



## HAWAI'I COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

**September 4, 2024**

**U.S. House of Representatives Oversight and Accountability hearing for the Subcommittee on  
Government Operations and the Federal Workforce  
Assessing the Federal Government's Response to the 2023 Maui Wildfires**

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(Testifying on behalf of Micah Kāne, HCF Chief Executive Officer)**

### Mahalo

On behalf of the Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF), I would like to acknowledge and mahalo the leadership of our Country, State, Maui County, corporate community, not-for-profit community and global donor community for their support and collaboration through this very intense, complex, deep and broad disaster. I would like to especially acknowledge the leadership of Governor Josh Green and Mayor Richard Bissen for working non-stop to lead emergency and recovery efforts since August 8<sup>th</sup> 2023 while keeping the rest of the county and state operating. I would also like to mahalo our Senators Hirono and Schatz, and U.S. Representatives Tokuda and Case for their continuous advocacy for Hawaii and keeping Maui's recovery top of mind for Congress. While the journey of the past year has been very challenging, and at times confusing, our ability to approach our collective work as one 'ohana positions us well for the challenges that remain in front of us.

### Background

The vision of the Hawai'i Community Foundation is to create an equitable and vibrant Hawai'i where all our island communities thrive. With our more than 107-year history, our trusted expertise, and the generous support of donors, we are working collaboratively to address the root causes of our state's most difficult challenges, including expanding access to affordable housing, conserving fresh water resources, and ensuring the healthy development of Hawai'i's young children.

As part of our mission toward positive change in Hawai'i, HCF plays a unique role in disaster preparedness and response. We collaborate with partners, both inside and outside philanthropy, for a coordinated effort to secure maximum community impact in the most efficient manner. Much

of the knowledge and experience we have gained is the result of supporting 4 major disasters across the state in just the last 6 years. For example, the Hawai'i Resilience Fund, created in March 2020, was launched to rapidly deploy resources to community nonprofits and health care providers who were working on the ground to address the COVID-19 pandemic in Hawai'i. Due to our unique and established role in Hawai'i's disaster preparedness and response, the State of Hawai'i and the City & County of Honolulu contracted HCF to administer \$54M of CARES Act emergency relief funds.

## Maui Strong Fund

Starting in 2019, HCF created Strong Funds for each county to support a coordinated response across our state and local government, first responders, volunteers, supporting organizations, and philanthropic contributors in the wake of unforeseen disasters to our island communities. The Strong Funds have been activated in response to numerous disasters, including the Kilauea eruption on Hawai'i Island, flooding and mudslides on Kaua'i, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on this experience, HCF was in a unique position to aid in the Maui fire relief efforts. Our work includes not only strategic grantmaking through the Maui Strong Fund, but also sharing information, convening, coordinating, and collaborating with a range of partners to **optimize responsiveness to needs while leveraging philanthropic dollars to fill gaps and minimize overlaps**.

We have adopted the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) four-phase approach to our disaster relief efforts. The approach acknowledges both the immediate and long-term recovery needs for the people and places affected by disaster events, ensuring that the Maui Strong Fund will be available to support relief efforts over the full course of Maui's rebuilding and restoration.

On August 9, 2023, the Maui Strong Fund began receiving contributions.

Within a week, we had

- Received over \$10M in contributions
- Awarded 44 grants totaling \$8.3M

One month later, we had

- Established a formal 5-member independent Special Oversight Committee (SOC) and held our first meeting. The SOC met weekly for the next few months and currently meets on a monthly cadence.
- Received \$120M in contributions
- Awarded 111 grants totaling \$23M

As of August 16, 2024, we have received \$197M in contributions, including \$5.8M in interest earnings that we have contributed back into the fund. We have not charged an administrative fee on the contributions, so the entire sum will go towards Maui's recovery. We have raised funds independent of the Maui Strong Fund to support the operations of a formal division within HCF, known today as the Maui Recovery Office (MRO), for a minimum of four years.

Contributions to the Maui Strong Fund came in various forms and from all over the world. There were more than 5,000 contributions from the global, national, and local corporate community, as well as more than 240,000 new individual donors from 78 countries. Contributions have been received from every state in the United States and every territory. Of the 5,000 corporate contributors, 400 commercial co-ventures made contributions based on incentive programs for their respective clients and customers.

So far, we have reviewed over 650 grant applications, granted \$112M via 250 grants to almost 200 organizations, with another \$11M pending approvals. We have also hired a nationally recognized audit and consulting company, Moss Adams, to provide an independent review of HCF's strategic framework, governance and administration of the Maui Strong Fund.

From day one, we have provided full transparency of funds received and grants awarded in detail at <https://www.hawaiicommunityfoundation.org/strengthening/maui-strong-fund> . We also produced and issued our [MSF One Year Report](#) on August 2, 2024.

