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Raising the Standard of Living Part I: Executive Actions

Improving the quality of life for the public workforce and families is among the foremost priorities of the Lemanu-Talauega Administration. The Compliance Review Committee (CRC) comprising various Executive departments was formed to lead this effort and provide recommendations to the Governor after a thorough assessment of personnel structures and years worth of personnel actions and contracts.

Governor Lemanu took swift action to reorganize and reassess payroll functions to “right the ship” in accordance with the law while mindful of the rapidly rising costs of living for families in American Samoa. On June 30, 2021, Governor Lemanu issued *General Memorandum 121-21* announcing the adoption of new pay scales for white collar employees, blue collar employees, and educators resulting in pay increases to most of the ASG workforce — leaving no employee making below the new ASG minimum wage of \$7.25 (approx. \$15,000 annually).

The following is a summary of key Executive actions and legislation signed into law under the Lemanu Administration to raise the standard of living for the Territory’s workforce and families:

- On April 1, 2021, Governor Lemanu issued *General Memorandum 77-21* outlining the terms of **hazardous duty pay** in effect from April 5, 2021 - December 31, 2021 ensuring that our first responders and frontline workers receive additional compensation for their service throughout the Covid-19.
- On September 15, 2021, Acting Governor Talauega signed Senate Bill (S.B. 37-29) into *Public Law 37-4* fulfilling a legislative requirement to **amend the tax code in order to enact the Child Tax Credit provision** of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) making available a total of **\$27.8 M** disbursed to eligible taxpayers.

- On September 23, 2021, Acting Governor Talauega signed House Bill (H.B. 37-21) into *Public Law 37-6* appropriating unobligated and unexpended revenues from FY 2020 and FY 2019 to **supplement the FY 2022 budget** to cover **increased pay and personnel costs at the ASCC, LBJ Tropical Medical Center, the Department of Health, the Office of Administrative Law Judge, and ASG Executive Branch Attorneys.**
- On December 20, 2021, Lieutenant Governor Talauega Ale announced to the Covid-19 Task Force the **Governor’s Hero Pay** initiative for front line workers involved in the Territory’s Covid-19 response. In addition to hazard pay, this benefit resulted in **\$260,500** paid to eligible employees.
- On August 30, 2022, Governor Lemanu issued *General Memorandum 130-22* reminding all ASG Executive Departments and Offices of their moral and legal responsibility to abide by Federal labor laws regarding the **timely compensation of Overtime** worked to their staff and employees.
- On September 23, 2022, Governor Lemanu signed House Bill No. 37-34 into *Public Law 37-11* fulfilling a legislative requirement to **amend the tax code in order to enact the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** provision of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) that will result in up to **\$16 Million** in EITC benefits disbursed to eligible taxpayers in coming months.

Historic action has been taken to provide long overdue raises to Government employees across the board including our lowest earners and families. Further, strategies to recruit and retain critical public service professionals amid mass employee resignations, mental health burnout, and a workforce shortage crisis remains a challenge for State and Territorial Governments across the nation.

Next week’s press release on “Raising the Standard of Living” will outline the numerous tax credits, social welfare programs, and small business cash and grants assistance disbursed to the community under the Lemanu-Talauega administration.

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