RES25-011
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 81

PUBLIC SAFETY & CUSTOMER SERVICES (PS)

PUBLIC SAFETY & CUSTOMER SERVICES (PS) Meeting

Meeting Date: Feb 13, 2025 @ 01:00 PM

Support: 0

Oppose: 12

I wish to comment: 0

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Eddie Fujioka	puunui@msn.com	96818
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Oppose	Feb 11, 2025 @ 02:20 PM

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Moku Nui	huhuhawaiian808@gmail.com	96817
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Oppose	Feb 11, 2025 @ 09:53 PM

Testimony:

Dear Council Members,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the reappointment of James Ireland as the Director of the Honolulu Emergency Services Department.

Over the last four years, his leadership has been defined by conflicts of interest, ethical and moral failures, blatant favoritism, and a disregard for accountability—all of which have directly led to staffing shortages, low morale, and a decline in the reliability of EMS services. Given the critical role of EMS in public safety, I urge you and the City Council to reject his reappointment in favor of a leader who will prioritize fairness, transparency, and the well-being of our emergency responders and the community.

Under James Ireland's tenure, department morale has plummeted, leading to an exodus of employees seeking similar positions within the local fire department and competing ambulance services. He has repeatedly misrepresented data in presentations to city leaders, distorting statistics to align with his personal narrative rather than providing an honest assessment of the department's worsening state. Despite record-high ambulance closures and dangerously low staffing levels, he has taken few meaningful steps to address these challenges. Instead of working to improve retention, recruitment, and response times, he has prioritized personal interests, pet projects, non-administrative work, and the creation of a new Special Operations and Community Medicine division that diverted paramedics and EMTs away from core 911 operations. This division was established with millions in city and federal grant dollars. Yet, it has failed to meet its stated objectives, specifically from Special Operations, further eroding trust among department employees and city officials. Meanwhile, frontline EMS crews continue to struggle with inadequate staffing, low morale, and increasing call volumes.

Throughout his appointment, James Ireland has failed to prioritize the administrative and operational needs of the department. He has been allowed to work as a less than full-time employee leader of this major metropolitan EMS system while simultaneously maintaining a well-established private medical practice, working one day a week outside his city duties and remaining credentialed at nearly all local hospitals, enabling him to implement policies that disproportionately favor his personal connections and certain hospital systems. Alarmingly, he has disregarded contractual milestones while

continuing to direct contracts toward a private ambulance company where he was previously employed. Although this company provides mutual aid services, he permits them to bill for their services, preventing the City from enhancing its own billing and revenue operations. Despite ending that employment to assume his city-appointed role, he has continued to show favoritism toward the company, raising serious ethical concerns about his decision-making and financial interests.

Additionally, James Ireland has inappropriately inserted himself into promotional processes in ways that are unprecedented for this position. He has inappropriately inserted himself into promotional panels, altering passing scores to favor friends while lowering hiring standards, thereby weakening the department's operational effectiveness. He recently sat on a panel selecting an Assistant Chief of Operations, a role that was ultimately awarded to his close friend—an external applicant. Predictably, this newly appointed Assistant Chief has been allowed to maintain secondary employment with the same private ambulance company, working every weekend on an outer island—further demonstrating the favoritism and lack of accountability within EMS leadership.

His disregard for ethical leadership and transparency is evident in his handling of personnel matters. The selective enforcement of policies has fostered an environment of fear, where employees are hesitant to voice concerns due to the retaliatory culture he has cultivated. Employees who have spoken out against him or his deputy have faced retaliation, including terminations for minor infractions, while their allies have been shielded from accountability for serious misconduct.

His conflicts of interest extend beyond hiring and promotions. As a physician, he has personally written doctor's notes for his friends within the department, allowing them to manipulate leave policies and evade accountability. This clear abuse of power undermines the integrity of department operations and erodes trust among employees. Additionally, rather than focusing on administrative leadership, he frequently inserts himself into emergency responses, not in a director capacity but for personal enjoyment. He has been seen taking pictures at emergency scenes and indulging in the adrenaline rush of driving with lights and sirens across the island, prioritizing personal excitement over the responsibilities of his position. These actions diminish the role of frontline EMS providers and create confusion about leadership authority during critical incidents.

