



‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

LATE

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education
Friday, February 13, 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 – MAKING AN EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa is in strong support for HB 2340, 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 SB 2969 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 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.

Governor Green is supportive of the overall intent of making emergency appropriations for this project.

Thank you for your consideration.

LATE

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 9:21:06 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Councilmember Tamara Paltin	Councilmember West Maui	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato and members,

My name is Tamara Paltin, and I am the Maui County Councilmember for the West Maui (Lahaina) residency area. 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 know of many families that have come to rely on these mental health and medical testing services to move on from the terror and trauma they experienced during the August 8, 2023 wildfires and the recovery up to this point. Entire families have built trust and bonds with the medical professionals serving out of the Lahaina Comprehensive Health Center. We have so many important choices to make in helping our people to heal and although they are not currently able to reach everyone, they are making a difference for a large portion of our population to carry on. People are still struggling with the day to day, with meeting FEMA requirements to keep their housing, struggling to find long term permanent housing, struggling with the entirety of the rebuild process, struggling with the cost of living, new jobs, new career paths and losing so much of our community along the way whether it is because of having to move away or the loss of lives of our loved ones... each new death in our community hits harder... another friend or family member not making it home, not crossing the finish line, not seeing a completely rebuilt Lahaina with those of us remaining. It's a heavy burden to carry every day, hour and minute that you can help ease.

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 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,

Councilmember Tamara Paltin West Maui



Hawaii Medical Association

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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Rep. Terez Amato, Vice Chair

Date: February 13, 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 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 Hawaii'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, Alike, 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



House Committee on Higher Education
Rep. Andrew Garrett, Chair
Rep. Terez Amato, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Friday, February 13, 2026

ACS CAN SUPPORTS HB 2340 – 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 – 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.



February 12, 2026

To: COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Rep. Terez Amato, Vice Chair

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

Hrg: February 13, 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

Testimony of
Jonathan Ching
Head of Government Relations

Before:
House Committee on Higher Education
The Honorable Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
The Honorable Terez Amato, Vice Chair

Friday, February 13, 2026
2:00 p.m.
Via Videoconference
Conference Room 309

Re: HB 2340, Relating to Making an Emergency Appropriation to the University of Hawaii.

Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and committee members, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2340, which would provide critical funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES) and the Maui Health Registry.

Kaiser Permanente Hawai'i SUPPORTS HB 2340.

Kaiser Permanente Hawai'i is one of the nation's largest not-for-profit health plans, serving 12.6 million members nationwide, and more than 271,000 members in Hawai'i. In Hawai'i, more than 4,200 dedicated employees and more than 650 Hawai'i Permanente Medical Group physicians and advance practice providers work in our integrated health system to provide our members coordinated care and coverage. Kaiser Permanente Hawai'i has more than 20+ medical facilities, including our award-winning Moanalua Medical Center. We continue to provide high-quality coordinated care for our members and deliver on our commitment to improve the health of our members and the people living in the communities we serve.

Kaiser Permanente has invested significantly in this work because we have seen firsthand the long-term health needs emerging after the Maui wildfires. To date, Kaiser Permanente has invested \$587,500 in project support for MauiWES to help ensure survivors receive immediate screening, referrals, and long-term follow-up care.

Kaiser Permanente has been encouraged by strong engagement in MauiWES: more than 2,000 Maui residents have already participated, with 41% following up with healthcare providers after initial study screenings and 16% accessing mental health services for the first time. This demonstrates how essential MauiWES is for connecting survivors to care, especially those who are under-insured or historically underserved.

HB 2340 would ensure continuity of these services, including:

- Free health screenings, toxic exposure testing, and care coordination for survivors
- Expansion of pediatric services, including mental health and exposure testing for 300 children annually
- Enrollment of 2,000 residents per year into the Maui Health Registry for long-term monitoring
- Community forums, data sharing, and culturally grounded engagement reaching 1,000+ residents annually

Importantly, this study does more than document harm; it actively reduces health inequities, strengthens trust in healthcare, and supports resilience in communities disproportionately impacted, including immigrant families and Native Hawaiian residents.

