**HAWAII COUNTY GOVERNMENT OVERVIEW**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counties</th>
<th>Government Form</th>
<th>Governing Body Size</th>
<th>Population (2020)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reformed(^1)</td>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>1.4 million(^2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**County Authority**

**Most Flexible (Home Rule):** The four counties within the state of Hawaii all operate under home rule, an option granted in the state’s constitution for all political subdivisions. Any county adopting a home rule charter must design its own executive, administrative and legislative structure and organization, including the method of appointment or election of officials.

**TOP REVENUE SOURCES FOR HAWAII COUNTIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Revenue Sources Chart]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\)“Government Form” refers to the distribution of executive decision making authority in a county. “Traditional” county states mandate that counties exercise executive decision making power solely through the board of elected officials (commissioners, supervisors, etc.). “Reformed” county states mandate that counties employ an elected or appointed county executive, manager or similar position to take on at least some of the county’s executive decision making authority. “Mixed” county states means that some counties in that state are “traditional” and some are “reformed.”

\(^2\)NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - 2020 Decennial Census

**Summary of County Services**

**Services counties MUST provide:**
- Establish and maintain local law enforcement.
- Regulate and restrict land use through zoning authority.
- Maintain parks within the local jurisdiction.

**Services counties MAY provide:**
- Supply children and youth services.
- Develop affordable housing.
- Establish county fire departments.

**Services counties CANNOT provide:**
- Establish and maintain libraries.
- Form local health departments.
- Provide public education.
SUMMARY

A county council governs three of Hawaii’s four counties. The council consists of seven or nine members who act as the legislative body and share executive authority with a county mayor. The consolidated government of Honolulu City and County, in contrast, is led by a city council. The elected county mayor serves as the executive leader for a county, with specific administrative powers determined by each county’s charter. Hawaii has one county geography – Kalawao County – with no local government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row Officers</th>
<th>Elected/Appointed</th>
<th>Mandatory/Optional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auditor</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Attorney*</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosecuting Attorney</td>
<td>Elected</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Only in Kauai County; exists as separate position from the elected prosecuting attorney.

COUNTY STRUCTURE

**Legislative Branch:** A county council of 7-9 members is the legislative decision-making body for counties. Honolulu City and County is led by a city council.

**Executive Branch:** All four counties have an elected county mayor as the chief executive officer. County mayors may appoint and administer all executive agencies. The mayor may veto council legislation, resolutions and ordinances proposed by the county or city council.

**Judicial Branch:** Hawaii’s local court system consist of circuit, district and family courts. The circuit courts have general jurisdiction over civil and criminal cases. The district trial courts have jurisdiction over traffic infractions, non-jury civil cases under $10,000 and small claims under $5,000. They also have jurisdiction over cases involving violations of a county ordinance. Finally, family trial courts have jurisdiction over cases involving families and children.

COUNTY AUTHORITY

**Executive Power:** Each county in Hawaii has a charter and may exercise its powers subject only to limitations in state law. Counties enact ordinances to protect the health, life and property of residents and to preserve order and security. Counties may set the structure and organization of its government and the method of appointment or election of its officials. Charter provisions in Hawaii are superior to statutory provisions.

**Ability to Form Partnerships:** Counties in Hawaii may contract to provide all county powers and services. In addition, any county council may authorize the executive branch to enter into a development agreement with a person having a legal or equitable interest in the development of real property.

**Call a State of Emergency:** The county mayor may declare a local state of emergency. Additionally, each county may pass emergency ordinances by a 2/3 vote in the face of an imminent disaster or danger to public safety.

**Special Districts:** Counties may establish an array of special districts to fund projects that contribute to the business and financial success of the county, including community improvement and special improvement districts.
OVERVIEW OF COUNTY SERVICES

Counties in Hawaii have jurisdiction over many services as enumerated in their charters. Counties provide fire departments, police departments, emergency planning and have broad authority in land use, planning and zoning. The state operates and maintains ambulance, education, road and library services. The state establishes a courthouse in each county. The state also shares in the cost of any new or increased service counties must provide.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

County Health Department: Counties cannot form local county health departments. However, the state department of health may delegate certain functions to county governments. The state also establishes a Subarea Health Planning Council in each county to review, seek public input and make recommendations relating to health planning.

