



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

By
Denise Eby Konan, Dean
College of Social Services
and
Vassilis Syrmos, PhD
Interim Provost
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 2340 HD1 – MAKING AN EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa is in strong support for HB 2340 HD1, which makes an emergency appropriation for fiscal year 2025–2026 to the University of Hawaii to expand and sustain the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry. HB 2340 would appropriate funds for UH to sustain and expand services provided by the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES) and Maui Health Registry. The initiatives were established in response to the devastating August 2023 Maui wildfires, which caused more than 100 deaths and significant toxic exposures and health trauma to survivors. These survivors include children, the elderly, first responders and medically vulnerable populations.

Funding will support expanded MauiWES services and long-term follow-up for thousands of individuals, building on the existing comprehensive biomonitoring effort that has already provided medical and mental health screenings and referrals to over 2,000 residents.

The MauiWES team is co-led by UH Mānoa College of Social Sciences (CSS) and the UH John A. Burns School of Medicine, in partnership with several units at UH. The program is administered by the UH Mānoa CSS Social Sciences Research Institute and UH Economic Research Organization (UHERO).

UH and its community partners are uniquely positioned to lead this work, integrating education, research and service in direct partnership with the community. The program actively trains and employs students and early-career professionals across medicine, nursing, public health, social sciences, environmental science, and data analytics. By integrating education with real-world service, MauiWES helps Hawai'i grow its own workforce while instilling a model of ethical, community-engaged scholarship.

As the MauiWes program involves significant participation by its non-profit partners, delivery depends on community-based non-profit entities for trusted outreach, translation and participation navigation. Thus, timely funding to them is essential. When state funds are appropriated solely to the University, and then must be routed to non-profit partners through

State procurement and contracting practices, the resulting requirements can create delays and administrative burden that disrupt time-sensitive community events, screenings and follow-up services. The University therefore strongly prefers that key non-profit partners receive their own direct appropriation (e.g., grant-in-aid), or that HB 2340 HD1 explicitly authorize sub-awards or grants to designated non-profit partners without triggering full procurement timelines.

Due to the work of MauiWES, hundreds of participants have followed up with healthcare providers, accessed mental health services, and made meaningful lifestyle changes as a direct result of their participation. HB 2340 HD1 ensures that this commitment continues, that services remain available to those who need them most, and that Hawai'i remains a national leader in community-centered, disaster-informed health response.

Thank you for your consideration.



February 24, 2026

To: COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Rep. Chris Todd, Chair
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Re: SUPPORT of HB2340 RELATING TO MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY
AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY

Hrg: February 25, 2026 at 2:00PM

The Hawai'i Public Health Association (HPHA) is a group of over 450 community members, public health professionals, and organizations statewide dedicated to improving public health. Our mission is to promote public health in Hawai'i through leadership, collaboration, education and advocacy.

The Hawaii Public Health Association supports HB2340 and its goal to provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

The impacts of the wildfires did not end in August 2023. Many residents continue to experience ongoing health concerns, including respiratory problems, mental health challenges, and uncertainty about long-term effects, especially for children and other medically vulnerable individuals.

Programs like the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry provide trusted, community-based care, early detection, and referrals that would otherwise be inaccessible to many families. Continued funding will help ensure that people are not forgotten and that health issues are identified before they become emergencies.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support HB2340 and ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important public health issue.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Holly Kessler' in a cursive script.

Holly Kessler
Executive Director



Hawai'i Community Health

info@hawaiicommunityhealth.org | www.hawaiicommunityhealth.org

February 23, 2026

To: House Finance Committee (FIN)

Re: Strong Support for HB 2340 – Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of myself and **Hawai'i Community Health**, I write in **strong support of HB 2340**, which would provide critical funding to expand the **Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES)** and Maui Health Registry and to strengthen community partners delivering vital interventions, follow-up engagement, education, and coordinated care for fire-impacted residents.

My name is Dayna Moore. I am a *Kānaka Maoli nurse rooted in Maui* and a community organization leader with both clinical and systems-level experience. I have been directly involved in Maui's wildfire crisis response and recovery since August 8, 2023, the deadliest urban wildfire disaster in a century. Building on prior public health and pandemic work, I continue to volunteer regularly at clinics with MauiWES and the Registry while coordinating statewide and community-based efforts through Hawai'i Community Health.

The health impacts of the Maui wildfires did not end in 2023. Many adverse physical and mental health conditions are emerging over time, particularly among keiki, kūpuna, first responders, volunteers, debris cleanup and rebuild crews, educators, and others exposed directly or indirectly in and around burn zones. Displacement, loss of access, and survival priorities delayed care for many residents.

Limited rural health system capacity continues to compound these challenges.

The **Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry** are now trusted, community-based entry points for screening, referral, and early intervention. These programs:

- Identify health concerns before they escalate into costly emergency or specialty care
- Support continuity of care and reduce gaps in access
- Strengthen coordination between researchers, providers, and community partners
- Generate data that informs policy, prevention strategies, and responsible resource allocation

HB 2340 represents a strategic investment in prevention and long-term cost containment.

Early screening and intervention reduce avoidable emergency visits, hospitalizations, disability, and long-term productivity loss. Sustaining this infrastructure now helps prevent significantly higher downstream healthcare and social costs in the future.

How Hawai'i Community Health Supports MauiWES and Fire-Impacted Communities

- On-the-ground clinic support alongside research and clinical teams
- Community and provider network-building, including support for helpers
- Distribution of PPE, medical and oral health supplies, clothing, and essential items
- Education and trauma-informed training for healthcare providers, educators, students, and families, including expert presentations, community discussions, and continuing education
- Pro bono health-related services and support
- Referral pathways and trusted resource coordination



- Multidisciplinary partnerships and statewide information-sharing
- Outreach through media, digital platforms, and in-person engagement
- Continuity across acute response, recovery, and long-term monitoring

Much of this unseen work continues through valued volunteer efforts and limited resources. It is, at times, a band-aid on a gaping wound, and this critical contribution reflects only a fraction of what is possible. Volunteer capacity is diminishing as many helpers are themselves part of impacted communities and navigating ongoing recovery.

With stable funding and strengthened partnerships, MauiWES and collaborators can scale evidence-based prevention models; expand to include more keiki, families, and vulnerable populations; and build durable health infrastructure that supports both community well-being and Maui's long-term economic recovery. Together, we are positioning Hawai'i as a leader that the world looks to for groundbreaking models of culturally based comprehensive long-term disaster-recovery that prioritizes public health and improving access to care.

Every point of contact has mattered. I have shared in the tears and the smiles. This work has always been collective, and Hawai'i Community Health extends deep gratitude to the MauiWES team (*led by Drs. Alike Maunakea and Ruben Juarez*) and partners for tireless work and strong leadership.

HB 2340 is a necessary investment in culturally grounded, community-centered, evidence-based care. It is our kuleana to strengthen Hawai'i's disaster readiness, build long-term public health infrastructure, and protect both people and public resources for keiki and future generations.

For these reasons, **Hawai'i Community Health strongly urges your support of HB 2340.** Mahalo for your leadership and continued commitment to the health and well-being of our communities. I am happy to provide additional information at any time.

With respect and aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dayna Moore".

Dayna Moore, BSN, LPN

on behalf of: Hawai'i Community Health (HCH) and Hawai'i Health C.A.R.E. Hui (HHCH)

Founder | Operations Manager - HCH

Founder | Director - HHCH

HCH Website: www.hawaiicommunityhealth.org

Email: dayna@hawaiicommunityhealth.org





Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i

February 8, 2026

Letter of Support for HB 2340
Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry

Aloha Chair and Members of the Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing the economic well-being of Hispanic-owned businesses and the broader Hawai'i workforce, we write in **strong support of HB 2340**, which would provide critical funding to sustain and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry (MauiWES).