Kaiser Permanente is committed to continuing our collaboration with UHERO, the University of Hawai'i Foundation, the John A. Burns School of Medicine, and Maui's community partners, but philanthropic and private support cannot sustain this critical public health infrastructure alone. State funding is essential to ensure that:

- Survivors receive ongoing monitoring and follow-up care,
- Children receive early detection for emerging health conditions, and
- Maui has the data needed to shape evidence-based recovery and future disaster response.

We request your support of HB 2340 to ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and long-term protection they deserve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important measure.



House Committee on Higher Education

Testimony on HB 2340

Making an Emergency Appropriation to the University of Hawai'i

February 13, 2026

2:00pm

Room 309

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**, 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

Making An Emergency Appropriation To The University Of Hawai'i

Aloha Chair Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the House Committee on Higher Education,

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,

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.

COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION
Rep. Andrew Takuya Garrett, Chair
Rep. Terez Amato, Vice Chair

LATE

Friday, February 13, 2026
2:00 PM – Room 309

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB 2340 – MAKING AN EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Pedro Haro, and I am the Executive Director of the American Lung Association in Hawai'i. On behalf of our organization and the thousands of Hawai'i residents we serve, I am writing in strong support of HB 2340, which provides vital supplemental funding to sustain and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES) and the Maui Health Registry.

The American Lung Association's mission is to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. In the aftermath of the August 2023 wildfires, our concern for the long-term respiratory health of the Maui community remains a top priority. The urban fire in Lāhainā was an unprecedented environmental event, releasing a complex mixture of heavy metals, synthetic chemicals, and toxic particulates. The respiratory risks associated with these exposures do not vanish when the smoke clears; they often evolve into chronic conditions over decades.

The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry are essential to protecting the community for the following reasons:

1. **Tracking Chronic Respiratory Illness and Latency:** Early data has already highlighted the immediate respiratory distress felt by survivors. However, environmental exposures from urban fires—which include lead, arsenic, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs)—are known to have significant latency periods before manifesting as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), pulmonary fibrosis, or lung cancer [1]. This registry provides the longitudinal tracking necessary to identify these trends early.
2. **Protecting Medically Vulnerable Populations:** Children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing lung conditions are at the highest risk from the lingering toxic legacy of the fires. Research into wildfire smoke and ash exposure consistently shows that vulnerable groups experience higher rates of emergency department visits for respiratory issues long after the initial event [2]. By expanding this study to 3,000 individuals, we ensure that a representative portion of these high-risk groups is monitored.
3. **Addressing Funding Gaps and Data Continuity:** As federal resources become more uncertain, it is imperative that the State of Hawai'i steps in to ensure this work is not interrupted. Gaps in longitudinal

data collection significantly undermine the ability of public health officials to establish causal links between disaster exposure and health outcomes [3]. We cannot afford to lose the momentum or the trust that the MauiWES team has built with over 2,000 participants to date.

4. Informed Public Health Policy and Future Preparedness: The findings from this registry will inform future public health responses, helping the American Lung Association and our state partners develop better air quality protections and clinical guidelines for future wildfire events in Hawai'i and beyond [4].

We owe it to the people of Maui to ensure they are not forgotten as the years pass. This registry is more than a study; it is a critical health safety net. On behalf of the American Lung Association in Hawai'i, I respectfully urge your committees to support HB 2340.

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

Sincerely,

Pedro Haro
Executive Director
American Lung Association in Hawai'i

Pedro.Haro@lung.org

Citations:

1. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2022). "The Chemistry of Fires at the Wildland-Urban Interface."
 2. Rice, M. B., et al. (2021). "Respiratory Impacts of Wildland Fire Smoke: Future Challenges and Policy Opportunities." *Annals of the American Thoracic Society*.
 3. Lurie, N., et al. (2013). "Research as a Part of Public Health Emergency Response." *New England Journal of Medicine*.
- Cascio, W. E. (2018). "Wildland fire smoke and human health." *Science of The Total Environment*



LATE

Hawai'i Community Health

info@hawaiicommunityhealth.org | www.hawaiicommunityhealth.org

February 11, 2026

To: House HED - Committee on Higher Education

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

Aloha Chair Takuya Garrett, Vice Chair Amato, 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 help support 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 + Registry**, while coordinating statewide and community-based efforts through Hawai'i Community Health to support residents, providers, and partners.