## Strategic Focus on Survivor-Informed Data

Rather than simply repeating information that is publicly accessible on our website or other publications regarding the Maui Strong Fund, I think it is important to share that a core part of our strategic focus is to ***understand prioritized needs, complement and leverage public resources rather than duplicate them, keep our eye out for the vulnerable***, and be as ***data informed*** as possible. Accordingly, there were key partnerships and catalytic grants that were critical to our work. Since matching needs with multiple layers of resources was our collective goal both in the emergency response and now recovery phases of this disaster, a significant component needed was an understanding of household and community needs and finding ways to complement or identify gaps left by public disaster resources. Given the severity of the losses, in addition to the cultural and socio-economically diverse population affected by the wildfires, we knew this would be a challenge.

Accordingly, we made an early commitment to partner with a few organizations and several strategic grants that would focus in on those who may 'fall through the cracks' of the disaster resource centers and other public disaster resources and processes. One of those organizations is the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA), led by CEO Kuhio Lewis, who was determined to support Maui on the ground at their own Maui-staffed ***Kāko'o Maui Resource Hub*** within a month of the fire. This was a critical partnership to us as they focused on being a safe place to find a range of resources that were explained and navigated in a culturally sensitive, trauma-informed way for those who were not comfortable with government-provided resources. CNHA not only provided in-person, locally-staffed navigation and case management support, but also a continuum of programs for housing and workforce development, supported by a [website](#) with links to their collective resources. They also created a [data hub](#) funded by the Maui Strong Fund, to do their best to stay in touch with the needs of survivors and make relevant resources available, which has served as a vital information source to many.

We also partnered with the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization (UHERO) via a grant funded by our Maui Recovery Operating Fund (separate from the Maui Strong Fund) to provide analysis and forecasts on economic and other trends for Maui, as well as deeper analyses in key areas like [wildfire survivor physical and mental health impacts](#); [housing supply and related policy implications](#); and ongoing surveys of disaster-affected households in partnership with CNHA.

We also provided sponsorship to the Hawaii State Rural Health Association (HSRHA) which commissioned a comprehensive data collection and analysis to understand [impact to wildfire survivors, healthcare providers and Maui County more broadly](#).

The results of these analyses, along with the ongoing surveys conducted by UHERO and CNHA, provide us with past and ongoing insights regarding the experience, condition and sentiments of our disaster-affected community that could be very instructive to all of us.

## Disaster Infrastructure Complementary to Public Resources

What has been clear and consistent throughout our formal and informal data-gathering via our partners, grantees, and survivors, is that **uncertainty** surrounding current and future resources and timetables is a significant factor impacting the ongoing mental health, well-being and recovery of our community. Uncertainty related to housing (for renters and owners), employment, and reconnection with neighbors and friends, hinges largely on federally-provided public resources and planning/execution efforts of the state and county.

**HOUSING:** While Non-Congregate Shelters (NCS) are a necessary and standard part of the response to disasters of this kind that displace people from homes, the lack of certainty of placement, length of stay and possibility of movement was repeatedly expressed as unsettling. Interim Housing that would stabilize families beyond a year was identified as a critical resource needed for survivors in their healing and recovery.

In response, HCF collaborated with FEMA, the State, County and other philanthropic organizations (American Red Cross and CNHA) to develop a time-bound plan and committed resources for housing for at least 18 months for 3,000 households, providing the **certainty** that families desperately sought. See [Maui Interim Housing Plan and MOU](#). Today, less than 20 families remain in the NCS. The rest have been provided with paid direct leases while a number of projects are in the middle of construction with families already beginning phased move-ins.

Challenges that still exist and need immediate attention include the unaffordable rents that have increased in ranges of 50-200% of pre-disaster levels creating sub-crises of its own as local residents are displaced when leases are either not renewed or renewed with exorbitant increases. This is the new group of 'disaster-affected' residents who represent our friends, families and critical contributors to our community and workforce, and many are contemplating leaving Maui.

Additionally, there are very significant concerns regarding the impending 'resource cliffs' when FEMA and other significant resources sunset as early as February 2025 without clear alternative paths and options for families. Improved forecasting and delivery of needs in affordable housing,

living-wage jobs, healthcare and other family resources are required and must be solidified with a sense of urgency to reduce and eliminate longstanding **uncertainty** for families.

**DISASTER CASE MANAGEMENT:** As a means of providing navigation for impacted families, the Disaster Case Management Program (DCMP) is also a critical part of disaster response and recovery. It is well-recognized that case management in the early days and months of a disaster is crucial, particularly to determine immediate needs. Hiring locally and providing cultural training is a very important commitment in responding to this and future disasters.

The public infrastructure to support long-term recovery is key, and we are happy to hear that additional resources have been approved. Sharing data and information about the enrollment, progress and effectiveness of this critical system in advancing the recovery of affected households is very important. Together, we need to ensure that all survivors and their families are attended to in a way that they feel safe, comfortable and equipped to move toward long-term recovery.