The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i has been an early partner of MauiWES and has worked closely with the study team since its inception. From the beginning, we have been deeply impressed by the study's commitment to meaningful community engagement, particularly among populations that are often underserved and underrepresented in health systems and research.

Hispanics represent approximately **11% of Hawai'i's population**, yet nearly **18% of participants in MauiWES** identify as Hispanic. This level of engagement reflects intentional outreach, culturally responsive communication, and genuine trust built between MauiWES and the community. For many Hispanic residents, this was the first time they received comprehensive health education, screening, and navigation support following the wildfires.

Several Hispanic-owned businesses and employers were directly impacted by the 2023 Maui wildfires. Many of their employees faced compounded challenges, including displacement, health concerns, language barriers, and limited access to care. We witnessed firsthand how MauiWES supported employees of these businesses by providing education, clinical screening, and referrals to services that are severely lacking in Maui, particularly for immigrant and working families.

From an economic and workforce perspective, this work is essential. A **healthy population translates directly into healthier workers, stronger businesses, and a more resilient local economy**. When employees have access to preventive care, mental health support, and trusted health information, businesses experience reduced absenteeism, improved productivity, and greater stability during recovery.

HB 2340 will allow this critical effort to continue and expand, ensuring that up to 3,000 residents—especially those most affected by the wildfires—can receive sustained health

Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i
www.hcchawaii.org



support. It also signals that Hawai'i recognizes long-term health recovery as a cornerstone of economic resilience and workforce stability.

For these reasons, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i strongly urges your support of **HB 2340**. This investment strengthens individual and family health while supporting Hawai'i's businesses and workforce.

Mahalo for your consideration and for your continued commitment to the people and businesses of Maui and the State of Hawai'i.

Respectfully,

Barbara de Lucca
Co-founder & President
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i



House Committee on Finance
Rep. Chris Todd, Chair
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2026

**ACS CAN SUPPORTS HB 2340 HD1 – MAKING AN EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION TO THE
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.**

Cynthia Au, Government Relations Director – Hawaii Guam
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

Thank you for the opportunity in **SUPPORT** of HB 2340 HD1 – Making An Emergency Appropriation to the University of Hawaii which appropriates moneys to expand and sustain services provided by the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry.

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), the nonprofit, non-partisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society advocates for public policies that reduce death and suffering from cancer. ACS CAN works with federal, state, and local government bodies to support evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem.

The 2023 Maui wildfires created unprecedented environmental exposures for thousands of residents, responders, and workers. Ensuring robust, long-term data collection is essential to understanding and reducing potential cancer disparities and other health impacts that may emerge in the years ahead. Comprehensive, community-grounded data is the foundation for effective prevention, early detection, and equitable access to care.

ACS CAN strongly supports funding for fiscal year 2026–2027 for the University of Hawai‘i, in collaboration with community partners, to continue and expand this critical work. Sustained investment in the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry will help reduce the cancer burden for communities affected by this disaster and ensure that residents receive the long-term monitoring and support they deserve.

Mahalo for your consideration of this important measure and for your commitment to the health of Maui's communities and for the opportunity to provide testimony in SUPPORT on this important matter. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Government Relations Director Cynthia Au at 808.460.6109, or Cynthia.Au@Cancer.org.



'Ahahui o nā Kauka

677 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 1015

Honolulu HI 96813

Phone 808.548.0270

E-mail huikauka@gmail.com

2025-2026 Advocacy Committee

*Marcus Kāwika Iwane, MD
President*

*Kapono Chong-Hanssen, MD
Vice-President & Advocacy Co-
Chair*

*Kaohimānu Dang-Akiona, MD
Advocacy Co-Chair*

*Kara Wong Ramsey, MD
Treasurer*

Kapua Medeiros, MD

Natalie Young-Albanese, MD

Jordan Lee, MD

February 24, 2026

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Rep. Daisy Hartsfield	Rep. Dee Morikawa
Rep. Ikaika Hussey	Rep. Amy A. Perruso
Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy	Rep. Shirley Ann Templo
Rep. Lisa Kitagawa	Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita
Rep. Matthias Kusch	Rep. David Alcos III
Rep. Mike Lee	Rep. Joe Gedeon
Rep. Tyson K. Miyake	Rep. Julie Reyes Oda

Group Testimony in support of HB2340 HD1

RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY

'Ahahui o nā Kauka is an organization of Native Hawaiian physicians dedicated to the health of the people of Hawai'i and Native Hawaiians in particular. Several of our hui members volunteered for the medical relief efforts after the Maui wildfires, experiencing first-hand the immediate devastation as well as the emerging effects on the physical, mentally, and social determinants of health. We support the continued appropriation of moneys to continue current efforts as well as to expand the Maui wildfire exposure study and the Maui health registry. In our continued dedication to the people we serve, we believe the data from this study will provide the State, local organizations, medical professionals and future policymakers with critical information needed to address current and future patient medical and mental health needs, community needs, as well as inform the long-term recovery process and support better planning for future disaster preparedness.



House Committee on Finance

Testimony on HB 2340 HD1

Making an Emergency Appropriation to the University of Hawai'i

February 25, 2026

2:00pm

Room 308

The Climate Change and Health Working Group (CCHWG) is a cross-sector collaborative focused on strengthening climate and health resilience in Hawai'i. CCHWG **supports HB 2340 HD1**, which makes an emergency appropriation for fiscal year 2025–2026 to the University of Hawai'i to expand and sustain the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry.

Testimony of the Hawai'i Climate Change and Health Working Group

In Support of HB 2340 HD1

Making An Emergency Appropriation To The University Of Hawai'i

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

The August 2023 Maui wildfires were the deadliest natural disaster in Hawai'i's history and one of the worst wildfires in the United States in over a century. Beyond the immediate and devastating loss of life and property, the fires created ongoing health consequences that continue to affect survivors today.

Survivors continue to face toxic exposures, respiratory illness, and mental health trauma. Wildfire smoke and ash can contain fine particulate matter (PM2.5), heavy metals, volatile organic compounds, and other hazardous substances released from burned homes, vehicles, and infrastructure.¹ Exposure to these contaminants is associated with respiratory irritation,

¹ [Wildfires](#), CDC. 2024.

reduced lung function, asthma exacerbations, cardiovascular stress, and long-term mental health impacts, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress.²

Children, first responders, kūpuna, and medically vulnerable individuals remain at especially high risk. Children are particularly vulnerable because their lungs are still developing and they breathe more air relative to their body weight.³ Kūpuna and individuals with underlying heart or lung disease face increased risk of serious complications, including heart attacks, strokes, asthma attacks, and COPD flare-ups.⁴ First responders may face repeated or prolonged exposure, increasing cumulative risk. Pregnant people and individuals with chronic conditions may also experience heightened susceptibility to both short- and long-term health effects.⁵

The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry, together, represent the most comprehensive social and health biomonitoring effort in the state's history.⁶ These efforts are critical for identifying patterns of exposure, connecting residents to medical and mental health services, and building the evidence base needed to guide ongoing recovery and preparedness.

To date, more than two thousand residents have received services, including medical and mental health screenings, biomonitoring, and referrals to care. Continued outreach and follow-up are essential to ensure that health conditions are identified early and that residents receive appropriate care over time.

