



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
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of the Interior**

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## News Release

### **Office of the Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas**

#### **Interior Assistant Secretary and Federal Officials Meet with Freely Associated States Citizens in Honolulu**

**HONOLULU, HI** (August 22, 2014) – Interior Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Esther Kia’aina met today with key representatives of the Micronesian, Marshallese and Palauan communities, joined by their Ambassadors, Consuls General and a former Marshall Islands President, to get a better understanding of their experiences and to discuss unique challenges they may be facing while living in the United States. Under federal law, citizens of these three Pacific Island nations may travel freely to the U.S. for work and school without regard for visas, and since the implementation of the Compacts of Free Association beginning in the 1980s, an estimated 15,000 freely associated states (FAS) migrants now live in Hawaii.

“I am here with our federal partners to meet the FAS community, to gain a better appreciation for the FAS experience here in Hawaii and to see where existing federal programs and policies may be leveraged to help FAS communities navigate their way more successfully as members of the Hawaii community,” said Ms. Kia’aina. “Today, we had some thoughtful discussions about obstacles and challenges while also recognizing that in the current environment of shrinking federal dollars, we must be resourceful and creative to make a difference. It is equally important that the Office of Insular Affairs also works closely with Hawaii’s federal and state officials, as well as officials from the freely associated states, to identify collaborative efforts that could help our FAS communities,” added Kia’aina. Given the importance of Compact Impact issues in affected jurisdictions, it is the desire of the Assistant Secretary to replicate such outreach efforts during future visits to Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Assistant Secretary Kia’aina was joined by key federal officials from the Departments of Justice, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development and Homeland Security who are familiar with the FAS communities. Hawaii congressional staff also participated in the meetings.

While in Honolulu, the Assistant Secretary intends to meet with key State government officials who handle homelessness, education, health, and fisheries issues as related to Compact migrants. She will also be attending bi-lateral meetings with the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia as part of the financial provisions of the Compact agreements with two FAS nations.

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