In the meantime, we have augmented support to families with strategic grants to partners who can focus on the most vulnerable survivors (such as those who are veterans, indigenous, immigrant/ESL, elderly, disabled, chronically ill, or of lower socioeconomic status). We have found that those groups may struggle to access resources via the federally funded DCMP, so our efforts are designed to supplement, rather than duplicate, what the DCMP provides. Here are just a few examples:

- \$5M leveraged grant to Hawaii Community Lending to provide financial case management to a Native Hawaiian homestead community in the burn site and scale up for all survivors with the goal of maintaining their home ownership by rebuilding in an economically feasible way
- \$5M grant to Maui Economic Opportunity to mirror \$100M in state-provided TANF funds for undocumented, low socioeconomic status individuals and families, as well as another \$3.6M for rental assistance and other needs
- \$5M grant to Catholic Charities for cash assistance to struggling families
- \$5M grant to Maui United Way for direct assistance to struggling families
- Seeded multi-million dollar cash assistance grants, with additional multi-million dollar grants still pending, to partners providing navigation support and cash needs assistance to immigrant groups (Filipino, Hispanic, COFA, Tongan, etc.)

## MSF Going Forward: Disaster Long-term Recovery & Resilience Toward Preparedness

1. Our approach going forward
  - a. Stretch our resources: Blend recovery and resilience and blend/braid funding (public, private) as much as possible (Disaster phases 2 and 3). Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) is a source to leverage, rather than duplicate, for MSF.
  - b. Invest in preparedness (Disaster phase 4) by hard-coding our lessons learned and ensuring needed local capacity to prevent and prepare for disasters

2. Use of remaining funds
  - a. Focus on housing stabilization for disaster-affected (including workforce), mental health and social supports, food security, workforce development
  - b. Leveraged funding mechanisms for recovery and resilience initiatives via funder collaboratives
  - c. Long Term Recovery Group, Resources Roundtable addressing Household Unmet Needs
  - d. Build stronger connectivity with Maui County to support ongoing recovery and disaster preparedness going forward
  - e. Build capacity in the local nonprofit sector to enhance recovery and disaster preparedness going forward

## Lessons Learned and Request for Action to Congress

1. Minimize need to repeat information, wait times, and burdensome changes for survivors by leading and resourcing cross-sector coordination in survivor information management and data sharing
  - a. Establish and resource universal in-take and data aggregation across government and nonprofit providers
  - b. Cultivate relationships with local response and recovery agencies and establish pre-disaster data sharing agreements
  - c. Incorporate cultural training into standard operating procedures
  - d. Locally contracted disaster case management (in all phases), with cultural/language barriers addressed
2. Continue positive momentum of remediation by clarifying available resources going forward in rebuild process
  - a. As the County has shared, the United States Army Corps of Engineers has made significant progress ahead of schedule, with debris cleared from residential properties and potable water restored to all of Lahaina. Wastewater infrastructure repairs are anticipated to be completed by the end of the year, and the County has engaged a vendor to support permitting processes. Currently, 12 homes are under construction, and the County is enhancing its policies and staffing to better assist residents. Amidst this accelerated readiness to rebuild, it is even more crucial for homeowners to know what resources are available to rebuild and when. Additionally, certainty and urgent authorization of CDBG-DR funding is crucial to continue this positive momentum, to accelerate recovery and reduce financial and mental health hardships for survivors.
3. Establish best practices related to the above that can become the new standard

- a. Well-coordinated, culturally sensitive remediation efforts with unprecedented speed and efficiency
- b. Significant financial subsidy of debris removal
- c. Establishment, hiring of local cultural monitors
- d. Formal collective impact across public and private entities for interim housing
- e. Formalized support and integration with innovative, community-driven emergency response efforts that demonstrate local community supporting each other:
  - i. Community resource hubs aggregating supplies, emergency navigation, medical respite, and grief counseling
  - ii. Locally-staffed and trained disaster resource hubs like Kako'o Maui
  - iii. Innovative housing programs like the Host Family program administered by CNHA

This concludes our testimony. While our commentary has been focused on the recovery, we hope and believe that Maui can be a model for not just how a people and place can prepare and respond to a disaster, but to ultimately rethink the economic construct for our broader Hawaii and other island communities. How does Maui use this disaster as a catalyst to develop a more resilient business model, one that rethinks and reshapes the reciprocal relationship with the Department of Defense and introduces a transformed visitor industry that accounts for holistic impacts on our local community and environment? How do we inform the economic resilience of our future with demonstrated reverence to the practices of our indigenous people who were model stewards of our place for more than 2,000 generations? Perhaps that is for another day.

Mahalo for the opportunity to participate and share what we are doing, what we have learned and what we look forward to. We appreciate your demonstration of care and commitment by being here in person to listen, inquire, understand and pursue informed action. We are ready to continue our participation and coordination with all parties to fully support the successful recovery and ultimate resilience of our friends and families on Maui.