Additional funding is needed to expand and sustain these services, with a focus on children and other high-risk populations, and to ensure long-term follow-up through the Maui Health Registry for up to five thousand individuals. Wildfire-related health effects may emerge or persist for months or years after exposure. Sustained investment is necessary to monitor long-term outcomes, support community trust, and ensure equitable access to services, including for immigrant and underserved communities.

Strengthening these efforts not only supports Maui's recovery but also builds statewide capacity to respond to future climate-driven disasters.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure. The climate crisis is a health crisis.

Sincerely,

James McCallen, MPH

The Climate Change & Health Working Group

² [Wildfires](#), CDC, 2024.

³ [Who is at Increased Risk of Health Effects from Wildfire Smoke Exposure?](#), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2025

⁴ [Who is at Increased Risk of Health Effects from Wildfire Smoke Exposure?](#), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2025

⁵ [Who is at Increased Risk of Health Effects from Wildfire Smoke Exposure?](#), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2025

⁶ [Maui Wildfire Exposure Study: Community Health, Wellbeing, and Resilience](#), UHERO, 2024.

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:18:29 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Evelyn Del Valle	Roots Rebon	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Evelyn Del Valle, and I am a community member who grew up on Maui and now works closely with immigrant and mixed-status families through Roots Reborn. I am writing in strong support of HB 2340, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

Growing up on Maui, I saw many of the adults around me struggle without access to health care. People worked hard, cared for their families, and contributed to our community, yet seeking medical care was often delayed or avoided due to cost, language barriers, or lack of insurance. Those experiences shaped my path and are why this work matters so deeply to me today. In my current role, I continue to see these same barriers affecting families who were already vulnerable before the fires and are now facing even greater challenges.

The impacts of the wildfires did not end in August 2023. Many residents continue to experience ongoing health concerns, including respiratory problems, mental health challenges, and uncertainty about long-term effects, especially for children, kupuna, and medically vulnerable individuals. For many families we serve, symptoms did not appear right away, and they are only now beginning to understand the toll the disaster has taken on their health.

Programs like the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry provide trusted, community-based screening, early detection, and referrals that would otherwise be inaccessible to many families. We have seen firsthand how transformative this support can be for people who have never been screened before or who do not feel safe navigating traditional healthcare systems. Continued funding will help ensure that residents are not forgotten and that health issues are identified early, before they become life-threatening emergencies.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support HB 2340 and ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve as recovery continues.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and commitment to the health of our communities.

Mahalo,
Evelyn Del Valle



COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 2:00 pm

Conference Room 308 and Via Videoconference

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2340, HD1, MAKING AN EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, Reps. Miyake and Yamashita of Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Veronica Mendoza, Founding Executive Director of Roots Reborn and a founding coalition member of El Pueblo en Acción (EPA) Maui - *The People in Action Maui*. Roots Reborn **strongly supports SB 2969**, relating to the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES) and Maui Health Registry, which appropriates funds for the University of Hawai'i to expand and sustain services provided by the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry.

Roots Reborn is a grassroots, immigrant-justice and disaster-response organization serving migrant and immigrant communities on Maui and across the state. Formed after the August 2023 wildfires, our team has worked alongside families through every phase of recovery by providing aid, navigating systems, and building community trust that remains the foundation of our work today.

More than two years after the August 2023 wildfires, the health impacts on our community are still unfolding. Many of the families we serve did not experience symptoms right away. We are now seeing breathing problems, acute mental health struggles, and concerns related to toxic exposure – often without insurance, stable housing, or access to care.

As a Community Partner of MauiWES, we have seen firsthand how transformative this work has been. Community members who had never received a comprehensive physical/screening were finally able to understand what was happening to their bodies, receive referrals, and feel seen and supported. This has been especially critical for immigrant families who are often afraid or unable to seek care elsewhere.

Senate Bill 2969 would allow this work to continue by supporting the screening and follow-up care of up to 3,000 additional residents, with a focus on children, first responders, and kūpuna – those most exposed and most vulnerable. To date, more than 2,000 residents have already been screened, and the results are alarming. Many are showing signs of respiratory illness, toxic exposure, and serious mental health challenges. Among children screened, more than half showed signs of depression, and many adults continue to struggle with anxiety and PTSD. This effort is not just about research. It is about early detection, connection to care, and making sure families do not fall through the cracks, especially those who already face barriers due to language, immigration status, or lack of insurance.

Lahaina continues to carry the burden of the deadliest wildfire in the United States in over a century. Senate Bill 2969 is a compassionate and practical step to ensure that recovery includes long-term health support — not just rebuilding homes and roads. **We respectfully urge you to pass SB2969.** We would welcome the opportunity to speak further or answer any questions. Mahalo for your time and for your continued commitment to Maui's communities.

Sinceramente,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Veronica'.

Veronica Mendoza

Maui Roots Reborn, *Founding Executive Director*

El Pueblo en Accion Maui, *Founding Coalition Member*

My name is Dr. Christopher Knightsbridge. I am one of only two full-time mental health professionals at the only behavioral healthcare clinic in Lahaina dedicated almost entirely to wildfire survivors. I also work with the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MAUIWES), and I am asking you to please support this bill.

When our clinic reopened, I did everything I could to make sure people understood that the suffering in Lahaina did not end when the fires stopped. I sit with it every day. I hear it in the stories of parents who still can't sleep, in kids who are anxious and withdrawn, and in families who are doing their best to hold it together while still grieving everything they lost.

I want to be clear about something important: **MAUIWES is NOT just research.** Yes, we collect data so we can understand the long-term health effects of this disaster. But we also provide direct care. Every time we hold a collection event, we screen people for medical and mental health concerns. If someone isn't connected to care, I reach out personally. Many of them end up in my caseload. Right now, that caseload is about 100 patients. I am doing everything I can, but it is not sustainable without support.

We are trying to expand services, especially for children. Our goal is to reach 5,000 participants, including 2,000 children aged 10 and older. 3 million helps us get closer to that goal. Early intervention matters. If we catch depression, PTSD, diabetes, or hypertension early, we prevent crises later. That is not only the right thing to do — it also saves the state a lot of money. A single ER visit for a suicidal crisis can cost over \$5,000. A phone call with me to receive stabilization and support costs nothing.

Hawaii deserves the same level of care as the mainland. Survivors of other national disasters have received long-term, state-backed support. The people of Lahaina deserve the same commitment. An investment of \$3 million would allow us to expand responsibly and continue this work in a sustainable way.

This is not about research funding for us. It is about making sure this beautiful community, which continues to suffer from the impacts of the deadliest wildfire disaster in modern U.S. history, is not forgotten after the headlines fade. We have dedicated our lives to helping Lahaina recover. We are simply asking for support to continue showing up for them the way they deserve.

I have also attached a mental health fact sheet of some of our findings as well as a letter of support written by the Hawaii State Council on Mental Health.

Thank you for taking the time to listen.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris M. Knightsbridge".

Dr. Christopher Knightsbridge, Psy.D.

