

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 17, 2019

The Honorable Jim Reilly, PhD
Director of the United States Geological Survey
USGS National Center
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive
Reston, VA 20192

Dear Dr. Reilly:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding reports that the USGS is considering relocating the Hawaiian Volcanoes Observatory (HVO) away from Hawai'i Island. Our local media has confirmed with HVO spokespersons that O'ahu is being considered as a relocation site. As the USGS discusses the possible options for rebuilding HVO facilities, we would like to emphasize the importance of the HVO's proximity to the volcanoes it studies, its relationship with the community it serves, and the potential burdens a move may place on HVO personnel.

The HVO sounded the alarm when the Kīlauea eruption was imminent, and credibly communicated with emergency responders to evacuate Leilani Estates, Vacationland, Kapoho, and threatened locations in between. Orderly evacuations saved lives, and continued efforts to monitor and forecast allowed many residents to return and salvage their belongings. The level of commitment has been incredible, and we applaud these outstanding scientists and professionals for being a lifeline for Hawai'i Island residents and the emergency management community.

The successful response to the Kīlauea eruption emphasizes the importance of keeping the HVO in close proximity to the community it serves. First responders need immediate access to HVO experts from the first hint that an eruption may occur. The trained eyes of HVO scientists on the eruption can pinpoint to the location of fissures to direct responders and save lives—lives that could be lost during the hours that it could take to fly them in from O'ahu.

It is also important that the HVO's forecasts and warnings are credible to the people they affect. HVO personnel currently live in the communities they serve. During the Kīlauea eruption, their personal relationships with these communities meant that HVO information was trusted, and that individuals and families heeded warnings and took action to stay safe.

Moving off of Hawai'i Island would also create problems in the day-to-day operations and personal lives of HVO personnel. For example, coordinating field research from off-island creates formidable logistical problems for HVO scientists. Just the burden of flying samples and equipment to and from Hawai'i Island would affect the cost and quality of the HVO's work. A significant portion of HVO staff have also established their lives in Hawai'i County. Relocating

these expert personnel would pose significant challenges and dramatic changes that could prompt some staff to find other work rather than move their lives to another island.

As a final note, we want to recognize that the HVO has continued its duties despite having been displaced by the Kilauea eruption. Working from temporary spaces, the HVO has continued to provide the highest level of service to the community. We hope the USGS will rebuild the HVO on Hawai'i Island so that it can maintain proximity and trust with the community it most immediately serves.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senator



TULSI GABBARD
Member of Congress



ED CASE
Member of Congress