From this direct involvement, 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, and **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 emergencies**, support continuity of care, and reach individuals who might otherwise face barriers to access. **HB 2340 is essential not only to expand MauiWES and the Registry, but also to help community partners providing interventions, follow-up, education, and coordinated care**.

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 with support for helpers as well as communities in need
- Distribution of PPE, medical and oral health supplies, clothing, and essentials
- Education and training for healthcare providers; educators; students in nursing, medical, and mental health programs; parents; and the community, including continuing education and professional development
- 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 health monitoring



*Much of our work referenced, and more, occurs through **individual volunteer efforts and without access to sustainable funding**. A band-aid on a gaping wound- this valuable work reflects only a portion of what is possible. As an ongoing volunteer and coordinator in crisis recovery since 2020, I can attest that it is now rare to find committed volunteer help on Maui as many are living amongst affected communities and needing to mālama their 'ohana and focus on self-care. With stable resources and strong partnerships: new paths, early interventions, and our prevention models can be expanded and sustained to better protect community health while also supporting Maui's long-term economic recovery and growth.*

Every point of contact with our community has mattered.

I have seen the impact - shared in the tears and smiles - firsthand over years. This work has always been a collective effort and HCH extends a big mahalo to the MauiWES Team (*led by Directors Drs. Alike Maunakea and Ruben Juarez*) and partners for such tireless and incredible work.

HB 2340 represents a necessary investment in evidence-based, cultural and community-centered care that honors the lived realities of Maui residents and strengthens Hawai'i's capacity to respond to disaster-related health impacts now and in the future. Together, we are making Hawai'i 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.

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. Please reach out anytime if I can be of further assistance.

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



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. Right now, we have around 200 children in our network of care. **I want 2000**. 1.5 million allows us to maintain the current cohort but does not allow us to expand. 3 million helps us get closer to that goal. We have other projects we want to start that require more investment, which would functionally eradicate the access to care crisis in west rural maui and this funding can help go to that as well.

Early intervention matters and is far cheaper. 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. While 1.5 million is a good start 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 the support to continue showing up for them the way they deserve.

Thank you for taking the time to listen.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. M. J.', positioned below the thank you message.

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

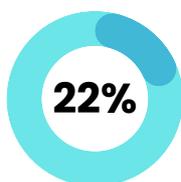
CHANGES OVER TIME (ADULT FOLLOW-UP) (n = 424 with Year-1 → Year-2 data)

- 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

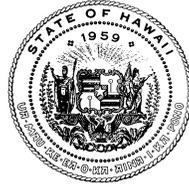
Highest burden observed among:

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

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Marian Tsuji, Deputy Director
Behavioral Health Administration

WEBSITE:

scmh.hawaii.gov

EMAIL ADDRESS:

[doh.scmhchairperson@
doh.hawaii.gov](mailto: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.

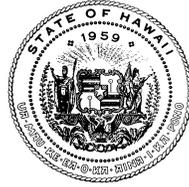
Sincerely,



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

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Behavioral Health Administration

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Dr. Ruben Juarez

Dr. Alika 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 'Katerine Aumer', written in a cursive style.

Katherine Aumer, Ph.D.

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 12:35:14 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sirun(Christina) Yu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Sirun(Christina) Yu, and I am a community health intern working with the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry. I am writing to express my strong support for HB2340, which would provide essential funding to continue and expand these programs.

Through my work as an intern, I have been closely involved in outreach, follow-up calls, and resource coordination for wildfire survivors. In this role, I have witnessed how the impacts of the August 2023 wildfires continue to shape people’s daily lives, long after the immediate emergency ended. Many residents describe persistent respiratory symptoms, heightened anxiety, disrupted sleep, and ongoing worry about what exposure may mean for their long-term health and for their children. These concerns often surface quietly, in moments when people finally feel safe enough to talk.

The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry create a rare bridge between research, care, and community trust. They offer residents a place where their experiences are taken seriously, health concerns are monitored over time, and referrals are made before problems escalate. For many families, especially those already facing barriers to care, these programs provide access and continuity that would otherwise remain out of reach.

This work has shaped my own future path. Working with Maui communities has deepened my commitment to trauma-informed, culturally responsive mental health care, and it has strengthened my goal of becoming a psychologist to continue serving communities affected by disaster and displacement. Continued funding through HB2340 would allow this work to grow in a way that honors residents’ experiences and protects their long-term well-being.