Head of Mental Health Research Team

University of Hawaii Wildfire Exposure Study (MAUIWES)

www.Mauiwes.org

MauiWES

Mental Health Outcomes

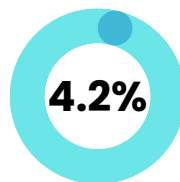
ADULT MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS (n = 1,800 wildfire-affected adults)



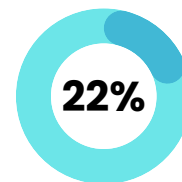
Depressive symptoms



Moderate-severe anxiety



Suicidal thoughts in the past month
(Pre-fire Maui baseline: 0.8%)

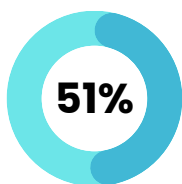


Low self-esteem

CHANGES OVER TIME (ADULT FOLLOW-UP) (n = 424 with Year-1 → Year-2 data)

- Suicidal ideation decreased by nearly 50%
- Severe depression and anxiety declined
- PTSD remains widespread (~1 in 3 adults)

CHILDREN MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS (Ages 8–18, n ≈ 200)



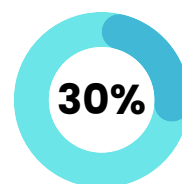
Depressive symptoms



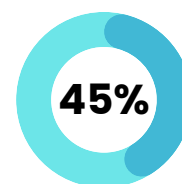
Severe depressive symptoms



Low self-esteem



Signs of anxiety disorder



PTSD symptoms

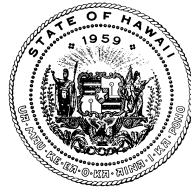
Highest burden observed among:

Filipino, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino youth

Girls show higher depression severity, PTSD, and lower self-esteem

RECOVERY IS UNDERWAY — BUT INCOMPLETE.

JOSH B. GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA
MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I



KATHERINE AUMER, PhD
COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON
LUNA HO'OMALU O KA PAPA

**STATE OF HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH**
P.O. Box 3378, Room 256
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96801-3378

August 12, 2025

CHAIRPERSON

Katherine Aumer, PhD

1st VICE CHAIRPERSON

Kathleen Merriam, LCSW CSAC

2nd VICE CHAIRPERSON

John Betlach

SECRETARY

Mary Pat Waterhouse, MHA MBA

MEMBERS:

Tianna Celis-Webster

Naomi Crozier, CPS

Lea Dias, MEd

Jon Fujii, MBA

Heidi Ilyavi

Jackie Jackson, CFPS

Christine Montague-Hicks, MEd

Ray Rice, MEd

Asianna Saragosa-Torres

Forrest Wells, MSCP, LMHC

Kristin Will, MACL, CSAC

EX-OFFICIO:

Marian Tsuji, Deputy Director
Behavioral Health Administration

WEBSITE:

scmh.hawaii.gov

EMAIL ADDRESS:

doh.scmhchairperson@
doh.hawaii.gov

To Whom It May Concern:

Two years after the devastating Maui Wildfire Disaster, we join others in remembrance and reaffirm our commitment to supporting recovery and meeting community needs.

The Council commends the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES) for its rigorous, evidence-based work to understand the wildfires' health and social impacts. With accessible tools like the Maui dashboard and a service component that assesses survivors' needs and links them to mental health and related supports, MauiWES models trauma-informed best practices—ensuring survivors both contribute to research and receive timely help.

We support MauiWES' effort to seek grants and funding to continue research and services but also urge stronger coordination with the Department of Health, its Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), Qualified Public Health Clinics (QPHCs), the Department of Education, the Department of Human Services, and other partners. All have also been on the ground, helping survivors and the island community. By seeking and threading resources together, we can ensure all survivors and affected parties—not only research participants—benefit from a seamless network of care.

Recognizing the Department of Health's broad responsibilities, we see MauiWES as a complementary resource that can strengthen existing programs. Partnerships and diverse funding can amplify the collective impact of our public health and community systems.

As established in HRS 334.10, the State Council on Mental Health advises the Department of Health, Governor, and Legislature on statewide mental health care needs and resources. Our vision is a Hawai'i where

Page 2. To Whom It May Concern Letter of Support for MauiWES

people of all ages with mental health challenges can achieve recovery and live full lives in the community of their choice.

Thank you. For more information, please contact us through our email, doh.scmhchairperson@doh.hawaii.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Aumer', written in a cursive style.

Katherine Aumer, Ph.D.

C.

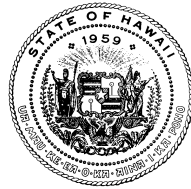
DOH Director

DOH BHA Deputy Director

DOH AMHD Administrator

DOH CAMHD Administrator

JOSH B. GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA
MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I



KATHERINE AUMER, PhD
COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON
LUNA HO'OMALU O KA PAPA

STATE OF HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH
P.O. Box 3378, Room 256
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96801-3378

September 9, 2025

CHAIRPERSON

Katherine Aumer, PhD

1st VICE CHAIRPERSON

Kathleen Merriam, LCSW CSAC

2nd VICE CHAIRPERSON

John Betlach

SECRETARY

Mary Pat Waterhouse, MHA MBA

MEMBERS:

Tianna Celis-Webster

Naomi Crozier, CPS

Lea Dias, MEd

Jon Fujii, MBA

Heidi Ilyavi

Jackie Jackson, CFPS

Christine Montague-Hicks, MEd

Ray Rice, MEd

Asianna Saragosa-Torres

Forrest Wells, MSCP, LMHC

Kristin Will, MACL, CSAC

EX-OFFICIO:

Marian Tsuji, Deputy Director
Behavioral Health Administration

WEBSITE:

scmh.hawaii.gov

EMAIL ADDRESS:

doh.scmhchairperson@
doh.hawaii.gov

Dr. Ruben Juarez

Dr. Alike Maunakea

Dr. Christopher Knightsbridge

Maui Wildfire Exposure Study

College of Social Sciences and John A. Burns School of Medicine

University of Hawaii

Via email

Dear Dr. Juarez, Dr. Maunakea, and Dr. Knightsbridge,

On behalf of the State Council on Mental Health, I extend our deepest gratitude for your powerful and informative presentation on the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES) during our August 12, 2025, meeting.

Your team's work in enrolling more than 2,000 participants—including 200 children—provides an essential foundation for understanding the wildfire's long-term impacts. The findings you shared regarding depression, anxiety, PTSD, and toxic exposure are sobering. Your commitment to addressing these challenges—through the registry, referrals to services, and culturally informed support—is both reassuring and necessary.

We are honored to send a letter of support for your grant-seeking efforts to continue and expand this important work. Your research advances knowledge and provides a pathway for healing, recovery, and long-term well-being in the community. We encourage more defined collaboration with partners, including Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, the Department of Education, Department of Human Services MedQUEST Division, and other health coverage providers.

Page 2. SCMH September 9, 2025 Letter to Dr. Juarez, Dr. Maunakea, and Dr. Knightsbridge

Once again, thank you for your time, expertise, and unwavering dedication to the people of Maui and all others impacted by wildfire disasters. We are inspired by your leadership and look forward to witnessing the transformative impact of your work in the years ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Aumer'.

Katherine Aumer, Ph.D.

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 5:40:58 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tara Zamani	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Tara Zamani and I was born and raised in Lahaina Maui. I am writing in strong support of HB2340 HD1, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

Growing up in Lahaina, I have been exposed to the deep sense of connection and resilience that defines my community. Lahaina is not just a place but the people and families who look out for one another. After the wildfires, many members of my community have been facing barriers in access to healthcare due to financial hardship and the limited access to healthcare providers. When the wildfires devastated Lahaina, it destroyed homes, businesses, and centers of medical care. The Lahaina community is struggling and we need access to reliable healthcare services like the ones being provided through MauiWES.

The impacts of the wildfires did not end in August 2023. Many residents continue to experience ongoing health concerns, including respiratory problems, mental health challenges, and uncertainty about long-term effects, especially for children and other medically vulnerable individuals.

Programs like the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry provide trusted, community-based care, early detection, and referrals that would otherwise be inaccessible to many families. Continued funding will help ensure that people are not forgotten and that health issues are identified before they become emergencies.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support SB 2969 and ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and commitment to the health of our communities.