Despite opposition from city leaders, James Ireland continues to operate carelessly. He has ignored warnings regarding the unmanageable 12-hour pilot program, which has resulted in widespread abuse of sick leave and schedule manipulation, leading to additional unit closures. While he and his deputy claim to be saving taxpayers money by reducing overtime costs compared to the previous 8-hour shift schedule, they fail to acknowledge that under the 8-hour shifts, there were zero unit closures. This misleading narrative prioritizes financial optics over public safety.

Even more concerning is his continued push to implement a 24-hour shift schedule despite national EMS agencies moving away from such models due to well-documented safety risks. No official study or analysis has been conducted to justify this transition, yet he persists in advancing this reckless agenda at the urging of his friends. A move to a 24-hour schedule will only serve to make the staffing crisis exponentially worse, further degrading EMS response capabilities and putting

both first responders and the public at greater risk.

Unlike his counterparts in the Honolulu Fire and Honolulu Police Departments who have readily available information on their respective websites, James Ireland has failed to produce a strategic plan, demonstrating a lack of vision and commitment to the department's future. His tenure has been characterized by a pattern of self-interest, cronyism, and poor decision-making that has weakened EMS services and placed public safety at risk.

Reappointing James Ireland would send the message that deception, favoritism, and mismanagement are acceptable in a critical public safety agency. His tenure has not only failed to improve EMS services but has actively contributed to their decline. The residents of Honolulu deserve leadership that prioritizes accountability, integrity, and a commitment to public safety above personal and political interests. For these reasons, I urge you and the City Council to reject his reappointment and seek a leader who can restore trust and stability within the department. I appreciate your time and consideration of these concerns.

Name: Laurie Grace	Email: pharomedic@gmail.com	Zip: 96789
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Feb 12, 2025 @ 09:26 AM

Name: Christopher Sloman	Email: crsloman@gmail.com	Zip: 96721
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Feb 12, 2025 @ 10:43 AM

Name: Manahel Al-hozail	Email: manahelalhozail@gmail.com	Zip: 96826
Representing: Self	Position: Oppose	Submitted: Feb 12, 2025 @ 11:49 AM

Testimony:

I disagreed with this nomination as the Honolulu EMS has the lowest moral in a long time. The city has paid $480k for a response active shooter vehicle instead of paying the 200+ employees the hazard pay they are owed for the covid-19 pandemic.

The moral is low and the issues brought forth has not be addressed and often dismissed.

The midnight fleet which makes up -40-45% of the staff are not allowed appropriate downtime while off duty to rest and spend time with family.

The midnight personal are called all hours of there off time to have schedule changes made in a daily based. The midnight crews are not allowed to sleep on duty but can "rest" however there are so many calls that eating a snack is often difficult. Not only are we constantly being woke up from our sleep and get insomnia and unable to rest after the phone calls but there is also discussion of a reduction in the fleet on the midnight shift.

We have a growing number of calls with more than 115k calls last year alone. EMS needs an increase in ambulance not a reduction. Honolulu has multiple new high rises in the last 5 years with numerous new building in construction currently. What is the plan for the future of EMS and the health and safety of the Emts and paramedics? Our current leadership is lacking in communication and proactive planning. A change needs to happen.

Pay the employees the money they are owed for the countless exposure and risks during the pandemic.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Jonathan Lee	jjlee5@hotmail.com	96744
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Oppose	Feb 12, 2025 @ 12:38 PM

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Anonymous Anonymous	1234@gmail.com	96789
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Oppose	Feb 12, 2025 @ 01:58 PM

Testimony:

I oppose this measure

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Johnny Wong	johnnywong@yahoo.com	96744
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Oppose	Feb 12, 2025 @ 04:05 PM

Testimony:

To whom it may concern

I am writing you anonymously to express my concerns about the reappointment of Dr Ireland to the position of Director of EMS

I am anonymously submitting testimony because of fear of retaliation. I can assure you that my opinions I share with you are the same opinions of my colleagues who are reluctant to reach out to you for your help because of fear of retaliation

Let me first share a little bit about myself. I am a paramedic. I have been a paramedic with the City and County of Honolulu for nearly 20 years. I'm currently working in what used to be a slower area outside of Honolulu

Over the years I have witnessed first hand the many changes that our department has experienced from the various types of leadership styles and how it has affected our departments morale, and working conditions

The issues that I feel we need to address are these, 1, mismanagement of City EMS, 2, lack of leadership, 3, mismanagement of funds, 4, conflicts of interest, 5, low morale. 6, Favortism