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

Mahalo for your time, your consideration, and your commitment to the health of Hawai‘i’s communities.

Sincerely,
Sirun(Christina) Yu

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

Aloha Chairs and Members of the Health and Education Committees,

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). I submit this testimony in strong support of **HB 2340**, 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 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

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 6:32:26 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lisa M Vallin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Higher Education Committee,

My name is Lisa M. Vallin, and I am an educator and a community member. 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.

While I was not directly impacted by the fires, several of my close friends and students lost their homes, and witnessing their ongoing recovery has made it clear that the devastation did not end in August 2023. Many families continue to face lasting physical and mental health concerns, along with uncertainty about long-term effects, especially for 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 referrals that would otherwise be inaccessible to many families. Continued funding will help ensure that residents 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,
Lisa M. Vallin

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 6:33:49 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jenifer Sunrise Winter	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Higher Education Committee,

My name is Jenifer Winter and I am an educator. 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 have worked with many students who were deeply affected by the Maui fires. 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 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,
Jenifer Winter

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 7:07:28 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Samia Valeria Ozorio Dutra	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Higher Education Committee,

My name is Samia Dutra, and I am a nurse and nurse faculty of the University of Hawaii. 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 have been volunteering my time in the weekends soon after the wildfires happened and it is clear how the need of support and resources might change in nature with time, but are adamant. Soon after the fires the participants would say "this is the first time I am getting my health screened since the fires happened" and more recently we have mothers with aggravating needs. This happened because they were so worried in taking care of their children and husband, that (once they felt things were stable with their children and husband), they came to us and we realized how much help and care they needed. Some may say that time makes things better, but we see a raise of urgency for different needs and community members throughout time.

While we are trying to calm different "fires", we are also involving students (nursing and medical students). Showing that this hybrid initiative of Maui Wildfire Study and the Maui Health Registry supports workforce development by providing training opportunities. This leads to connection with the communities while discovering different ways to support different needs.

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 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,

Samia Dutra

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 7:08:52 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daewon Kim	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Higher Education Committee,

My name is Daewon Kim, and I am a resident. 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.

As an economic student and also economist, the wildfires affect to the residences very harmful to their life well-being. But, we can manage by lots of legislations or researches.

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 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,
Daewon Kim

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 7:25:43 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 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

Aloha mai kākou,

'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 visit with us.

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

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 or Dr. Blaidstell?

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

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 7:44:37 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 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 SB 2969, 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 last week 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.

Continued funding for these programs 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,
Peggy Latare

Aloha ladies and gentlemen of the committee,

My name is Amy and MauiWES saved my life.

During the breathing test they asked me why I couldn't take a deep breath. I thought it was because I just turned 50 & was tired. But when they took my blood they said my hemoglobin was so low that it didn't even register on their machine & told me to go immediately to urgent care or the hospital. I went to the hospital, was put in ICU and ended up getting 5 blood transfusions. I am so grateful that I went that day and I am still here for my kids. Most of us are so busy taking care of others that we forget about ourselves. Please help support HB 2340 so MauiWES can continue doing their health check-ups that literally saved my life.

Mahalo nui loa

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 9:13:51 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Richard Ries	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Representatives,

As a licensed Clinical Psychologist, and the former chairman of the Hawai'i State Council on Mental Health, I have been eagerly tracking the contributions of MauiWes.

While they are a research entity, they are also providing crucial mental health care and evaluation for the people most impacted by the historic and tragic Lahaina Wildfires.

Real people, real families and neighbors have access to medical and psychological recovery resources because of this organization.

Often funding agencies miss seeing how much is saved financially and in terms of social costs by prevention efforts. MauiWes as a program is both offering significant services to this in need, but also preventing otherwise predictable harm that follows kind after the stories remain newsworthy to the public.

Please support this organization's capacity to continue giving care.

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 9:47:22 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kyle Zhang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Higher Education Committee,

My name is Kyle, and I am a doctoral student and research assistant at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. I am writing in strong support of **HB 2340**.

I have been part of the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study from its early stages—collecting data, coordinating participant sampling, and working through every step of the research process alongside our team. This experience has given me a deeply personal understanding of why this study must continue.