Sincerely,
Tara Zamani

**Testimony of Dr. Ruben Juarez
In Strong Support of HB2340 HD1 – Funding for the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study
(MauiWES) and Maui Health Registry**

Aloha Chairs and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is **Dr. Ruben Juarez**, and I am one of the co-directors of the **Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry** ([MauiWES.org](https://mauiwes.org)). I submit this testimony in strong support of **HB2340 HD1**, which would provide critical funding to sustain and expand this work.

MauiWES has been transformative for the Maui community, not only as a research study, but as a trusted, community-centered health response during one of the most difficult periods in Maui's history. This effort exists because the community asked for it, and because the community continues to rely on it.

Since the 2023 Maui wildfires, our team has reached **more than 2,000 individuals affected by the fires**, and nearly **1,200 participants have returned for follow-up in the second year**. Many of these residents had not prioritized their health since the fires, not due to neglect, but because survival came first: housing instability, job loss, food insecurity, and trauma. Health was often postponed. *MauiWES helped bring it back to the forefront.*

Dr. Alike Maunakea and I personally attend MauiWES community events *at least once a month*. We do not manage this work from afar, we show up, listen, and engage directly with participants. What we have seen is powerful. While some health indicators are slowly improving, the most meaningful change has been the *restoration of agency*: people feeling empowered to understand their health, ask questions, and take action.

The impact is measurable:

- **825 participants** followed up with a healthcare provider after receiving their results
- **760 individuals** made lifestyle changes based on their health findings
- **320 people** accessed mental health services they otherwise would not have sought

We have also referred *dozens of individuals to the emergency room* based on screening results, providing, in some cases, *life-saving interventions*. These are not abstract statistics. These are parents, kūpuna, immigrant families, and wildfire survivors, many of whom were connected to care for the *first time* because MauiWES met them where they were, in their language, and through trusted community partners.

Equally important, MauiWES has helped *rebuild trust* in health and research systems that many communities had disengaged from. By returning results on the same day, explaining findings clearly, and directly linking participants to services, rather than handing them a pamphlet, we demonstrated that research can *serve communities, not extract from them*.

While there are substantial economic savings associated with this work, which I will abstain from detailing in this testimony, I want to emphasize that MauiWES has been one of the most

impactful community-based research initiatives undertaken by the University of Hawai‘i to date. It represents the ideal integration of education, research, and direct community service, and it clearly demonstrates the tangible impact that the University of Hawai‘i can, and does, have when it is deeply engaged with the communities it serves.

Beyond Maui, the lessons from MauiWES are now helping to *build a disaster health resilience model* that can be applied elsewhere. Just recently, our team returned from supporting communities affected by the *Los Angeles fires*, where we shared lessons learned from Maui, particularly around rapid health screening, community trust, and culturally grounded engagement. Maui is not only healing; it is *leading*, and helping other communities respond more effectively to disaster-related health impacts.

As we enter Year 3, we are ready to take on an *unprecedented next phase*. With increased support, our goals are to:

- *Enroll up to 3,000 participants, continuing being the largest social and biomedical screening study ever conducted after a disaster in Hawai‘i*
- *Expand significantly to children*, where participation to date has been limited to approximately 200 youth, despite clear evidence that children are among the most vulnerable to long-term impacts
- *Build a comparison cohort from other parts of Maui*, which is essential to distinguish wildfire-related health effects from broader island-wide trends
- *Strengthen local health capacity* and train the next generation of community-based researchers, healthcare workers, and translators to carry this work forward

This is not just about data, it is about *building lasting infrastructure*, ensuring continuity of care, and creating a model that Hawai‘i can rely on for future disasters.

Let me be very clear: *MauiWES is not a short-term project*. The health consequences of the fires will unfold over years, and so must the response. Our commitment to this community is *day by day*, standing alongside the people most affected, long after the headlines fade.

Continued support through HB2340 HD1 will allow us to remain present, responsive, and accountable, while building a sustainable, community-driven health system that Maui deserves.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify and for your continued commitment to the people of Maui.

Respectfully,

Dr. Ruben Juarez

UHERO–HMSA Distinguished Professor in Health Economics

Department of Economics & UHERO

University of Hawai‘i

Aloha e Chair Todd and members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Alika K. Maunakea, and I am a resident of Hawai‘i. I am submitting this testimony in my personal capacity as a community member and scientist, and not on behalf of the University of Hawai‘i or any of its entities.

I am writing to express my **strong support for HB2340, Relating to the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry.**

The 2023 Maui wildfires were not only the deadliest natural disaster in Hawai‘i’s history, but a profound public health event whose consequences are still unfolding. While the immediate devastation was visible, the longer-term health impacts — respiratory disease, mental health trauma, toxic exposures, and disruption of housing and livelihoods — are far less visible, yet no less devastating.

As someone who has been **directly involved in the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES)** since its inception, I have seen firsthand how essential this work has been for the people of Maui. The Study and the Maui Health Registry together represent the **only comprehensive, longitudinal effort** to understand how this disaster is affecting residents’ health over time, particularly for children, kūpuna, first responders, and medically vulnerable individuals.

To date, **over 2,000 Maui residents** have participated in MauiWES, receiving health screenings, biomonitoring, mental health assessments, and referrals to care. Importantly, this effort has reached communities that are often excluded from traditional healthcare and research — including Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Filipino, immigrant, and low-income families — by building trust and delivering services directly within the community.

Findings emerging from MauiWES underscore why **continued and expanded support is urgently needed**. Published results show substantial declines in self-reported overall health, high rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress symptoms, and measurable impairments in lung function months after the fires. Biomonitoring has identified elevated levels of metals commonly associated with wildfire ash and smoke exposure, particularly among residents of Lahaina and other heavily impacted areas. These health impacts are not evenly distributed: they are **strongly shaped by housing displacement, income loss, and limited access to care**, factors that place already vulnerable communities at even greater risk.

Critically, many of these effects **do not appear in hospital or emergency department data**. Without a program like MauiWES, they would remain invisible — untreated until they become far more serious and far more costly to address. Importantly, no other effort in Hawai‘i is currently collecting rigorous, high-quality, and clinically translatable data at this scale following this unprecedented disaster. MauiWES has already become a **national model** for post-wildfire health response, informing similar efforts across the country — including serving as a reference point for the health and environmental monitoring now being assembled in the aftermath of the Los Angeles wildfires last year.

HB2340 provides the resources necessary to **sustain this work**, ensure long-term follow-up, and expand services to reach up to 3,000 individuals statewide, with a focus on those at highest risk. This is not only a compassionate response; it is a fiscally responsible one. Early detection, prevention, and coordinated follow-up care reduce the long-term burden on Hawai‘i’s healthcare system and strengthen community resilience.

More broadly, **HB2340** signals that Hawai‘i recognizes disaster recovery as a **long-term health commitment**, not a short-term emergency response. The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Health Registry is already a model for how states can respond equitably to climate-driven disasters. Continued investment will ensure that Maui — and Hawai‘i — remain leaders in protecting the health of their people. Indeed, just as importantly, funding for MauiWES and the Maui Health Registry is also an investment in Hawai‘i’s workforce. This program is training the next generation of local professionals — including students in nursing, medicine, public health, social science, and environmental science — by combining their education with real-world experience delivering services and giving back to the community. In other words, MauiWES strengthens Maui today while also helping Hawai‘i “grow its own” multidisciplinary workforce for the long-term.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **support and pass HB2340**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for your continued commitment to the people of Maui.

Me ke aloha pumehana,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Alikea K. Maunakea', written in a cursive style.

