acceptable and effective measures to mitigate or prevent the significant adverse impacts, if any, of commercial air tour operations upon the natural and cultural resources, visitor experiences and tribal lands...In 2005, the project was upgraded to an Environmental Impact Statement, and the Federal Aviation Administration published a notice of opportunity for commercial air tour operators granted interim operating authority to review and self-correct annual authorizations. In 2008, Federal Aviation Administration and National Park Service staff met with Hawai'i air tour operators, and acoustic monitoring of three sites at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park was conducted. In 2011, a preliminary draft Air Tour Management Plan for Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park was published, but...seven years later, in 2018, there [was] still no final Air Tour Management Plan for Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park...In addition, after more than sixteen years, no Air Tour Management Plan for any national park in the nation has been completed..."

This history only reflects government failure to appropriately regulate noise over national parks, but it is not surprising that government has been equally deficient when it comes to noise over residential areas. How can our constituents be asked to tolerate the status quo?

SB 2649, SD1, would deny a permit to anyone "allowing the noise footprint of their tour aircraft to enter any occupied property." Given the noise complaints that helicopters generate, such legislation would be welcome news, but only if it makes a meaningful difference. Therefore, if this route is taken, I would ask this Committee to be as stringent as it deems reasonable in defining "noise footprint." The helicopter industry should be required to become a responsible and considerate corporate member of our community, and it is not there yet.

Respectfully Submitted,


Harry Kim
MAYOR