

**Testimony of Major General Kenneth Hara  
Adjutant General for the State of Hawaii  
House Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce  
Hearing: “Assessing the Federal Government’s Response to the 2023 Maui  
Wildfires”  
Lahaina, Maui  
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Chair Sessions, Members of the Subcommittee, and Members of the Hawaii Delegation:

Good morning and Aloha. I am Major General Kenneth Hara, the Adjutant General for the State of Hawaii, Department of Defense and the overall Incident Commander for the State’s Maui Wildfires response.

In the aftermath of the August 8, 2023 Maui Wildfires, federal, state, county, private and local organizations rapidly mobilized and responded to provide lifesaving, life sustaining, and remains recovery operations. These entities worked together to quickly provide sheltering solutions to the survivors of the Maui Wildfires. The federal response in particular was very organized and grew rapidly over the course of the recovery operations. For example, once private property and commercial zones were cleared, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) commenced household hazardous waste removal, which allowed residents and loved ones to reenter their properties and safely retrieve valuables, including items of sentimental value. This immense federal response enabled the County and State to rapidly transition to long-term recovery operations.

Throughout the recovery and response period, state and federal resources also worked hard to support the County of Maui and adhere to the guidance and vision of Maui community leaders. Cultural considerations, historic preservation, and environmental planning have

all been important priorities during the Maui Wildfire response process, and our federal partners have been responsive to that emphasis throughout.

In short, the coordinated response to the Maui Wildfires has been remarkable at all levels. My testimony will focus on cooperation and accomplishments with respect to Interagency Coordination, Interim and Long-Term Housing, Debris Removal, and Cost Share and Federal Reimbursement.

### **Interagency Coordination**

In support of the recovery efforts, the federal government has provided a wide range of resources, primarily via FEMA, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Small Business Administration (SBA), Department of the Interior (DOI), Economic Development Administration (EDA), and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

For example, in the immediate aftermath of the wildfires, the State of Hawaii and FEMA Region IX established a joint Recovery Coordination Group led by Luke Meyers, the Hawaii State Disaster Recovery Coordinator and Alana Kuhn, the Federal Disaster Coordinator. The scope, scale, and complexity of the fire's aftermath required a Whole Community recovery approach. Organized into six Recovery Support Functions—Community Planning and Capacity Building; Economic; Infrastructure Systems; Health and Social Services; Natural and Cultural Resources; and Housing—the joint team effectively coordinated operational, resource, and policy issues.

Longer term recovery efforts have been led by the Hawaii Office of Recovery and Resiliency (ORR), which leads the State's coordination efforts with federal, state, county, and private partners. Since last fall,

ORR has worked closely with Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinators (FDRCs) and the Interagency Recovery Coordination group (IRC), which have coordinated federal recovery efforts.

### **Interim and Long-Term Housing**

Interagency coordination has also been key to developing sheltering and housing solutions after the fire. Immediately following the wildfires, the County of Maui provided congregate shelters for displaced individuals. Meanwhile, Governor Green directed State and FEMA leaders to move survivors into non-congregate shelters as soon as possible and then quickly transition them into more permanent interim and long-term housing solutions.

In support of that goal, the State of Hawaii contracted the American Red Cross to manage the State's Non-Congregate Sheltering (NCS) Program, which included case management and wraparound services. Some survivors were eligible for placement into FEMA Temporary Sheltering Assistance early on, while other survivors, who were either ineligible for FEMA or had undetermined status, were placed into the state-led NCS Program.

At this point, the state-led NCS Program has successfully transitioned into the federally-run Direct Federal Assistance (DFA) Sheltering, Direct Lease, Rental Assistance, and Temporary Housing Assistance Programs. Survivors who remain ineligible for FEMA assistance have all been transitioned into State, County of Maui, or private non-profit housing programs.

### **Complex Debris Removal**

The State of Hawaii contracted the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) as the prime contractor for Maui's Complex Debris Removal project.

USACE planning and communication with all stakeholders has been extremely inclusive and effective. In addition to subcontracting local companies, the USACE team contracted trusted cultural advisors and cultural monitors for the project. USACE maintained clear communication by holding weekly community recovery meetings that ensured transparency and responsiveness to local concerns.

### **Cost Share and Federal Reimbursement**

Throughout the Maui Wildfire disaster, the White House and FEMA supported the State's requests for 100% cost share for Category A (Debris Removal) and Category B (Emergency Protective Measures). Without this cost share approval, the State of Hawaii would not have had the funding to meet state match requirements for the multi-billion-dollar response and recovery activities.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, the overall response to the Maui Wildfires has been nothing short of extraordinary, and we are immensely grateful to the federal partners who have come alongside us in this effort. We look forward to continuing to work together as we recover and rebuild Maui.

Once again, the State of Hawaii thanks the Subcommittee for its attention to this matter and looks forward to further discussion and collaboration.