Alikea K. Maunakea, PhD

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:35:09 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
H. Blaisdell-Brennan, M.D.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Dr. Helen Blaisdell-Brennan, and I am a psychiatrist who volunteers with the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES). I am writing in strong support of HB 2340, HD1, which would provide critical funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

I have traveled with the MauiWES project to provide volunteer psychiatric support to wildfire victims. I have met with mothers and their teenage sons, kupuna, and displaced residents who lost everything. Beyond the vital scientific data this project gathers, I have witnessed firsthand the profound need for human connection. Our volunteers fill that need, offering calming support and hope to those experiencing deep grief. These connections are essential to the healing process.

The impacts of the wildfires did not end in August 2023. Many residents continue to face ongoing health concerns, including respiratory issues, mental health challenges, and uncertainty regarding long-term effects—particularly for children and medically vulnerable individuals.

Programs like MauiWES and the Maui Health Registry provide trusted, community-based care, early detection, and referrals that would otherwise be inaccessible. Continued funding will ensure that our community is not forgotten and that health issues are identified before they become emergencies.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support HB 2340 HD1 to ensure Maui residents receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and commitment to the health of our communities.

Sincerely,

Dr. Helen Blaisdell-Brennan

Native Hawaiian Community Psychiatrist

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:46:48 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nori Tarui	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Finance Committee,

I am writing in **strong support of HB 2340**, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

Programs like the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry provide trusted, community-based care, early detection, and referrals that would otherwise be inaccessible to many families. Continued funding will help ensure that people are not forgotten and that health issues are identified before they become emergencies.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **support HB 2340** and ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and commitment to the health of our communities.

Sincerely,
Nori Tarui

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:49:00 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Pcola_Davis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strongly Support continued funding

Most importantly we (State of Hawai'i) are a first of a kind to address physical and mental health of survivors of the wildfire. First and foremost were the people of Lahaina. Secondly, we are a model!

This legislature recognizes that this is the only access to data, as well as healthcare, that Hawai'i has to measure the health effects of the 2023 Lahaina wildfire. Maui WES has continued to provide comprehensive reports with up-to-date information. I re-emphasize, it is the first and only, providing immediate and continuing health both physical and mental, like it in the country! Maybe before your final decision, you could read this report. Funding is absolutely required to continue. This is longitudinal and will follow participants through their lives.

Money is tight but this is important to add more participants, especially children. It has proved invaluable in recognizing PTSD. These mental health services as well as other services are managing to help those through this terrible point-in-time in their lives, all at no cost for the registered survivors.

"From Crisis to Recovery: Health and Resilience TwoYears After the Mami Wildfires June 2025"

This year's report reveals the lasting health and social impacts of the 2023 Maui wildfires. Key findings include sharp increases in depression, chronic illness risk, and barriers to care—especially among uninsured and displaced residents.

Kudos to Alika and Rueben for your continued service! As a team initiative, thank you team

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:02:09 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Peggy Latare	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Dr. Peggy Latare, and I am a resident of Kailua a retired family medicine physician and an adjunct clinical professor at the John A Burns School of Medicine. I am here today in strong support of HB 2340, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

For the past year and a half, I have been volunteering with the Maui study at the screening clinics there. I have seen for myself, and as a physician of over 40 years, just how devastating the wildfires have been on Maui residents' mental, physical, and spiritual health. Just two weeks ago we sent two adults to urgent care for extremely high blood pressure readings, a medical emergency. We are also detecting untreated diabetes, lung disease, mental health concerns, and of course high blood pressure.

The impacts of the wildfires did not end in August 2023. One of the things are this impressed to be the most about working with the MauiWES study is their ability to flex to the needs of the community. In the early days with so much job and insurance loss people had no contact with their usual medical care and the study helped them find temporary access to care- another example of how these events especially affect children and other medically vulnerable individuals.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support HB 2340 and ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Peggy Latare

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:51:38 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
May Okihiro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am a pediatrician at the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center and have over 25 years of experience working with Hawaii's families. I am writing in strong support of HB2340 HD1 which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

The impacts of the Maui wildfires did not end in 2023. Indeed, we know wildfire victims continue to experience the negative impact on their health and well-being. This is especially true for children, youth and other vulnerable individuals. Monitoring and supporting on-going services and resources for these community members will be essential as we work to rebuild the community. The Maui Wildlife Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry have become a trusted sources of community-based monitoring, early detection and referral for many families.

As a pediatrician, I have seen the negative outcomes when we ignore those who have endured harmful and traumatic events such as the Maui Wildfires. Policy makers too often are short sighted when they only fund health program once a huge problem has developed.

As such, continued funding of the Maui Wildlife Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry is essential and will be cost effective to support the best outcomes for these community members who have endured so much.

Mahalo!



Hawaii Medical Association

1360 South Beretania Street, Suite 200 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96814
Phone: 808.536.7702 • Fax: 808.528.2376 • hawaiimedicalassociation.org

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Representative Chris Todd, Chair

Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Date: February 25, 2026

From: Hawaii Medical Association (HMA)

Elizabeth Ann Ignacio MD - Chair, HMA Public Policy Committee

Christina Marzo MD and Robert Carlisle MD, Vice Chairs, HMA Public Policy Committee

RE HB 2340 HD1 MAKING AN EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

University of Hawaii; Maui Wildfire Exposure Study; Maui Health Registry; Appropriation

Position: Support

This measure would make an emergency appropriation for fiscal year 2025–2026 to the University of Hawaii to expand and sustain the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry.

The Maui WES cohort study of adults affected by the Maui wildfires found significant mid-term cardiopulmonary and psychological health impacts, with social support linked to better mental health but not to improvements in physiological outcomes such as reduced lung function. These findings underscore the need for disaster response models that combine long-term clinical surveillance, targeted mental health interventions, and culturally grounded community support to protect vulnerable populations as climate-driven disasters increase.

Maui WES has combined biomonitoring, health screenings, biospecimens, and socioeconomic data to track health outcomes among affected residents and has grown to include over 2,000 participants. It represents the most comprehensive post-disaster health study in Hawai'i's history.

The health outcomes from wildfires extend beyond acute injury, affecting physical, mental, social, and economic well-being. HMA supports funding of this comprehensive research and registries. Maui WES equips policymakers, clinicians, and community partners with the evidence necessary to protect health, reduce preventable disease burdens, and prioritize vulnerable populations of Hawaii after disasters.

Thank you for allowing the Hawaii Medical Association to testify in support of this measure.

2026 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team

Elizabeth A Ignacio, MD, Chair • Robert Carlisle, MD, Vice Chair • Christina Marzo, MD, Vice Chair
Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

2026 Hawaii Medical Association Officers

Nadine Tenn-Salle, MD, President • Jerald Garcia, MD, President Elect • Elizabeth Ann Ignacio, MD, • Immediate Past President
Laeton Pang, MD, Treasurer • Thomas Kosasa, MD, Secretary • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

REFERENCES

Juarez R, Phankitnirundorn K, Ozorio Dutra SV, Bond-Smith D, Lee AG, Maunakea AK. Health and Social Support in the Aftermath of the Maui Wildfires. JAMA Netw Open. 2025 Aug 1;8(8):e2525430. doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2025.25430. PMID: 40768146; PMCID: PMC12329611.

Maunakea, Alika, et al. "Invisible Battles: Maui Survivors Struggle With Mental Health Two Years Post-Fire." *Hawaii Public Radio*, 5 Aug. 2025.

From Crisis to Recovery: Health and Resilience Two Years After the Maui Wildfires. MauiWES Report, June 2025.