1, Mismanagement,

City EMS has had issues with mismanagement for decades. Issues with our automotive/maintenance program, retention of MICTs, the increase in call volume and workload, poor compensation, and many more. These issues have been written on the wall for everyone to see but yet for over 20 years there has not been one person who has been creative enough to tackle these issues. We strongly feel that had someone began to look into these issues years ago and gotten the ball rolling in ways to fix these problems, we possibly would not be in the situation we are in today

Dr Ireland has been in the position of director for 4 years. And we are worse off now than we were prior to his appointment. We feel that Dr Ireland is focusing too much on the little easy quick fixes and not on the long term fixes. Failure to start working on the long term fixes will only delay the process and prolong our problems. We do not feel he listens to what we have to say. We feel that he just continues to do what he wants to do until he realizes that what he's doing is no longer working instead of tackling the actual issues head on. We all realize that these fixes will take time and a large amount of effort. But focusing on the small easy fixes are just temporary and will not actually fix these problems.

There is also evidence of a second medical director position that was created two years ago that has not been filled. What is the purpose of the second medical director position and who is supposed to be placed into that position?

The EMS 1 or Chief of EMS position was recently vacated by acting EMS chief Spencer Yamamoto and has yet to be filled. Spencer was asked to leave the position and to return to his FOS position. We currently do not have a Chief of EMS which leaves us without a true chain of command.

2, Leadership

We don't feel that Dr ireland has the leadership ability to run our department. We feel Dr Ireland is more focused on his personal image and his self interests. True leaders have the courage to be able to make hard decisions that may not place them in favorable positions. True leaders are able to admit when they need help and will seek help knowing that it's not a sign of weakness but strength knowing they are doing what's better for the team and not themselves. We feel that Dr Ireland is more focused on his image and chasing news cameras, getting air time and publicity. We feel that Dr Ireland cares more about the position he holds instead of what's going to benefit our department and community. We have witnessed Dr Ireland time and time again on the news, in front of city council lie about our response times, unit closures, morale, retention etc. we do not feel like he represents us and minimizes all of the hard work we all put in everyday. We want someone who will be honest to the mayor, city council and the public and tell them that we are closing units on a daily basis. That unit closures do affect the public by delaying response times. That our morale is the lowest it's been in decades. That our department does have a retention problem and that we do need help. Even if it's from another agency

We want leadership that is transparent, honest, willing to represent US and who will put his TEAM in front of himself.

We want a Director that directs more time into doing what directors are supposed to do! We do not want a director playing paramedic chasing and responding to only the glorious calls only to be interviewed by the media. We have paramedics and PIOs for that

3, Mismanagement of funds
There is a lot of concern of where our funding is going. How well we are recouping our funds

There was a new "specialized medicine program" that was spearheaded by deputy director Ian Santee. We are concerned about where this money is coming from and if the money used for this program could have been better spent on other more important areas like our ambulances, our laptops, the MDTs newer equipment like EKGs or gurneys etc. This specialized medicine program spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on brand new ambulances and a "armored bearcat" with a water turret on its roof. This type of vehicle is mainly used for riot control. Why would we need to waste money on that? Not to mention this program is never fully staffed and not always available when needed

There was also funding approved for a ALS ambulance unit "Waikele". Waikele was initially open and running out of the Waipio unit but was later closed. It's been almost two years since that unit closed. What happened to the funds for that unit

We were just told yesterday that we now have funding approved for another ALS unit in town. When, where and how will we be able to open that unit? We don't have the paramedics to even open Waikele. I'd like to see where that money goes.

4, conflicts of interest/ethics
Is it not a conflict of interest or an ethics issue for Dr Ireland to be running a private medical practice while being a Director of EMS? How can he be a 75% medical director and 25% private practice nephrologist? Can any of us be a 75% paramedic or EMT and run a business 25%!of the time and get paid our 100% salary? Is it not an ethics violation? I remember when a couple of my colleagues who were paramedics had a medical transport business and had gotten into trouble for it because it was in violation of Ethical Standards?

