

November 29, 2009

HUMAN SERVICES

NEED IS GREAT; CUTS CAN'T BE TOLERATED

Do you know the indicators of a stressed community, and where Hawai'i stands on the scale? What the media have reported over the past several weeks are increases in requests for public assistance, food stamp applications, homeless numbers, incidents of violent crimes, layoffs and related social indicators of a community in distress. The tipping point has come and gone. Our safety net is unraveling.

What can we do? We understand and have been part of the shared sacrifice. And whatever the sacrifice, we need preservation of basic health, safety, housing and human services — the essence of a healthy community; essential to a society that values its people. We want to be partners in the discussions on cuts. We want transparency when decisions are made. We want to know that special funds are going to be used to address "real people" survival needs.

We want to be at the table with the Reinventing Government Task Force to ensure the policy-makers are doing everything in their power to keep the most vulnerable in our Hawai'i — the children, the families, the disabled, the elderly — surviving through the rainiest of days. It's not a choice — it's a shoring up of the safety net that must happen to preserve our humanity.

Joanne Lundstrom

Chair, PHOCUSED (Protecting Hawai'i's 'Ohana, Children, Underserved, Elderly and Disabled)