



Testimony of **Lahaina Strong**
Before the House Committee on
Water and Land

In Consideration of Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 219 SD1
**RELATING TO URGING THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY TO
EXPEDITE THE PLACEMENT OF MAUI WILDFIRE SURVIVORS INTO THE
FEDERAL DIRECT LEASE PROGRAM**

To Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe and the honorable members of the committee,

We are writing on behalf of Lahaina Strong, an organization that was initially formed in 2018 following the Hurricane Lane fire in Lahaina and re-energized last year after the devastating Lahaina fires on August 8. Our organization is the largest grassroots, Lahaina-based community organization, with over 20,000 supporters, engaged in emphasizing the importance of local voices and community-driven solutions.

Lahaina Strong stands in support of SCR219 SD1 which recognizes the urgency and severity of the housing crisis facing Maui wildfire survivors. This resolution urges the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to take immediate action in expediting the placement of affected individuals and families into the Federal Direct Lease Program. By advocating for the swift implementation of this resolution, we demonstrate our commitment to the well-being and resilience of our community. We urge the legislature to call upon FEMA to streamline the application process, eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, and ensure that every survivor receives the support and assistance they need to rebuild their lives.

In the aftermath of the catastrophic Maui wildfires, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), though well-intentioned, fell short of addressing the crisis's scale. Despite initial relief efforts, thousands of families still lack stable housing as of April 2024. SCR219 SD1 urges FEMA to expedite placement into the Federal Direct Lease

Program. Streamlining this process is crucial to providing long-term stability for wildfire survivors.

The Federal Direct Lease Program presents a critical opportunity to address the ongoing housing crisis faced by Maui wildfire survivors. With over one thousand three hundred units available, many of which currently remain unoccupied, this program holds the potential to provide the stability and security necessary for those grappling with displacement and uncertainty.

However, bureaucratic obstacles have impeded the timely placement of survivors into these housing units. We have witnessed firsthand the dire consequences of delayed action. Families who have languished on the waiting list for the Direct Lease Program for months have been forced to make the heart-wrenching decision to leave the island, unable to bear the instability and uncertainty any longer.

The Economic Research Organization at the University of Hawaii forecasts that the population of Maui has declined by 4,000 people since the fires and will fall even more in the years to come. The failure to address the housing needs of our community members swiftly and effectively exacerbates this ongoing crisis.

Lahaina Strong stands in support of SCR219 SD1 urging FEMA to expedite the placement of Maui wildfire survivors into the Direct Lease Program. By prioritizing the streamlining of the application process, eliminating unnecessary barriers, and swiftly placing survivors into long-term dignified housing we can demonstrate our commitment to the well-being of those impacted by this tragedy and further prevent any more of our community members from leaving the island.

Mahalo for your attention to this critical matter, and we appreciate your commitment to the well-being of Lahaina and a more resilient and sustainable future for its residents.

Sincerely,

Pa'ele Kiakona, Jordan Ruidas & Courtney Lazo

Lahaina Strong

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 1:48:18 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keoni Shizuma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice-Chair, members of the committee,

Please pass this resolution. More than 6 months after the fires and people still aren't placed in dignified housing and are still bouncing between hotels. That is inhumane and unacceptable. The fire wasn't their fault, and thus this type of support should be provided to them.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Keoni Shizuma

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 2:06:04 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keila Paahana	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 2:16:03 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Consuelo Apolo-Gonsalves	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in full support please help out all our families

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 2:25:51 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
pahnelopi mckenzie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We urge you to require transparency and immediate action upon FEMA, direct lease programs, and the response to disaster protection in regards to housing. We are in and have been in a housing crisis. To know that there are landlords getting paid exorbitant rental prices with no one living in the homes is disgusting. There are families that want to have FEMA assistance so they can get renters in and no response from FEMA.

It is criminal the way that landowners and the government continue to fail in this disaster. The people that are taking rent from FEMA with no renter should be only able to get that money when a renter is actually being housed. It is unacceptable to houses to go empty while people are in need. To the landlords that re making money off of FEMA while thousands are still homeless is shameful and the top of greedy.

People have been waiting on the list to get housing, and yes they want to stay in the Lahaina area if possible.

Expedite the actual housing of people on there terms. FEMA is here to serve the people not greed. The assistance is taken away or denied from people with because of red tape and in the back ground greedy landlords are making money for an empty house when so many people cannot find anywhere to live.

The housing crisis is maintained by lack of humanity in the choices being made by our state and federal governments.

Please Expedite the placement of Local Lahaina residence and hold accountable the landlords stealing survivors financial supports.

Thank you, Pahnelopi McKenzie

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 2:34:25 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelsey Devanney	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am in strong support of the proposed bill to place fire survivors into direct long-term housing asap. It has been 8 months since the fire and over a thousand people are still in the hotels. FEMA's meal program just got cut to 1 meal a day for people living out of mini fridges, with no money to eat out and no place to properly cook. People need stability in order to properly grieve and not rely on unhealthy coping mechanisms to process the tragedy and trauma of August 8. They need to create a home they can live in until the rebuild--that is, for those who can afford to rebuild or reenter Lāhainā when the rentals are rebuilt. It is high time they have a place to call home during this recovery.