The truth is, the health consequences of wildfire smoke exposure are often irreversible—and they do not appear overnight. In large-scale cohort studies like ours, it can take years, sometimes a decade or more, before certain conditions fully manifest, particularly cancers and other chronic diseases linked to toxic exposure. Of course, no one hopes that any of our participants will develop these illnesses. But the scientific reality is that prolonged exposure to hazardous smoke creates risks that may only become visible long after the fires have been extinguished. That is precisely why sustained, long-term monitoring is not just valuable—it is essential.

If we look back ten years from now at the work we are doing today, I am confident we will see it as one of the most meaningful public health efforts in Hawai‘i’s history—and a study that contributes significantly to how the world understands and responds to wildfire disasters. This is the kind of research that has the potential to leave a lasting mark, not only for Maui but for communities everywhere facing similar threats.

As a researcher, I am deeply passionate about this work. Beyond the immediate health services we provide—screenings, referrals, early detection—our findings can equip policymakers with the evidence-based insights needed to develop more effective disaster preparedness and response strategies. This is science in service of people, and it deserves to continue.

I respectfully urge you to support **HB 2340** and ensure that the residents of Maui receive the long-term care and attention their health demands.

Mahalo for your time and commitment to our communities.

Sincerely,
Kyle

Aloha Chair and members of the Higher Education Committee,

My name is Dr. Martina Kamaka and I am a board-certified Family Physician and Professor at the John A. Burns School of Medicine. I am writing in **strong support of HB2340**, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES) and the Maui Health Registry.

I have been a physician volunteer with the MauiWES study since soon after it began and I also contribute as a scientific advisory member. The study has had over 3000 individual encounters, including both initial and follow-up visits. As we've learned, the impacts of the wildfires did not end in August 2023. MauiWES has been screening wildfire survivors looking at health parameters such as blood pressure, blood and urine chemistries, pulmonary (lung) screening tests, mental health screenings and even heavy metals. We are seeing that 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. As a physician, I have been concerned to see elevated levels of heavy metals in many of the survivors and we are still uncertain as to long term consequences of these. In addition, we are seeing possible long term adverse impacts on lung function and mental health.

The Maui medical community is not equipped to do this important kind of screening and follow up on their own. We need to ensure that Maui wildfire impacted community members are cared for, and that includes continuous longitudinal screening to look for long term health effects and to partner with local physicians on prevention and treatment. The long-term health effects from the World Trade Center disaster have taught us that these types of exposures and traumas require long term follow up since problems don't always appear right away. Support from the longitudinal screenings provided by MauiWES go a long way in assisting not only patients, but also medical providers in tracking possible long-term consequences. In addition, MauiWES has worked hard to ensure impacted survivors have follow-up care with primary care providers and mental health professionals. For example, in our first year, many participants had lost access to medical care and although it was not part of our study protocol, MauiWES worked hard to find medical care and mental health support for those 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 not only help reach out to those who have not yet participated but also ensure that people are not forgotten and that health issues are identified and dealt with before they become expensive and health 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. Mahalo for your time, consideration, and commitment to the health of our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martina Kamaka', with a horizontal line underneath.

Martina Kamaka, M

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/11/2026 11:43:53 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pauli Amornkul	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

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 SB 2969 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 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,
Pauli N. Amornkul, MD, MPH

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 8:16:38 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jillian Strong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Higher Education Committee,

My name is Jillian Strong and I am a resident and community member. While I currently live in Honolulu, I was born and raised on Maui. 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.

As mentioned, I was born and raised on Maui. While I am not from Lahaina or Kula specifically, anyone from Maui will tell you that any part of Maui is both home and community. In my current occupation at the University of Hawai'i, I work directly with students who were impacted by the 2023 Maui Wildfires. Every day I connect with these students and hear both their stories of survival and resilience, while also understanding their drive for pursuing a higher educational degree. Ultimately, they want to return home and give back to their community that gave them so much. In the first few years after the wildfires, it was challenging for both the students and their families, as they experienced the after effects of trauma. Despite this, they continued on. The strength of these students and families is immensely admirable. I find myself in a position of humility as I get to work alongside these students to reach their goals of giving back to their communities through their education.

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 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,
Jillian Strong, M.Ed.