5, Favortism
Recently there have been some promotions and decisions made that favor individuals that most of us do not feel comfortable with. Some of the recent promotions involved an individual(s) that we do not feel was qualified or deserved the promotion. This promotion clearly passed up other individuals who clearly had a better work ethic, stronger ability to lead, integrity, character and respect from their colleagues. Despite opposition and disagreement from multiple field personnel, the individual(s) were promoted anyway

This also applies to decisions made about personnel going to CORE and the Specialized medicine program

We also have had personnel who have been investigated for errors in judgement that would otherwise have ended in termination. Investigations that in what some believe would have been slam dunks. This or these individuals are still employed by the city

6, low morale
I have never experienced a time in my career where morale has been this low. The issues that I have highlighted are only a few of the problems and concerns we face and directly affect our morale

I hope the issues in this letter resonate in you as it does within us. I hope that you listen to the concerns we have and implement the changes needed to improve transparency and fairness. We hope that this will help to improve our working conditions and morale and will motivate each and everyone who reads this into diving deeper into our concerns and to investigate issues within our department

VR
J.W.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Johnny Wong	johnnywong42@yahoo.com	96744
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Oppose	Feb 12, 2025 @ 04:25 PM

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VR
J.W.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
City Medic	citymedic808@gmail.com	96814
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Oppose	Feb 12, 2025 @ 11:24 PM

Testimony:
Dear Honorable Council Members,

As a 10 year veteran of Honolulu EMS, I am writing to express my concerns regarding the potential reappointment of Dr. James Ireland to the position of Director of the Honolulu Emergency Services Department. While Dr. Ireland's tenure has seen some accomplishments, I believe there are significant issues that warrant consideration before confirming his reappointment.

First, there have been numerous complaints by his subordinates and public concerns regarding the efficiency and responsiveness of the department under his leadership. The Honolulu Emergency Services Department is critical in providing swift, life-saving services, and it is essential that the leadership of this department be capable of not only managing resources effectively but also fostering a healthy workplace by improving morale and retention.

Unfortunately, there have been many instances of miscommunication, inadequate staffing, and logistical delays that undermine the department's ability to serve the residents of Honolulu optimally putting lives at risk.

Moreover, there is a need for greater transparency and accountability in the department's operations. As a current EMS

employee and resident of this city, we deserve to know that the Emergency Services Department is being managed with the utmost care and responsibility. The challenges we face require leadership that is proactive, responsive, and willing to make tough decisions to ensure that we have the best emergency response system possible.

I strongly urge you to carefully assess Dr. Ireland's and his deputy's leadership during their current tenure and consider the potential impact of reappointing them. It is vital that we place trust in a director who will meet the high expectations of public safety, efficiency, and effective management.

Please start by looking into the following...

-Look into the numerous ambulance closures putting lives at risk. (If the 2025 NYE fire tragedy happened an hour later, 5 city ambulances would have been shut down and u able to respond)

-Look into the prolonged response times and inability to meet nationwide standards due to closures and overall lack of resources.

-Look into poor billing recoupment numbers despite promising the city that this administration could outperform the State Department of Health after taking over EMS.

-Talk with Paramedics and see how terrible moral truly is.

-Look into the misuse of department funds.

-Inquire about Ian Santee's newly formed "Specialized Community Medicine" branch and how personnel and vehicles were acquired there and the cost to store them.

-Look into the poorly maintained ambulance fleet and inquire why crews are being forced to work in unsafe and mechanically unsound apparatus.

-Why does the department have to rely so heavily on AMR (private ambulance) and the Federal Fire Department for mutual aids.

-Why did Ocean Safety petition so hard to leave HESD and this administration?

-Why does the majority of the EMS department wish to explore the opportunity of merging EMS and HFD?

I urge you all to start with these topics and meet with the men and women in uniform to tell you the truth about what really goes on. Many are reluctant to speak the truth in fear of retaliation from this administration.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I trust you will make a decision that is in the best interest of the residents and visitors of Honolulu.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
City Medic	citymedic808@sharklasers.com	96814
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	Oppose	Feb 13, 2025 @ 01:10 AM

Testimony:

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Thank you for your attention to this matter. I trust you will make a decision that is in the best interest of the residents and visitors of Honolulu.

Name:	Email:	Zip:
E M	PLEASESAVEEMS@hotmail.org	96782
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
EMS HAWAII	Oppose	Feb 13, 2025 @ 09:31 AM

Testimony:

Please do NOT reappoint James Ireland and Ian Santee. They have made a mess of EMS! They have been deceitful to the citizens of this county and have degraded the integrity of EMS to fulfill their personal and political agenda. It will take years to undo and rebuild the trust of the EMS community, more lives WILL BE LOST with their leadership and egotistical agenda!

