



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

Statement of the Honorable Josh Green, M.D., Governor of the State of Hawai'i
on
H.R. 8219 – Lahaina National Heritage Area Act

Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources
1334 Longworth House Office Building

June 21, 2024

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, Members of the Subcommittee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on H.R. 8219, the Lahaina National Heritage Area Act. I write to you in my capacity as the Governor of the State of Hawai'i.

On August 8, 2023, strong easterly winds caused by Hurricane Dora to the south of the State of Hawai'i strengthened various wildfires across the Counties of Maui and Hawai'i. The wildfire that began in the western part of Maui Island decimated the town of Lahaina and is the deadliest wildfire in U.S. history in the last 100 years. As of today, the incident has resulted in 101 fatalities; billions of dollars are estimated to have been lost to properties, facilities, and infrastructure. Hundreds of businesses were destroyed, and hazardous environmental conditions were created as a result of the fires.

This act would help to provide cultural significance and ensure the preservation of important sites as we continue to work to rebuild Lahaina and restore its heritage.

We greatly appreciate the subcommittee's time and attention to this matter. Beginning the process of a heritage designation through a feasibility study by the Department of the Interior would provide an important step in recognition for the people and history of our state.

I would like to commend Congresswoman Tokuda for her time and dedication for Lahaina's recovery. I am grateful that this legislation was introduced by her.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide support for this meaningful piece of legislation. My administration stands ready to support the Department of the Interior with the feasibility study and will continue to work with the County of Maui, Mayor Bissen, and Congresswoman Tokuda for the people of the State of Hawai'i and Lahaina.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Josh Green M.D." in a cursive style.

Josh Green, M.D.

Governor, State of Hawai'i

RICHARD T. BISSEN, JR.
Mayor

JOSIAH K. NISHITA
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Statement of the Honorable Richard T. Bissen, Jr., Mayor, County of Maui
on
H.R. 8219, the Lahaina National Heritage Area Act

Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources
1334 Longworth

June 26, 2024

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, members of the subcommittee:

Thank you for allowing me to submit a statement on behalf of H.R. 8219, the Lahaina National Heritage Area Act. My name is Richard T. Bissen, Jr. and I have been Mayor of Maui County since January 2023. Prior to becoming mayor, I grew up, went to school, worked as a prosecutor and judge on Maui and have called it home for many years.

Eight months after taking office, the town of Lahaina on the island of Maui endured unspeakable tragedy. On August 8, 2023, wildfires spread so quickly across Lahaina that some people were unable to evacuate. Many others barely made it out or managed to survive, homes and businesses were destroyed.

In total, 101 people died from the fires. Our beloved Front Street, home to local businesses and a centerpiece of the memories of many who have visited our island, is no longer recognizable. So much of what we had is now gone, but we have started to recover and figure out what it will take to rebuild and restore Lahaina for its new future.

One thing the fires could not take away is the historic and cultural importance of Lahaina. Lahaina was once the capital city of the Kingdom of Hawaii and served as the center of government for 50 years. Lahaina served as the residence of King Kamehameha I for decades and was where kings and queens were buried. Its harbor was the cornerstone of whaling and fishing for the Hawaiian Islands. Lahaina also served as the location for so many firsts, such as the first high school west of the Rocky Mountains and the first lit navigation tower.

I can think of no better place to be the first National Heritage Area in the State of Hawaii.

This designation would provide critical assistance to bring back important sites and help highlight the cultural significance of so many locations throughout Lahaina. This will not only help us in our efforts to rebuild and bring back Lahaina, but it is also a clear testament to Lahaina's rich heritage and a recognition of its importance to our people, our history, and to Hawaii.

H.R. 8219, the Lahaina National Heritage Area Act would begin the process of this designation by initiating a feasibility study to be conducted by the Department of Interior. If this designation is approved in the future, the County of Maui stands ready to administer and support accordingly. I wholeheartedly support its passage and thank Congresswoman Tokuda for her all her time and attention toward Lahaina's recovery and for introducing this legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 8219. I look forward to the advancement of this bill and I am happy to answer any questions the subcommittee may have.



Written Testimony of Mr. Ke'eumoku Kapu
Cultural Program Coordinator, Nā 'Aikāne o Maui Community Foundation

H.R. 8219, the Lahaina National Heritage Area Act

Subcommittee on Federal Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources
Legislative Hearing – June 27, 2024

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, members of the subcommittee:

My name is Ke'eumoku Kapu, a lifelong Native Hawaiian cultural practitioner and the cultural program coordinator at the Nā 'Aikāne o Maui Community Foundation. Since 2011, our organization has been dedicated to helping guide Lahaina's future generations with our traditional knowledge and practices.

I also serve as chair of the Native Hawaiian Historic Preservation Council of the State of Hawai'i's Office of Hawaiian Affairs. Our role is to perpetuate the cultural identity of Native Hawaiian people through responsible stewardship of our traditions, practices, values, and cultural and historic resources.

West Maui has been the ancestral home of my family for generations. To the hills east of Lahaina lies the Kaua'ula Valley in which you can find the plot of land that my ancestors were awarded in the Great Māhele, which introduced private property ownership to Hawai'i for the first time in our history. Doing so separated many Native Hawaiians from the ancestral lands they lived on, including my own family. Reclaiming this land where my family and I now live has been a decades-long journey, but it shows how deeply we are tied as a people to the 'āina.

That is why I am proud to testify in support of Representative Jill Tokuda's bill, H.R. 8219, the Lahaina National Heritage Area Act. For kānaka maoli like me whose ties to West Maui span generations, Lahaina has long been a spiritual and cultural capital for our people, even as it was transformed from wetlands into sugar plantations and then into the famous tourist hub it was for most of my life.

The fires last August changed everything. Our Nā 'Aikāne o Maui Cultural Center on Front Street was among the thousands of buildings we lost. With it, hundreds of artifacts documenting the history of our people were lost, including traditional feathered capes, historical maps, and old land deeds that could have helped other Native Hawaiian families reclaim their ancestral lands.

Despite all this loss, the work of Nā 'Aikāne o Maui in protecting our culture and traditions will not cease. We will rebuild and continue our work. In the meantime, I have been focused on supporting our local people and serving as a cultural advisor to our federal and state relief and recovery efforts.



The fires have given us a new opportunity to rebuild and restore Lahaina in a way that reflects its rich history and cultural heritage. The community has rallied around the restoration of Moku'ula, a sacred island once surrounded by the freshwater pond Loko o Mokuhinia and formerly the site of King Kamehameha III's royal palace, that has long been buried.

Establishing a National Heritage Area for Lahaina would go a long way in supporting the community's efforts to preserve and protect this place that is central to our history and culture, especially after the fires last August. There is already a community-driven effort to accomplish this, and the National Heritage Area designation would help tell the important stories that Lahaina has to share with the rest of Hawai'i, the United States, and the world.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of H.R. 8219. I would be pleased to answer any additional questions the subcommittee may have on this bill.

Me kealoha pumehana,

J. Ke'eamoku Kapu

Na 'Aikane o Maui