Aloha Chair Garrett and Members of the Higher Education Committee,

My name is Daniela Bond-Smith. I am a Research Economist at the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization. My testimony is submitted as an individual and not as a representative of the University of Hawai'i. I wish to express my strong support for HB2340 – MAKING AN EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII. The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES) provides the State, local organizations, and affected community members with critical information needed to address imminent community needs, inform the ongoing recovery process, and support better planning for future disaster preparedness.

Based on my professional experience with survey and health research, I can assure you that this project is essential. There is no alternative available data that could be used to comprehensively monitor and analyze the long-term health impacts of the Maui wildfires. The project also does an exceptional job in working with the community to ensure that community priorities are honored and affected community members are referred to essential care.

I hereby ask for your support and allocation of state funding for HB2340.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Dr. Daniela Bond-Smith

Aloha Chair and members of the Higher Education Committee,

My name is Aaron Ramirez, and I am a healthcare worker. 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.

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 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,

Aaron Ramirez
University of Hawai'i SONDH, Nursing Student Volunteer

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 1:39:50 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marsha Lowery ND	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair,

My name is Dr. Marsha Lowery, and I am a naturopathic physician on Maui. I am writing to urge your support for HB2340, which would fund the continuation and expansion of the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

While the fires of August 2023 may be in the past, their effects are not. Many individuals and families across Maui are only now beginning to recognize health issues linked to smoke, toxic exposure, and trauma. Respiratory symptoms, stress-related conditions, and concerns about long-term health impacts—especially for children and other vulnerable populations—remain.

The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry play a vital role in tracking these outcomes, providing early intervention, and connecting residents with appropriate care.

For

many, these programs represent the only accessible pathway to monitoring and addressing fire-related health concerns. Continued funding ensures accountability, prevention, and long-term protection for affected communities.

I respectfully ask that you support HB2340 and help ensure that Maui residents receive the follow-up, care, and safeguards needed in the years ahead.

Mahalo for your leadership and dedication to the health of our communities.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marsha Lowery

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 2:21:09 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Annie Alvelais	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Higher Education Committee,

My name is Annie Alvelais, and I am a Maui community member. 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.

The tragedy of the 2023 wildfires birthed incredible organizations and community initiatives that have the potential to create long-term change for the entire Maui community. MauiWES is one of those initiatives, which has stepped in ways that no other entity has to protect the long-term health of those who were impacted.

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 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.

Aloha mai,

Annie

LATE

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/12/2026 8:22:33 PM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chad K Taniguchi	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The fires are over, but effects continue. We need to care for and understand the survivors.

LATE

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 9:11:47 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 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!

LATE

HB-2340

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 10:08:38 AM

Testimony for HED on 2/13/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Binh Le	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators in the Education and Health and Human Services committees,

My name is Dr. Binh Le, and I am a UHERO researcher who volunteers with the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES). I am writing in strong support of HB2340, which would provide critical funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

I have travelled to Maui with the MauiWES project to provide volunteer data entries and Vietnamese translation to wildfire victims. I have met with a Vietnamese grandmother (around 76 years old) and a couple (around 55 years old) who totally lost their house and everything after the fires. They did not have a house to live in, and they were living with their relatives when I was there. They said they do not have a sustainable place to stay and depend on their relatives. If their relatives do not want them to stay there, they have to move to another location. They do not have a stable income. The couple told me that they earned around \$1,500 per month and were receiving food stamps assistance.

I think the fire victims need the government's support. Through the MauiWES, you can support those people, at least with the physical and mental health assessment. I also feel that they were happy when they received \$100 in cash from the MauiWES project.

The Lahaina wildfire has a long-term impact on the Maui community. Many residents migrated to Honolulu, the mainland, or another island after the fires. Many residents who were still in Lahaina continue facing ongoing health concerns - PTSD or respiratory concerns.

The MauiWES and the Maui Health Registry are community-based projects that provide accessible health services to vulnerable groups. When I helped with the data entries, I recognised that some participants did not even have health insurance. With growing uncertainty about federal funding, continued support from the state and local agencies will ensure that the vulnerable community is not left behind.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support HB2340 to ensure that Maui residents receive the care they need and are listened to.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Best,

Dr. Binh Le

UHERO Researcher and Adjunct Faculty in the School of Business, Chaminade University