



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Tuesday, March 3, 2026 at 10:17 a.m.

By

Denise Eby Konan, Dean
College of Social Services

and

Vassilis Syrmos, PhD
Interim Provost
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 2969 SD1 – RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UH) is in strong support of the intent of SB 2969 SD1. SB 2969 SD1 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 SD1 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. SB 2969 SD1 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.



**STATE HEALTH PLANNING
AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH - KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO

JOSH GREEN, MD
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII

KENNETH S. FINK, MD, MGA, MPH
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOHN C. (JACK) LEWIN, MD
ADMINISTRATOR

March 2, 2026

TO: SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair
Honorable Members

FROM: John C. (Jack) Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA, and Sr. Advisor to
Governor Josh Green, MD on Healthcare Innovation

**RE: SB 2969-SD1-- RELATING TO RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE
EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY**

HEARING: Tuesday, March 3, 2026 @ 10:17 am; Conference Room 211

POSITION: SUPPORT with COMMENTS

Testimony:

The State Health Planning and Development Agency is in **strong support of SB 2969-SD1**, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

After 9/11, the World Trade Center Health Registry found 67% of adult enrollees reported new or worsened respiratory symptoms and 16% screened positive for probable PTSD. Urban wildfire disasters show similar patterns: after the Fort McMurray fire, 33.9% of workers reported a fire-related health conditions, including respiratory and mental health problems. More recently, California data from the 2020 wildfire season linked increases in wildfire smoke (PM2.5) to increased mental health emergency department visits in the days after exposure. If the State of Hawaii waits any longer, we miss the chance for early detection and prevention and people will show up later in crisis, sicker and harder to treat.

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 community-based care and early detection that would otherwise be inaccessible to many families. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support

SB 2969-SD1: testimony of SHPDA (2026), continued.

SB 2969-SD1 and guarantee that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Thank you for hearing SB 2969-SD1.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

■ -- Jack Lewin, MD, Administrator, SHPDA



'Ahahui o nā Kauka

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2025-2026 Advocacy Committee

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February 28, 2026

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

Group Testimony in support of SB2969 SD1

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.



Hawaii Medical Association

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

Date: March 3, 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 SB 2969 SD1 RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY. University of Hawai'i; Maui Wildfire Exposure Study; Maui Health Registry; Appropriation
Position: Support

This measure would appropriate funds for the University of Hawai'i to expand and sustain services provided by the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (WES) 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

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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.

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Linda Rosehill, JD, Government Relations • Marc Alexander, Executive Director



Hawai'i Psychological Association

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COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Senator Donovan M. Del Cruz Chair

Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki,

Tuesday, March 3, 2026 - 10:17 AM – Rm 211 and via VIDEO CONFERENCE

The Hawaii Psychological Association testifies strongly supports SB 2969, SD1

This measure appropriates moneys to the University of Hawai'i to expand and sustain a multiethnic cohort study regarding the 2023 Maui wildfires.

The full impact of the Maui wildfires and recovery efforts on the mental health of the residents of Maui and the resulting economic and emotional aftermath is still yet to be fully appreciated. Of particular concern is the stress this disaster has had on the capacities of Hawai'i's mental health providers – demand for which is already at crisis-level shortages.

We support very focused efforts on determining and studying the mental health and well-being of those communities impacted; and helping us chart a path toward full recovery and prevention.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alex Lichten, Ph.D.

Chair, HPA Legislative Action Committee



March 1, 2026

To: COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

Re: SUPPORT of SB2969 SD1 RELATING TO MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY
AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY

Hrg: March 3, 2026 at 10:17 AM

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 SB2969 SD1 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 SB 2969 SD1 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". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Holly Kessler
Executive Director



Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i

March 1, 2026

**Letter of Support for SB2969
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 SB2969**, 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.

SB2969 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 **SB2969**. 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



Hawai'i Community Health

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March 1, 2026

To: Senate Ways and Means Committee (WAM)

Re: Strong Support for SB 2969 – UH 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 SB 2969**, 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

SB 2969 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.

SB 2969 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 SB 2969.** 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,

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





fightcancer.org

Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Moriwaki, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Tuesday, March 3, 2026

ACS CAN SUPPORTS SB 2969 SD1 – RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY.

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

Thank you for the opportunity in **SUPPORT** of SB 2969 SD1 – RELATING TO RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY which appropriates moneys 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.

