

**RICHARD T. BISSEN, JR.**  
Mayor

**JOSIAH NISHITA**  
Managing Director



**OFFICE OF THE MAYOR**  
COUNTY OF MAUI  
200 SOUTH HIGH STREET  
WAILUKU, MAUI, HAWAII 96793  
[www.mauicounty.gov](http://www.mauicounty.gov)

TESTIMONY OF RICHARD T. BISSEN, JR., MAYOR, COUNTY OF MAUI  
BEFORE THE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE & FINANCE COMMITTEE  
INFORMATIONAL HEARING

January 26, 2026

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Committees.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your continued collaboration in advancing Maui's recovery, strengthening resilience, and improving affordability for our residents.

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the State Administration and Legislature for your ongoing support of Maui's recovery efforts. This work has required sustained coordination across multiple state agencies and meaningful investments that directly support our residents.

I am especially grateful for your \$5 million allocation toward the more than \$80 million Wai'ale Road Extension Project, a critical investment in Central Maui's long-term growth, connectivity, and emergency access, including support for the new Central Maui school.

I also extend my mahalo to Senator Hashimoto, Representative Sayama, and the United Public Workers for your support of House Bill 159 and Ka Lima O Maui, and for your partnership in developing solutions that preserve jobs and ensure the continued maintenance and upkeep of County parks.

**From Recovery to Readiness**

In 2025, Maui reached a critical turning point as we shifted from recovery to readiness across housing delivery, public safety, and resilient infrastructure. A key milestone was securing a one-year extension for temporary housing, impacting 946 of approximately 1,400 survivor families. I am deeply grateful to

Governor Green, Hawai‘i’s congressional delegation, FEMA, the Department of Homeland Security, and the many leaders who advocated on Maui’s behalf. This extension has provided survivors with the time needed to secure stable, long-term housing.

### **CDBG-DR Funding and Community-Led Recovery**

Our long-term recovery efforts are supported by the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery program. The CDBG-DR Action Plan was approved in late June 2025, resulting in the award of \$1.6 billion in disaster recovery funds. The use of these funds is guided by a community-led Action Plan developed through extensive public input to ensure alignment with HUD national objectives and local priorities, including permanent housing and infrastructure restoration.

These funds are administered under HUD-approved guidelines and compliance oversight and are allocated based on extensive community outreach and feedback.

### **Debris Removal and Site Restoration**

Debris removal was a foundational step in enabling recovery. In the largest debris operation in County history, more than 400,000 tons of wildfire debris were safely removed from Lahaina, an amount equivalent to approximately two years of municipal solid waste collection for the entire county.

This unprecedented effort required the rapid development of a temporary debris site in Olowalu, the identification, acquisition, and construction of a permanent disposal site in Central Maui, and the transfer of all debris to that permanent facility. This work was completed ahead of schedule, and consistent with our commitment to the Olowalu community, the temporary site has been fully cleared and restored.

### **Lahaina Harbor and Commercial Recovery**

Through a State and County partnership, Lahaina Small Boat Harbor reopened on December 15, 2025. The restoration of limited commercial operations and daytime public access reflects our commitment to supporting harbor-based businesses and tour operators as repairs continue.

To support this transition, the County provided security, fencing, parking ambassadors and enforcement, wayfinding, and targeted community outreach.

### **Accelerating Housing Delivery Through Permitting**

Housing recovery continues to advance at an accelerated pace. Through our expedited recovery permitting program, the County has achieved an average permit approval time of approximately 60 days for wildfire survivors.

To date, 122 permits have been completed, meaning structures have been fully constructed and may be occupied. An additional 559 permits have been

approved, with another 334 in the pipeline. Today, approximately 300 sites are actively under construction in Lahaina. In total, 427 homes have been fully constructed in Lahaina Town. As housing recovery stabilizes, the County is shifting additional resources to commercial permitting, including infrastructure restoration, waivers, fast tracking, and the development of plans and design guidelines.

### **Visible Progress in Lahaina**

Progress across Lahaina is increasingly visible. Areas such as Kuhua Camp, near the historic Pioneer Mill smokestack, show tangible rebuilding activity. Makai and mauka views of Lahaina Town demonstrate the transition from cleared lots following debris removal to new construction throughout the community, including both temporary and permanent housing.

### **Ho‘okumu Hou Housing Program**

Central to our recovery is the Ho‘okumu Hou Housing Program, launched in August 2024. This is Maui County’s community-driven housing recovery program funded through disaster recovery resources. It is delivered through six coordinated housing programs with one primary objective, to keep our people home.