2024 Hawaii Medical Association Officers

Elizabeth Ann Ignacio, MD, President • Nadine Tenn-Salle, MD, President Elect • Angela Pratt, MD, Immediate Past President
Jerris Hedges, MD, Treasurer • Thomas Kosasa, MD, Secretary • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

2024 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team

Beth England, MD, Chair
Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 9:13:37 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cybil Moran	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

'Ō Cybil ko'u inoa.

I'm here as a MauiWES participant, a first responder who worked in the burn zone in Lāhainā, a community facilitator and a resident of Lāhainā asking for your help in supporting my community by allowing MauiWES to continue giving their free health check-ups because they are saving lives.

I work with fire survivors every day, many who found out they had diabetes, lung obstructions, anemia, & hypertension (myself included) at a MauiWES visit..

These invaluable checkups include heavy metal testing, blood work, lung function tests, & mental health screenings.

Where else can you go and get all of that testing for free and at the same time meet with a Doctor to go over your results and see a mental health provider like Dr Chris Knightsbridge or Dr. Blaidsdell?

Additionally, nursing students from UH Maui college as well as O'ahu get first hand experience working with our medically underserved community.

I will conclude by saying this is a win-win for everyone involved!

Mahalo nui loa to the committee and chairs for your time and consideration

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 6:31:36 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amy Jackson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Amy Jackson. The Maui WES literally saved my life. I barely escaped being trapped on Front Streer the day of the fire only to fight for my life again 1 year later. I registered for the study to get the 100\$ cash to gift my 13 year old daughter for her birthday. After the wildfire I was no longer able to use gig work as a chef to help make ends meet. The whole island is still struggling to recover financially. I was not concerned over my health but had complaints of fatigue, shortness of breath with exertion and feeling cold constantly. It was just before my 50th birthday, and I figured turning 50 was kicking my butt! I would not have sought medical care or treatment until it was too late. The day of the study kind eyes and warm smiles explained that my Hemoglobin was not detectable on the equipment and they told me to seek care at the Emergency Room. I was immediately admitted for blood transfusions and months of hospitalizations. As a single mother I am am forever grateful for the study. I am still here today for my children. Please continue the Maui WES to help in healing from this disaster for the Island of Maui and for the lahui. Mahalo for your time.

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 8:28:15 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephanie Villalobos	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Stephanie Villalobos, and I am a Maui resident, community member, and Community Care Navigator with Roots Reborn. I am writing in strong support of HB 2340, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

I personally participated in the study, and it was extremely well organized and impactful. Through the process, I learned how deeply the stress and heartbreak of losing friends in the wildfire had affected my own health. I realized that I had not been taking care of myself in ways I thought I was. The study helped me better understand my physical and mental health in ways that I would not have discovered through a regular doctor's visit alone. In particular, the mental health screening encouraged important conversations with my physician that I might not have otherwise initiated.

The impacts of the August 2023 wildfires did not end when the fires were extinguished. Many residents continue to experience ongoing health concerns, including respiratory problems, mental health challenges, and uncertainty about long-term exposure effects — especially children and medically vulnerable individuals.

Programs like the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry provide trusted, community-based care, early detection, and critical referrals that would otherwise be inaccessible to many families. Continued funding ensures that residents are not forgotten and that health concerns are identified early, before they become emergencies.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support HB 2340 and ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and commitment to the health of our community.

Sincerely,
Stephanie Villalobos

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 9:13:18 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Manmohan Yadav	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of **HB 2340**, which makes an emergency appropriation to the University of Hawai‘i to expand and sustain the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry.

The August 2023 wildfires had devastating and long-lasting impacts on the health and well-being of Maui residents. The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry are providing essential health screening, follow-up, and data to understand both the short- and long-term health effects of smoke, ash, and trauma from the fires. In Year 1, the study provided health screening services to more than 2,000 people affected by the fires, and nearly 1,200 participants were served in Year 2. Year 3 is about to launch, and stable funding is urgently needed to continue this work and to support long-term follow-up.

HB 2340 would sustain and expand the study and registry so they can reach more individuals over time, ensuring that people affected by the wildfires are not forgotten once the immediate disaster has passed and that policymakers, health providers, and communities have the data they need to respond effectively.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to pass **HB 2340**.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify and for your consideration of this important measure.

Sincerely,

Manmohan Yadav

Honolulu, Hawai‘i

House Committee on Finance

Testimony on HB 2340 HD1

Making an Emergency Appropriation to the University of Hawai'i

February 25, 2026

2:00pm

Room 308

In Support of HB 2340 HD1:

Making An Emergency Appropriation To The University Of Hawai'i

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair, and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

The August 2023 Maui wildfires were the deadliest natural disaster in Hawai'i's history and one of the worst wildfires in the United States in over a century. Beyond the immediate and devastating loss of life and property, the fires created ongoing health consequences that affect survivors today. **As a physician and resident, I urge you to support HB 2340.**

Survivors continue to face toxic exposures, respiratory illness, and mental health trauma. Wildfire smoke and ash can contain fine particulate matter (PM2.5), heavy metals, volatile organic compounds, and other hazardous substances released from burned homes, vehicles, and infrastructure.¹ Exposure to these contaminants is associated with respiratory irritation, reduced lung function, asthma exacerbations, cardiovascular stress, and long-term mental health impacts, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress.²

Children, first responders, kūpuna, and medically vulnerable individuals remain at especially high risk. Children are particularly vulnerable because their lungs are still developing and they breathe more air relative to their body weight.³ Kūpuna and individuals with underlying heart or lung disease face increased risk of serious complications, including heart attacks, strokes, asthma attacks, and COPD flare-ups.⁴ First responders may face repeated or prolonged exposure, increasing cumulative risk. Pregnant people and individuals with chronic conditions may also experience heightened susceptibility to both short- and long-term health effects.⁵

The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry, together, represent the most comprehensive social and health biomonitoring effort in the state's history.⁶ These efforts are

¹ [Wildfires](#), CDC. 2024.

² [Wildfires](#), CDC. 2024.

³ [Who is at Increased Risk of Health Effects from Wildfire Smoke Exposure?](#), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2025

⁴ [Who is at Increased Risk of Health Effects from Wildfire Smoke Exposure?](#), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2025

⁵ [Who is at Increased Risk of Health Effects from Wildfire Smoke Exposure?](#), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2025

⁶ [Maui Wildfire Exposure Study: Community Health, Wellbeing, and Resilience](#), UHERO, 2024.

critical for identifying patterns of exposure, connecting residents to medical and mental health services, and building the evidence base needed to guide ongoing recovery and preparedness.

To date, more than two thousand residents have received services, including medical and mental health screenings, biomonitoring, and referrals to care. Continued outreach and follow-up are essential to ensure that health conditions are identified early and that residents receive appropriate care over time.

Additional funding is needed to expand and sustain these services, with a focus on children and other high-risk populations, and to ensure long-term follow-up through the Maui Health Registry for up to five thousand individuals. Wildfire-related health effects may emerge or persist for months or years after exposure. Sustained investment is necessary to monitor long-term outcomes, support community trust, and ensure equitable access to services, including for immigrant and underserved communities.

Strengthening these efforts not only supports Maui's recovery but also builds statewide capacity to respond to future climate-driven disasters.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure. The climate crisis is a health crisis.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Kiefer, MD MPH

Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine, JABSOM

Co-Founder: The Climate Change & Health Working Group

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Chris Todd, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 2:00 pm

Conference Room 308 and Via Videoconference

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2340, HD1, MAKING AN EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII.

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, Reps. Miyake and Yamashita of Maui, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Christine Andrews, and I am a long-term resident of Wailuku, Maui. I write to you today in **strong support of HB 2340, HD1**, Making an Emergency Appropriation to the University of Hawaii, which makes an emergency appropriation for fiscal year 2025–2026 to the University of Hawaii to expand and sustain the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry.