Testimony in Opposition to James Ireland as Director

January 25, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to formally express my opposition to the nomination of Dr. James Ireland for the position of Director of Emergency Services.

While Dr. Ireland may possess certain qualifications, I believe that there are several significant concerns that must be taken into consideration:

1. **Concerns About Leadership Effectiveness:**
    - Effective leadership is essential for the success of any organization, and Dr. Ireland's leadership style raises concerns. Low employee morale, record unit closures, stolen vehicles, employee retirement and transfers have been reported, which could potentially hinder collaboration and morale among the division
    - In the last 4.5 years 6 senior highly experienced District Chiefs and one Chief of Operations left EMS. Although I cannot give you the specific details all have expressed frustration and lack of appreciation as the main reasons they left EMS. In 2024, 7 Paramedics and support staff retired a record number for EMS in a calendar year.
    - No Strategic Action Plans – Department or Division this is important to keep employees engaged and on track is the same direction
    - No SOP manuals available for employees
    - Poor Communication with employees – Employees does not get regular updates on current affairs, projects, plans, budgets, equipment etc. Previous Administration held monthly District Chief and Unit Supervisor meetings where information was shared and allowed Chief's and Supervisors to discuss issues in an open forum. Communication is key to engaging employees toward goals and issues, it is key component in leadership
    - The high number of testimonies in support of Resolution 24-272, an EMS/Fire integration is a clear indicator of a lack of confidence with Dr. Ireland's leadership and the desire to integrate into Fire based system.
2. **Concerns About Full-time status:**
    - In Dr. Ireland's role as Director, it has been reported that he is not full-time employee. As a Director of a First Responder Service a director is the leader, the tip of the spear and must be present at a minimum Full Time. It has been reported that Dr. Ireland is allowed to keep his personal medical practice which takes away valuable time from a Directorship. Divided attention has directly impacted operational efficiency and staff morale such as unit closures
    - Four years ago, Dr. Ireland was selected as Chief of EMS. Since that time, he has been appointed as Director of the Department of Emergency Services. The Chief of EMS position has been left unfilled and remains vacant today. There have been at least two TA Chief's that have been serviced as EMS 1. One left the City and the other has retired, both were removed as EMS 1 by Dr. Ireland. EMS

needs a Chief of EMS. Organizations need to know who is in command, what is their vision, what is the strategic action plan both near term and long term.

3. **Concerns About Alignment with Organizational Values**
    - The values and mission of Honolulu Emergency Services are integral to our success, and there are significant concerns about Dr. Ireland's alignment with these principles. Specifically, CORE has required valuable time to Organize. Time that EMS needs to maintain Moral, direction, writing Standard Operating Procedures, Strategic Long term action plan like ones HPD and HFD have written in detail. A play/plan book a new Supervisor can open and follow as a template to any incident.
    - Last year the City council passed a Resolution to encourage the Administration and the Director to establish a First responder mental health and wellness program. I believe there has been no, or little, noteworthy progress made on this much needed program. We need trained, certified professionals to staff a program like many organizations across the country. First responders serve our community every day, 24/7/365 and ask for nothing in return. Now is the time we care for current and retired first responders. This program must begin, it will help responders, and their families, prolong careers, and assist with directing responders to activities to deal with mental health and overall wellness. These will help raise morale and send a message to responders that we care, they as valued and not just words. The recent tragedies have examples of what our brave First Responders deal with in their careers MENTAL HEALTH is HEALTH.
    - Many Cities have robust first responder Wellness programs. The following are agencies that can be referenced; **Seattle, Portland, Los Angels, San Franciso, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Albuquerque, Houston, San Antonio, Dallas, New York, Orlando, Tampa, Georgia First Responder PTSD program, Washington DC, Nashville and Tennessee First Responder Foundation** are just a few. The lack of progress despite the Councils Resolution underscores a missed opportunity to support those responders that serve the community tirelessly.
    - EMS Dispatch started a program to gain Accreditation from priority Dispatch in 2022. Dr. Ireland promoted two Supervisors, one to a Chief's position and other to Supervisor of training. It has been nearly three years, and they still have not been accredited. I have spoken to Priority Dispatch, and they have mentioned that HNLEMS has large issues, and it has taken must longer than expected.
    - After speaking to several current EMS employees; all have expressed deep concerns about Dr. Ireland's leadership style. There needs to be a change in leadership, or a major change is the nominee's leadership style.