### **First-Time Homebuyers Opportunity Program**

The First-Time Homebuyers Opportunity Program provides up to \$600,000 in assistance to eligible households purchasing a home in Maui County. The program received strong interest, with 2,946 applications submitted, and has begun awarding funds. The first families are already moving into homes as first-time homeowners.

### **Reconstruction and Reimbursement Programs**

The Reconstruction Program will rebuild owner-occupied residences for eligible households using twelve Lahaina-specific, Firewise home designs now available through the Ho‘okumu Hou program. Goodfellow Brothers, Inc. has been selected by the County as the builder for this County-built project.

In addition, the Reimbursement Program provides up to \$400,000 to eligible homeowners who occupied their property as a primary residence at the time of the wildfires, helping to offset rebuilding costs.

### **Evacuation Planning and Emergency Access**

Beyond housing, the County continues to strengthen emergency preparedness. We are advancing strategic land acquisitions and roadway improvements to improve evacuation routes, including the Luakini Street Extension. These investments will improve traffic flow, emergency access, and long-term connectivity.

### **Wildfire Mitigation and Fuels Reduction**

Wildfire mitigation remains a critical focus. Through a countywide, data-driven

assessment of 801 County-managed parcels, 35 high-risk areas were identified for mitigation.

The Ukumehame project is one of these priority areas, where approximately 42 acres were treated, and an estimated 4.7 million pounds of hazardous fuels were reduced to improve firefighting access along a critical West and Central Maui corridor. With this phase complete, the area will be restored as a wetland reserve.

### **Kama‘āina Housing and Countywide Affordable Housing Delivery**

Across Maui County, we are continuing to build momentum in affordable and workforce housing. In 2025, more than 500 affordable and workforce homes were fully constructed, with over 600 additional homes estimated to be completed in 2026. Combined with recovery-related housing, approximately 3,000 affordable and workforce homes are projected to be built countywide by 2030, with more than 700 homes under construction today.

During my administration, the County has allocated over a quarter of a billion dollars toward affordable housing, supporting the development of 2,883 affordable units. This includes permanent affordable housing on County-owned land, such as rent-to-own housing in Lāna‘i City and the Kaiaulu o Nāpili project, which will deliver 120 affordable rental units for low- and moderate-income residents.

### **Infrastructure as the Backbone of Housing**

Housing delivery depends on infrastructure. Through House Maui, we recognize that housing does not happen without sufficient capacity. In the near term, more than \$1 billion in infrastructure investment is anticipated to support housing development, including over \$500 million in disaster recovery funds committed to water systems, wastewater capacity, and transportation and drainage projects.

### **Legislative Session 2026 Priorities**

As we move into the 2026 Legislative Session, we look forward to continued collaboration with the State. The County is requesting \$10.5 million for the Central Maui Wastewater Reclamation Facility, alongside a proposed \$125 million in County funds in FY 2027. This investment remains essential to supporting Central Maui’s growth, housing development, and long-term wastewater capacity.

In partnership with our sister counties, we support the HCOM package and specifically wish to highlight the measure that promotes workforce stability by allowing the temporary rehiring of retired public employees in critical positions.

### **State and County Partnerships Driving Progress**

State and County partnerships continue to drive progress. The State has

requested a \$100 million County contribution toward the Lahaina Bypass as part of a broader recovery partnership. This project will improve emergency evacuation, reduce daily traffic congestion, protect Lahaina's historic core, and strengthen long-term resilience.

Front Street Apartments represents a major step in restoring housing in Lahaina. The State has requested approximately \$96 million from the County in CY 2026, and the County has confirmed that the project's application has been reviewed and is eligible up to the amount requested. The State has also requested an additional \$20 million from County general funds in FY 2028, which my administration supports, subject to Council review and approval.

Hale O Lā'ie remains a key workforce housing project that has provided essential temporary housing for survivors. The State has requested, and the County is proposing, \$2.5 million in County funds in FY 2027 to support operating expenditures through February 2027. This funding would ensure continuity of the program during the transition to permanent workforce housing.

### **Closing**

As we look ahead to 2026, we remain focused on continued partnership with the State to accelerate housing delivery, strengthen emergency readiness and wildfire mitigation, and advance infrastructure resilience. Mahalo for your continued support of our residents. We remain committed to delivering measurable results together.