Senior Care Facilities: The state executive office on aging must coordinate with county offices and councils to provide senior care facilities and programs. Counties may, however, operate senior centers and provide various services to seniors.

Mental Health Facilities: The state is responsible for mental health services. The state department of health operates community mental health centers in each of the four counties.

Child Services: Counties may provide services for children and youth. For example, Maui County implements childcare and development programs for children aged 1-8. Honolulu City and County has a Youth Commission to advise the city council and mayor on how certain policies may impact younger residents.

Welfare: The state administers welfare services. Counties may provide tangential services to residents, such as housing assistance and workforce development programs.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Roads: The state department of transportation must construct and maintain all public highways. Hawaii, Kauai and Maui counties cannot maintain or construct roads unless a road is donated or dedicated to the county or if the repair of a private road is imperative for the general welfare of the county. The mayor of Honolulu City and County, however, may appoint a Chief Engineer to maintain public roads and bridges.

Mass Transit: Counties may construct, maintain and operate mass transit systems, including buses, street railways, monorails, subways and taxis. Counties may provide mass transportation services either directly, jointly or through contracts with private parties.

Broadband Permits: Counties may approve or deny broadband-related permits.

Alternative Energy: Counties may participate in the development of alternative energy sources, including geothermal, solar, wind, ocean power, biomass and solid wastes.

Utilities: The state public utilities commission regulates and administers public utilities. Counties may regulate certain utilities, such as water (through county boards of water), solid waste or electricity.

- Water: Counties may supply water and install water pipes.
- Sewer: Counties may install sewage pipes.
- Solid Waste: Counties may establish and operate solid waste facilities.
- Electric: Counties may establish and operate electric generation facilities.
- Gas: Counties cannot provide gas utility services.
**ZONING AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Zoning Power:** Counties must regulate and restrict the use and construction of buildings and spaces with their zoning authority. Counties must develop long-range, comprehensive general plans to guide overall future development. Unlike many states, county zoning ordinances may regulate agricultural lands, too.

**Zoning Restriction:** Counties must use their zoning authority within the context of comprehensive land use planning. Counties cannot zone areas susceptible to flooding for residential use.

**Housing Authority:** The state housing authority regulates and enforces safe housing conditions. Counties cannot operate housing authorities but do have individual offices and departments that may construct, operate and maintain affordable housing units. In addition, counties may cooperate with the state housing authority to deliver state housing projects.

**Experimental and Demonstration Housing Projects:** Counties may designate certain areas for experimental and demonstration housing projects to research and develop ideas that would reduce the cost of housing.

**Affordable Housing:** Counties may develop, construct and provide low- or moderate-income housing. Counties may also partner with developers and provide assistance to a public agency that plans to develop and construct new housing for low- or moderate-income households.

**Indigenous Architecture:** Counties must allow for the exercise of indigenous native Hawaiian architectural practices, styles, customs, techniques and materials historically employed by native Hawaiians in their building codes.

**Urban Renewal:** Counties may create a local county redevelopment agency to undertake and carry out urban renewal projects, as well as to prepare studies and research for a general neighborhood and urban renewal plan.

---

**PUBLIC AMENITIES**

**Parks and Recreation:** Counties must maintain and operate all parks within their jurisdictions through parks and recreation departments. Counties may donate park lands to be maintained and operated by the state park system instead.

**Libraries:** Counties cannot establish libraries. The state department of education maintains and establishes libraries.

**Beach Maintenance:** Counties must maintain public beaches, which includes removing and clearing all seaweed and debris that could create unsanitary conditions or otherwise become a public nuisance.

**Community Entertainment:** Counties may make appropriations for community promotion, public celebrations and other entertainments.

**Arborist Advisory Committee:** Counties must establish a county arborist advisory committee appointed by the county mayor. The committee must prepare recommendations to the county council on exceptional trees that need to be protected by county ordinance or regulation.