Please pass this bill so we can get one step closer to home.

Mahalo nui,

Kelsey Devanney

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 8:53:00 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carlos Lamas	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Carlos Lamas, a Maui resident, and I write in strong support of SCR219 SD1

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)'s Direct Lease Program presents a beacon of hope for many of us still grappling with the losses. This program, which leases existing, ready-to-occupy residential properties to house families displaced by the wildfires, is a critical step toward recovery. However, the slow and cumbersome process, especially the stringent requirements for credit and background checks, has made access to this vital resource challenging for many deserving survivors.

It is both a moral and financial imperative for the State and for FEMA to streamline these processes and ensure that every survivor has the opportunity to rebuild their lives with dignity and security. The current state, where thousands of West Maui residents are still without long-term housing despite the availability of units in the Direct Lease Program, is unacceptable.

Mahalo for reading my testimony in support of SRC219 SD1.

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 8:58:50 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sandra Lundborg	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please place our Lahaina residents into much needed vacant housing. Today! People are exhausted from being shuffled.

A concerned West Maui Resident.

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 9:03:12 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tamara C Griffiths	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

AS THE ELECTED LEGISLATORS REPRESENTING YOUR LAHAINA CONSTITUENTS, HARD WORKING, TAX PAYING, VOTING SURVIVORS OF THE AUG. 8 FIRES WITH NO HOUSING SOLUTIONS EIGHT MONTHS LATER, IT IS YOUR DUT AND OBLIGATION TO URGE THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY TO EXPEDITE THE PLACEMENT OF MAUI WILDFIRE SURVIVORS INTO THE FEDERAL DIRECT LEASE PROGRAM.

SINCERELY,

TAMARA GRIFFITHS

LAHAINA, HI

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 9:16:49 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Nakamura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, as a resident of Maui concerned about the well-being of the Lahaina fire survivors and the health and sustainability of our communities, I strongly support SCR219 urging FEMA to expedite the placement of survivors within direct lease. So many families are stuck waiting to move into a more permanent housing situation. We must be advocating for the people of Lahaina and prioritizing their needs every step of the way. Mahalo.

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 9:58:08 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chris McKeown	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of SCR219 SD1.

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/10/2024 10:58:02 PM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dino Rivera	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I Dino Rivera support this bill!

Support of SCR 219 SD1

To Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair Poepoe and the members of the committee,

I am writing as a concerned member of the Lahaina community in **support of SCR 219 SD1**. Following the devastating Maui wildfires, many families are still struggling to find stable housing. SCR 219 SD1 calls on FEMA to speed up the process of placing survivors into the Federal Direct Lease Program, which offers critical long-term stability.

Despite the availability of thousands of empty units, bureaucratic obstacles have left families waiting for months, compelling some to make the difficult decision to leave the island, uncertain of their future. Personally, I have multiple friends and family who were approved for the Direct Lease Program over four months ago yet remained unplaced. Faced with such uncertainty, they prioritized their sanity and security by seeking stability elsewhere off island.

The situation described is unacceptable, and FEMA must be held accountable for the displacement experienced by families affected by the Maui wildfires. The Economic Research Organization at the University of Hawaii forecasts a significant decline in Maui's population, with 4,000 people already having left since the fires, and more anticipated to follow in the coming years. This trend underscores the urgent need to address the housing crisis to prevent further decline in our community. It's imperative that swift action is taken to streamline the placement process and ensure that affected families can access stable housing, thereby stemming the outflow of residents from Maui.

Our community is constantly hearing of multiple property owners who surrendered their units months ago for the Direct Lease Program, yet these properties remain unoccupied. Despite the owners continuing to receive exorbitant monthly rents, the units sit empty, offering no relief to those in need and only exacerbating our rental market crisis on the island. Compounding this challenge is the fact that the Direct Lease Program, initially designed for a 12-month duration, often results in delays so significant that individuals are placed months later than anticipated, which results in time off their once guaranteed year of stability.

I encourage you to **support SCR 219 SD1** and implore FEMA to act swiftly, especially considering Lahaina's urgent situation. FEMA, as an emergency disaster response agency, must recognize the pressing need to move quickly to aid Lahaina residents in their time of need. Your support for this resolution will demonstrate your commitment to Lahaina's recovery and the well-being of its residents.

Mahalo

Sincerely,

Katie Austin

SCR-219-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/11/2024 7:49:00 AM

Testimony for WAL on 4/11/2024 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Miriam Keo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Ichiyama, Vice Chair People, and. Honorable members of the committee,

I am writing this as a concern citizen and victim of the Lahaina fire. We are 8 months in and the amount of insecurity still left amongst my community is heartbreaking. At a time like this we need to push all parties to expedite processes that can help families feel a little more stability and can also help the mental health and well-being of them as well just by simply having a place to cook food and rest their heads at night.

I urge you to pass this resolution submitted by Senator McKelvey.

Me ke aloha,

Miriam-Ashley Keo