



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Hale o nā Luna Makaʻāinana

STATE OF HAWAII
STATE CAPITOL, ROOM 315
415 SOUTH BERETANIA STREET
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

September 4, 2024

Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce

Hearing titled: “Assessing the Federal Government’s Response to the 2023 Maui Wildfires”

September 4, 2024

10:00 AM HST

Lahaina Civic Center, Social Hall, 1840 HI-30, Lahaina, HI 96761

Dear Chairman Pete Sessions, Ranking Member Kweisi Mfume, and Members of the Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce,

Thank you for this opportunity to offer the following comments and requests as the Hawaii State House Representative of Lahaina and West Maui, a fire survivor and a lifelong resident of Lahaina, Maui, Hawaii.

Federal Funding Requests to address current recovery needs, mitigate destruction in potential future disasters, and build resiliency:

1. *Lahaina Flood Control Project (32 years old) originally a USDA-NRCS Watershed Project authorized in 1992 under Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (P.L.93-566).*

- Purpose and Need - Still of High Importance today. This project would protect a newly built Lahaina from a 100-year/200-year storm flood event from being covered in mud, debris and flood waters which would create another disaster. The Flood Control Project would have a huge positive impact on Public Safety, Property Damage, and Environmental Benefit. It also could bolster a Fire Mitigation Plan with a firebreak for the town of Lahaina.
- To date 2024 the project is 47% complete.
- Need discussions to happen with Maui County, NRCS, West Maui Soil and Conservation District, and funding through US Senator Brian Schatz.

2. *Lahaina Bypass Extension North Project.*

- Recently passed vote in support by the Maui Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to be added to the Maui Improvement Transportation Plan (TIP).
- Next step is to get support to put on the Hawaii State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). I have discussed this life-saving project with the offices of Senator Schatz and

Representative Tokuda; both expressed support but it first must be prioritized on the STIP.

- On behalf of the Lahaina and Maui Island constituents we implore you to support this project as it will save lives and open up potential evacuation routes out of the four Lahaina schools and thousands of homes. It could have saved lives if it had been built before the Lahaina Wildfire Fire!

3. *Inter-Island (Expeditions)/Inter-State Ferry Services*

- Maui County and Maui MPO are entertaining the idea of purchasing the current inter-island ferry service between Lahaina and Lana'i Island.
- This too can be a life saving measure as a means of evacuation out of town/off the island and a way to bring supplies and help via the ocean.

4. *The West Maui Hospital*

- Has been an undertaking for decades. It is at a point to be able to finally move to building its vertical construction as all the underground infrastructure has been completed.
- I was able to secure a \$20 million Hawaii State Special Purpose Revenue Bond (SPRB).
- It currently is going through the Maui County Corporation Counsel process to get Maui County to sign as the Guarantor of the funds.
- This Life Saving Hospital needs funding from the Feds, and West Maui understands that CDBG-DR funds could be available. Please contact the Board of the West Maui Hospital Foundation through Joanne Johnson-Winer, email: mynaboyd@me.com.

5. *Cesspool Conversion to County Sewer System*

- FEMA funding has added infrastructure on Fleming Road in Wahikuli for residents along that road to help with conversion from cesspools to county sewer.
- The State has a mandate that ALL cesspools across the State be converted to County sewer systems. So, can the Feds look at supporting conversions for all of the Wahikuli/Lahaina area? With all structures gone, roadways and rights of way wide open, trenching and construction of this infrastructure would be easier and less invasive to residents now while no one is in the area.

Community Collective Concerns and Suggestions:

Is there anyway to simply ask the 2,200 property landowners -- whether a homeowner, business or investment property -- what their end goal is and what their needs are to survive and stay in Lahaina if that's their choice?

They need subsidies or no-interest loans. Please use your influence and work with banks on mortgage forbearances, get insurance companies to extend rental assistance beyond a year and not gouge clients, establish rent price control, etc. There are constant complaints of denials, jumping through hoops and back to being run around in circles again to just be denied in the end! We are The Government that needs to take care of The People.

A step in a positive direction will be doing all you can to get people some sort of normalcy that will be getting homes and businesses built back on properties in Lahaina. Please work with the County of Maui to achieve this goal!

Mahalo for the work that has gone into cleaning up Lahaina. The lots are cleared; soils tested; water, power, sewer good to go. Yet, patience is wearing thin with the 2,200 lots that need to be addressed for rebuild. Every day that passes without a home built in Lahaina means another Lahaina family leaves. I'm really afraid for what Lahaina will become without the Lahaina People.

Mahalo and Aloha for your time and attention,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elle Cochran".

Elle Cochran