**Public Off-Street Parking Facilities:** Counties may provide public off-street parking facilities.
HAWAII COUNTIES EMPLOY 18,838 GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

- **Law Enforcement:** Counties must establish a police commission and appoint a chief of police to provide local law enforcement.
- **Jails:** The state department of public safety must administer and maintain all public and private correction facilities.
- **Courthouses:** The state chief justice of the Hawaii judiciary must construct and operate courthouses and related facilities. The state legislature appropriates funds for the courthouses.
- **Fire:** Counties may establish and maintain county fire departments. Each county may also determine how many fire departments are created, as well as how they are funded and operated. A county council may also establish and maintain volunteer fire stations.
- **Ambulance:** The state department of health collaborates with counties to operate and maintain statewide ambulance services.
- **Emergency Management Agency:** Counties must establish and maintain an emergency management organization and must also develop a county emergency management plan and program, which is overseen by the county mayor.
- **Flood Control:** Counties may construct, maintain and remove water channels to improve the ability to divert or control flood waters.

HAWAII COUNTY GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES BY TOP FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice &amp; Public Safety</td>
<td>6,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Amenities</td>
<td>3,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>2,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water, Sewage and Solid Waste</td>
<td>2,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>1,154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Employment, 2017

SERVICES, CONTINUED

**SCHOOLS**

**Education, Generally:**

The state legislature must fund and establish a public education system. The state board of education must administer state education policies and operate the public school system.

**School Board:** Counties cannot have county boards of education.

**Community Colleges:** The state board of education must operate and maintain community colleges.
OVERVIEW OF COUNTY FINANCE STRUCTURE

Despite having home rule authority, counties cannot levy any tax that has not been authorized by the state. County councils may authorize to levy taxes and determine the rate of taxation on real property, vehicles and fuel. Counties primarily rely on real property taxes to provide resident services, so the state does not impose restrictions on these taxes. Counties in Hawaii may also issue bonds up to 15 percent of the assessed value of all taxable county property. Finally, counties may also levy a franchise tax on the gross receipts from Hawaii electric public utility companies.

FINANCES, TAXES AND LIMITATIONS

Property Tax: Counties may levy taxes only on real property, including land, buildings, equipment and improvements. The state does not impose any restrictions on county property taxes.

Personal Property Tax: Counties cannot impose a tax on personal property.

Income Tax: Counties cannot levy an income tax.

Sales Tax: Counties cannot impose a local sales tax.

Mineral Tax: Counties cannot impose a mineral tax.

Gas/Fuel Taxes: Counties may levy a tax on the sale of motor fuel at an amount approved by county voters.

Vehicle Tax: Counties must impose a vehicle tax, based on vehicle weight. These funds must be distributed to the state highway fund and used to maintain and construct roads within the county in which the funds are collected.

Public Utilities Franchise Tax: Counties may impose a 2.5 percent franchise tax on the gross receipts from electric power companies operating as public utilities.

Debt and Debt Limit: County councils may, through a two-thirds majority, issue general bonds up to 15 percent of the values of assessed property within the county. These bonds must fund public improvements or other special improvements as defined by state law. Counties may also issue bonds for revenue-producing projects such as a public works improvement. Hawaii state statutes also include provisions for pollution control and economic development special purpose revenue bonds.

Other Finance Info:

- General Excise Tax: Counties in Hawaii may temporarily impose a surcharge of 0.5 percent on proceeds from state general excise taxes, but these revenues must be used for transportation costs. This tax only applies to activities taxed at 4 percent or below.

- State Mass Transit Special Fund: The state department of budget and finance may allocate funds collected from a transient accommodation tax and a surcharge on state tax revenues to counties.

- Commuter Benefits Program: A county council may establish a commuter benefits program that incentivizes employers and their employees to use public transit, bicycles or other environmentally responsible transportation options.

- Tax Increment Financing: Counties may create tax increment districts, issue tax increment bonds and deposit tax increments into a tax increment fund.
HAWAII COUNTIES INVEST $4.4 BILLION ANNUALLY

Transportation 28% $1.23 B
Justice and Public Safety 17% $760 M
Sewerage and Solid Waste Management 15% $665 M
Utilities 8% $374 M
Public Amenities 6% $283 M

Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017

HAWAII COUNTIES RECEIVE $604 MILLION FROM INTERGOVERNMENTAL SOURCES

Intergovernmental Sources:
- From State Government: 86%
- From Local Government: 7%
- From Federal Government: 6%
- County-Generated Revenue: 5%

Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017