



**Testimony of Shelee Kimura  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
Hawaiian Electric**

**Before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations,  
U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce**

**“Investigating the Role of Electric Infrastructure in the Catastrophic Maui Fire”  
September 28, 2023**

Aloha Chair Griffith, Ranking Member Castor, Chair McMorris Rodgers, Ranking Member Pallone, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On August 8 in Lahaina, Maui, we saw human loss and devastation at a speed and on a scale that even two months later is difficult for our hearts and minds to process. I want to start by honoring those lost and those whose lives have been forever changed by this overwhelming and tragic event.

Most of you know the word aloha. There is another word in the Hawaiian language – kuleana. Loosely translated, this word means responsibility but, like aloha, it cannot be simply defined. It is a deep sense of responsibility that is both an obligation and privilege. It is a responsibility that has been entrusted to you by your ‘ohana (family), by your community, by generations that came before you and those that will follow you. Kuleana is one’s responsibility within a bigger system or community to which one belongs. It is a privilege to have kuleana within this interdependent system and to one another.

For generations past, present and future, Hawaiian Electric's kuleana is to Hawai'i. And so we are committed to be there for Maui, for our employees, our customers, our communities and for Lahaina for as long as it takes to recover and to rebuild.

My personal kuleana is to Hawai'i and my hope is that by being here in our nation's capital, we are ultimately helping Hawai'i. It was difficult to leave my island home this week when the disaster response efforts are still ongoing. It feels like leaving your family in their time of need. But I hope that as I carry out my kuleana here, it helps you carry out your important kuleana. I hope Hawai'i – the place and people that have embraced millions of visitors, from across the country and the world, in our home each year – will be helped in its time of need and for the challenging years to come.

In that spirit, I hope all of us can see it as our shared kuleana – our responsibility – today to honor the people of Lahaina as we do this work together as part of a collective community. I hope we can start to find solutions that will help protect Hawai'i and the rest of the nation from the increasing threats of familiar natural disasters like hurricanes and those that we have rarely experienced, including droughts that can fuel catastrophic wildfires on tropical islands.

The Hawaiian Islands are home to 1.4 million people who live on the Earth's most isolated populated archipelago 2,500 miles from the West Coast. To reach the islands, it takes five and a half hours on a plane, three days on a ship.

There's no electrical connection to the continental U.S. or even between islands. We are totally isolated.

This is one of the reasons Hawai'i has the highest electric rates in the nation, along with high costs for housing and other consumer goods. On an island, we have to

meet demand at all times and keep a reserve margin and system redundancy sufficient to serve as our own safety net – we can't call a neighboring state if we run short. Everything is a complex and consequential balance as we pursue safe, reliable power at a reasonable cost for our customers and communities.

Hawaiian Electric was founded in 1891, when Hawai'i was an independent nation ruled by a constitutional monarchy.

As investor-owned utilities go, we're small, with about 470,000 customers on five islands, all but Kaua'i, which has its own utility. There are about 70,000 customers on Maui.

The Department of Defense is our largest customer. Hawai'i is home to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, and Hawaiian Electric is the only utility in the nation serving all components of one combatant command.

In 2019, Hawaiian Electric was awarded a 50-year contract to own, operate and maintain the electric distribution system serving the U.S. Army's 12 installations on O'ahu. We take seriously our role to support the military and its national security mission.

I became president and CEO of Hawaiian Electric in January 2022. Every day, I feel a tremendous responsibility to our customers, employees, and the Hawai'i community. Over the last two months I've spent much of my time on Maui, and have seen the devastation in Lahaina first-hand. Our Hawaiian Electric team has been working tirelessly to restore power and ensure safety throughout our communities.

Our Maui employees have been faced with putting our customers before the needs of their own families and I could not be more grateful and more proud to call them my friends and colleagues.

We all want to learn about what happened on August 8 so that it never happens again. On that day, a fire at 6:30 a.m., the “Morning Fire,” appears to have been caused by power lines that fell in high winds. The Maui County Fire Department responded to this morning fire and reported that by 9 a.m. it was “100% contained.” The fire department later determined it had been “extinguished” and left the scene in the early afternoon.

At about 3 p.m., a time when all of Hawaiian Electric’s power lines in West Maui had been de-energized for more than six hours, a second fire, the “Afternoon Fire,” began in the same area. The cause of this Afternoon Fire that devastated Lahaina has not been determined.

We are working tirelessly to figure out what happened, and we are cooperating fully with federal and state investigators.

Speaker McCarthy and President Biden both visited Lahaina a few weeks ago. Speaker McCarthy has talked about the vacations he and his family have taken to Maui, and of the treasured memories he had of walking along Front Street in Lahaina. Like Speaker McCarthy, some of you know Maui and Lahaina and have your own treasured memories of this special place.

I look forward to fulfilling our shared and respective kuleana to honor the people of Lahaina and Maui as we seek solutions to help protect Hawai‘i and the rest of the nation from other deadly disasters.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.