It is crucial that the leadership of Honolulu Emergency Services and especially the Division of Emergency Services is entrusted to individuals who not only possess the requisite qualifications and experience but also embody the values and vision of our organization. Based on the concerns outlined above, I respectfully urge you to reconsider the nomination of Dr. Ireland as Director.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Eddie Fujioka

Retired EMS District Chief

Testimony Opposing the Reappointment of HESD Director James Ireland and Deputy Director Ian Santee

Honorable Members of the Honolulu City and County Public Safety Committee

I am submitting this testimony to firmly appose the reappointment of current Director James Ireland and Deputy Director Ian Santee as the department heads of Honolulu Emergency Services Department(HESD).

The dedicated men and women who serve our communities are highly committed to their roles, often putting their lives on the line to ensure public safety. However, even the most skilled and dedicated need support, or their productivity and effectiveness decline.They deserve better and so do the people of Oahu.

Under Director Ireland and Deputy Dir Santee's leadership, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and its service to the public have deteriorated significantly. With the daily closures of EMS Units due to staffing shortages, the turn over loss of personnel, and the dependency on AMR and Military EMS to make up for the lack of coverage are some of the main reasons the current leadership has failed. There has been a continued and clear lack of commitment to, and prioritization of, the recruitment and retention of essential personnel in EMS.

Moreover, the prioritization of personal agendas over the core mission of EMS, has caused morale to plummet in their tenure. Personnel are actively seeking employment elsewhere due to a toxic work environment and favoritism. This culture has led personnel to "quiet quitting," where employees disengage while remaining on the job, and a continued exodus of skilled personnel in search of better career opportunities.

Additionally, the preferred selection and reassignment of qualified personnel off the road to developing positions of expansion, further affect the multiple closures of EMS units, resulting in significant delays of 911 responses. This misallocation of resources undermines the efficiency and effectiveness of EMS services, further endangering public safety.

There have also been instances of selective targeting of personnel who do not align with current leadership views. This has resulted in the misuse of tax payers dollars on unwarranted investigations against employees who are otherwise competent and dedicated. Such actions are an abuse of power and further erodes trust and morale within the department, discouraging good employees from continuing on with their service.

HESD and the people of Honolulu deserve a qualified Director and Deputy Director to lead and serve. Any appointee who uses their position for self promotion undermines the integrity of HESD and does a disservice to the people of Oahu. The inability to address or prioritize the needs of HESD personnel and more importantly, the people of Oahu, compromises the 911 service that is so critical to our infrastructure.

In closing, I strongly urge the committee to consider new leadership other than James Ireland and Ian Santee, that will prioritize the needs of the people of Honolulu and the dedicated men and women of EMS that I have had the privilege to serve with for 33 years.

Respectfully,

Laurie Grace 2/13/2025
NREMTP
Hawaii State Licensed EMTP
(808)291-4246
pharomedic@gmail.com

Testimony to the Honolulu City Council Public Safety Committee

Date: February 11, 2025

From: Chris Sloman, Former Acting Chief of Emergency Medical Services (EMS), Assistant Chief of Operations

Subject: Testimony Against the Reappointment of Dr. James Ireland, M.D., and Ian Santee as Director and Deputy Director of Emergency Services, and Advocacy for New Leadership

Honorable Members of the Honolulu City Council Public Safety Committee,

I am writing to express my opposition to the reappointment of Dr. James Ireland, M.D., as Director of Emergency Services and his Deputy, Ian Santee. As a former Acting Chief of EMS and Assistant Chief of Operations, I have had the opportunity to observe the leadership and operational challenges within the Emergency Medical Services Division firsthand. My concerns are rooted in systemic issues that have undermined the effectiveness of EMS and the morale of its personnel, and I believe these issues warrant a change in leadership as the recently established task force evaluates the potential integration of EMS with the Honolulu Fire Department (HFD).

During my tenure, I observed a pattern of inconsistent decision-making that often appeared to prioritize short-term political or public relations gains over long-term solutions to EMS challenges. For example, resources were occasionally redirected to address high-profile issues in a manner that garnered media attention but did not address underlying operational needs, leaving critical gaps in service delivery.