The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study, or MauiWES, engages a wide array of partners led by the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization and the John A. Burns School of Medicine with numerous community and health organizations. The study addresses a critical gap in knowledge about the effects of environmental hazards and socioeconomic challenges on the health of those affected by the wildfires. The focus lies on collecting data and biospecimens from over 1000 residents impacted by the wildfires, providing vital insights into the short- and long-term health outcomes such as chronic diseases, mental health issues, and the broader social implications.

The mission of the MauiWES extends beyond immediate analysis. It endeavors to establish a resilient health model, integrating biomarker and socioeconomic data to forecast individual-level risks and inform preventative strategies. This comprehensive approach aims not only to address the current crisis but also to create a blueprint for future disaster response, prioritizing health and well-being in the wake of natural disasters.

The 2025 MauiWES/UHERO Report, “From Crisis to Recovery: Health and Resilience Two Years After the Maui Wildfires” shares that data collected from the full cohort of 1,800 adults through January 2025 echoes the previous year’s findings and reveals the long arc of recovery. Overall, 41% of adults report worse health compared to the previous year. Half show depressive symptoms, 26% report moderate-to-severe anxiety, and 4.2% have had suicidal thoughts in the past month. Meanwhile, 74% have elevated or hypertensive blood pressure, and over a quarter show reduced lung function. While insurance coverage has improved significantly, access to care remains a persistent barrier. About one in three participants report difficulty scheduling appointments or getting prescriptions, especially for chronic and respiratory conditions. The social recovery is equally uneven. About 41% of adults are still living in temporary housing, and 25% remain unemployed but actively looking for work. Despite these struggles, 61% report high levels of support from family and friends—demonstrating the continued strength of community bonds.

Children in the MauiWES study show signs of physical healing, but their emotional well-being raises serious red flags. Over half (51%) of children ages 8-18 screen positive for depression, with 22% in the severe range. About 30% report anxiety symptoms, and nearly 45% still show signs of PTSD—4.3% at severe levels. One in four report low self-esteem, and many are experiencing functional challenges at school and home. Cardiopulmonary health is also a growing concern. One in three children had elevated or high blood pressure, with Filipino youth most affected—15.4% falling into Stage 2 hypertension. Nearly 20% of children have impaired breathing capacity, especially among Asian and Filipino children. Girls show slightly more severe lung issues. These findings point to the need for sustained investment in pediatric care, trauma-informed school services, clean indoor air, and culturally tailored mental health programs. Without early intervention, these risks could become lifelong health burdens.

I strongly support the work of the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study being done with its partner organizations and request that you **vote in support** of the Maui community and its recovery by **supporting HB 2340, HD1**.

Mahalo,

Christine Andrews, JD
Wailuku, Maui

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 12:56:45 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Martina Kamaka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Todd and the rest of the House Finance Committee

My name is Dr. Martina Kamaka and I am a Family physician who is helping to volunteer in the MauiWES study. I am writing in **strong support of HB2340 HD1**, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

As a physician, I have been concerned with the increased amount of pulmonary disease and the abnormally high levels of heavy metals, on top of the high rates of mental health disorders in the survivors. We know from the World trade center experience that diseases can show up years later. We need longitudinal studies like this to help to prepare for, and prevent if possible, long term health consequences. For that, we need data like is being studied in the MauiWES study.

The impacts of the wildfires did not end in August 2023. Many residents continue to experience ongoing health concerns, including respiratory problems, mental health challenges, and uncertainty about long-term effects, especially for children and other medically vulnerable individuals.

Programs like the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry provide trusted, community-based care, early detection, and referrals that would otherwise be inaccessible to many families. Continued funding will help ensure that people are not forgotten and that health issues are identified before they become emergencies.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **support HB2340** and ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and commitment to the health of our communities.

Sincerely,
Martina Kamaka, MD

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 1:47:11 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pauli Amornkul	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Pauli Amornkul, MD, MPH. I am a medical epidemiologist who started volunteering with MauiWES last year. I connect with study participants in person or by phone to help them understand their test results, answer questions, and help to connect them with wrap around services as needed. I write in **strong support of HB 2340** to provide funding to sustain and expand the important work done by the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

I started volunteering with MauiWES close to 18 months after the fires. Things were still raw. Life remained chaotic and unsettled for all of the participants I spoke with. Participants repeatedly told me how grateful they were for all that MauiWES has been doing for them. Participants felt they had been forgotten by the rest of the world as FEMA was winding down despite continued housing and life instability. “The public has moved on.” There were and continue to be many tears during my consultations. Now, nearly a year later, the sentiment remains unchanged - deep gratitude for MauiWES’ continued strong presence, advocacy, service, and support.

MauiWES has been able to connect participants with health insurance, mental health services, and screen them for early detection of potential negative health outcomes. We have detected new onset diabetes, detected blood pressures in the stage 2 hypertension range, and have had to send several participants straight to urgent care or the emergency department - in time to prevent much worse health outcomes.

I am privileged and grateful to be working *with* such a team of professionals, working *for* a community in need, and working *toward* improved quality of life for those who have been traumatized and whose lives have been upended by the fires. Many health and research questions have arisen from the data collected. The persistent elevated urine heavy metal levels is deeply concerning and begs continued surveillance, prospective monitoring, and further research.

The impact of the wildfires did not end in August 2023. Many residents continue to experience ongoing health concerns, including respiratory problems, mental health challenges, and uncertainty about long-term effects, especially for children and other medically vulnerable individuals.

Programs like the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry provide trusted, community-based care, early detection, and referrals that would otherwise be inaccessible to

many families. Continued funding will help ensure that people are not forgotten and that health issues are identified before they become emergencies.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **support HB 2340** and ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and commitment to the health of our communities.

Sincerely,
Pauli N. Amornkul, MD, MPH

HB-2340-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 2:11:16 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Freddie Lao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Freddie Lao, and I've been volunteering with the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study for the past year. I am an undergraduate student majoring in kinesiology and public health at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa on a pre-med track. I am writing to express my strong support for HB2340 and the continued funding of both the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

Over the past year, I had the opportunity to work alongside a dedicated team of researchers, healthcare professionals, and fellow students like myself who are committed to serving Maui's communities. Through this work, I have interacted with families and residents who are still living with the burden of the 2023 wildfires. What stands out most is that recovery is not just about rebuilding homes or infrastructure — but also about protecting long-term health. Many residents continue to voice concerns about breathing difficulties, sleep disruption, anxiety, and uncertainty about what prolonged exposure may mean for their future. These worries are real, and without structured programs in place, many individuals would not know where to turn for reliable information or follow-up care.

The value of these initiatives goes beyond data collection. They create a bridge between affected residents and the healthcare system by offering screenings, referrals, and culturally grounded outreach that builds trust. For families with limited resources or transportation, these programs serve as one of their points of contact with preventive health services. In my experience volunteering, I have seen how simply having someone listen, document concerns, and provide direction can ease fear and encourage proactive care.

Sustained funding allows this work to remain continuous rather than temporary. Health impacts from environmental disasters can surface months or even years later, and without consistent monitoring, warning signs may be missed. Investing in these efforts now helps reduce long-term medical costs, strengthens community resilience, and demonstrates that the well-being of Maui residents remains a priority long after the immediate crisis has passed.

I respectfully ask that you support HB2340 so these outreach programs can continue serving the people who rely on them. Mahalo for your leadership and for your commitment to the health and future of our communities.

Mahalo nui loa,
Freddie Lao