There have been instances where emergency procurement processes were utilized in ways that raised concerns about fiscal responsibility and alignment with industry standards. For instance, the acquisition of certain equipment—such as ambulances that were outdated by modern standards—diverted funds from more pressing needs, such as increasing the number of operational units or enhancing training programs.

Leadership has at times failed to hold personnel accountable for significant policy violations, particularly when those individuals had personal or professional connections to senior management. Conversely, personnel who voiced concerns or opposed certain initiatives were subject to disproportionate scrutiny, including investigations without their knowledge, which fostered a culture of fear and retaliation rather than collaboration and improvement.

The transition of EMS billing from state to city management, intended to increase revenue and expand services, was marred by delays in obtaining necessary certifications, such as a Medicare provider number. This resulted in a significant loss of potential revenue—

estimated in millions of dollars—due to an inability to bill for services within the required timeframes, further straining EMS resources.

In light of these systemic challenges, I strongly urge the Committee to consider a new leadership structure for EMS, specifically a commission-based model similar to those adopted by the Honolulu Fire Department and the recently established Ocean Safety Department. A commission-based structure would:

Enhance Accountability: By replacing politically appointed leadership with a commission of experts and community stakeholders, EMS would benefit from greater transparency and oversight, ensuring decisions are made in the best interest of public safety and service quality.

Promote Meritocracy: A commission could establish clear, merit-based criteria for promotions and resource allocation, reducing the influence of personal or political relationships and fostering a culture of professionalism and fairness.

Support Long-Term Planning: Unlike appointed directors who may focus on short-term political wins, a commission would be better positioned to develop and implement sustainable strategies for addressing EMS challenges, such as staffing shortages, equipment modernization, and integration with other emergency services.

The reappointment of Dr. Ireland and Mr. Santee risks perpetuating the systemic issues that have hindered EMS's ability to serve the people of Honolulu effectively. While the task force evaluates the potential integration of EMS with HFD, this is a critical opportunity to install leadership that prioritizes accountability, transparency, and long-term solutions. I respectfully request that the Committee reject the reappointment of the current Director and Deputy Director and instead pursue a commission-based leadership model to guide EMS into a more effective and equitable future.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I remain committed to supporting the improvement of emergency services in Honolulu and am available to provide further insights or assistance as needed.

Respectfully,

Chris Sloman

Chris Sloman

Former Acting Chief, Emergency Medical Services

Assistant Chief of Operations

Chair of the Public Safety and Customer Services Committee

Agenda item RES25-001

CONFIRMING THE NOMINATION OF JAMES H. E. IRELAND, M.D., TO SERVE AS THE DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES OF THE CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU.

February 13, 2025

1:00 PM

IN OPPOSITION

My name is Jonathan Lee NREMT, Hawaii state licensed EMTP with 33 years of service in the City and County of Honolulu HESD dept EMS div. I am testifying against the confirmation of James H. E. Ireland for the Director of HESD.

James Ireland has consistently failed for the past 4 years as the Director of HESD to demonstrate any ability to lead HESD in any direction except backwards. He has not been able to bring forth an effective plan to improve employee morale, increase employee retention, improve working conditions and end ambulance unit closures. Unit closures have peaked during his current term as Director of HESD. This has consistently reduced ambulance coverage delaying response times for 911 calls. The citizens of Honolulu County and its visitors have been put at great risk because of this.

Director Ireland has created numerous special assignment positions for a very selected group of employees. Giving them better hours of work, more pay, more overtime. These positions were not offered to all employees even if they may have been more than qualified to fill that position. He created an upper level leadership position that "HESD administrative staff only" were eligible to apply for. Director Ireland continuously makes empty promises of more pay, better conditions, and more Ambulance units giving the personnel false hope. Morale is driven further down when none of his hollow promises come to fruition. Blame is constantly placed on the hard working, highly trained dedicated Paramedics and EMTS of Honolulu EMS for having bad morale and abusing sick leave, but these problems are symptoms of what the leadership is doing wrong or not doing at all. I am sure that if you took a no confidence vote today the personnel of Honolulu EMS division would overwhelmingly vote NO CONFIDENCE in James Ireland.

In conclusion James Ireland has had 4 years to lead this department forward improving work conditions, increase morale and employee retention and end Ambulance unit closures. He has obviously failed! It is time for new leadership for HESD that has a clear vision and a viable plan to move this department in a positive direction.

Jonathan Lee
NREMT, Hawaii licensed EMTP (33 years of service with HESD)
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808-387-8714