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 11:17:01 AM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Pedro Haro	Testifying for American Lung Association in Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF SB 2969 – MAKING AN APPROPRIATION FOR THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND THE MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY

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 SB 2969, 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 SB 2969. 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*



Testimony of **Lahaina Strong**
Before the Senate Committees on
Education and the Health and Human Services Committees

In Consideration of Senate Bill No. 2969
**RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH
REGISTRY**

Aloha Chairs Kim, San Buenaventura, and members of the Senate Education and Health and Human Services Committees,

We are submitting this testimony on behalf of Lahaina Strong, and we strongly support SB2969 which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry..

We speak as Lahaina fire survivors, West Maui residents, and participants of the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry. As we all know, 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.

Lahaina Strong respectfully urges you to PASS SB2969 to ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Me ke aloha nui,

Paele Kiakona, Jordan Ruidas, Courtney Lazo

On behalf of Lahaina Strong

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/27/2026 5:31:55 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

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

Comments:

SB2969

Strongly Support funding

This legislature recognizes that this is the only access to data 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.

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. 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.

"From Crisis to Recovery: Health and Resilience Two Years 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 and yor whole team of VOLUNTEERSfor your continued service!

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 8:37:44 AM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

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

Comments:

My name is Dr. Peggy Latare. 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 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 3 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 that has impressed me 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, MD

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and Members of the Ways and Means 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 SB2969 SD1 – RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY. 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. Finally, it is a prudent, forward-looking investment that provides critical information for strengthening recovery outcomes and helping contain longer-term public expenditure.

I hereby ask for your support and allocation of state funding for SB2969 SD1.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Dr. Daniela Bond-Smith

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 12:56:41 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Salazar Hyman	Testifying for Tagnawa	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is **Michelle Hyman**, and I am a community member who has been working to support Filipino fire survivors since August 2023. I am writing in **strong support of SB2969**, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

I volunteer with the organization Tagnawa, and we have focused on supporting Filipino fire survivors since the fire. Many of our community members risk "falling through the gaps" in services. Maui WES/Maui REG are one of only a few organizations that have intentionally reached out to support us to in assuring that our Filipino communities are not forgotten.

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 SB2969** 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,
Michelle Salazar Hyman

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 6:25:18 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rebekah Uccellini Kuby	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Rebekah Uccellini, and I am the Executive Director of the Makai Foundation. I have worked with thousands of fire survivors across five states and with more than 1,300 Lahaina Fire-survivors closely since the August 2023 Maui fires. I am writing in strong support of SB2969, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

One of the greatest gaps in post-wildfire recovery is the lack of long-term, longitudinal research on the physical, mental, and emotional health impacts of fire exposure. Because these studies are so limited, communities are often left without the data needed to guide best practices, secure long-term funding, and build systems of care that truly meet survivors' needs.

Maui has a rare and important opportunity to help change that. The data being collected locally is invaluable — not only for the long-term health of Maui residents, but also for informing future wildfire response and recovery efforts in other communities. The lessons learned here could help shape stronger public health protocols for years to come.

I have seen firsthand what is lost when this research is absent. After the CZU Fire, I participated in a small study that highlighted the importance of biotoxin binders after debris cleanup. But because there was no formal longitudinal study behind those findings, those recommendations were not incorporated into official guidance from agencies such as FEMA or the Army Corps for fires that followed. As a result, I personally paid for \$5,000 worth of binders to make them available to residents and those tasked with debris cleanup in Maui.

Similarly, in the Los Angeles fires, studies conducted on firefighters and first responders helped make treatments such as glutathione nebulizers, IV support, and hyperbaric oxygen more accessible for those populations. Yet because there was no broader longitudinal study that included community members, those same supports were not made available to fire survivors, impacted residents, or grassroots responders on the ground — even though many could have benefited.

Systems take time to change. Research takes time to influence policy. That is precisely why it is so important that this study continue. While I wish there had been thousands of participants, I am deeply grateful that more than 150 people are already involved. It would be a tremendous loss to stop short now. Completing at least five years of post-fire study would provide critical data, actionable lessons, and evidence-based best practices that could better protect communities in future disasters.

The impacts of the Maui wildfires did not end in August 2023. Many residents continue to experience respiratory issues, mental health challenges, and deep uncertainty about the long-term health effects of exposure — especially children, kūpuna, and medically vulnerable individuals. Programs like the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry provide trusted, community-based care, early detection, monitoring, and referrals that would otherwise remain out of reach for many families.

Continued funding is essential to ensure that people are not forgotten, that emerging health issues are identified before they become crises, and that Maui can lead with knowledge, care, and preparedness rather than silence and preventable harm.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support SB2969 and ensure that Maui residents continue to receive the follow-up, care, and protection they deserve.

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

Sincerely,

Rebekah Uccellini

Executive Director, Makai Foundation

Dear chair, vice chair and other members of the Ways and Means Committee.

My name is Dr. Christopher Knightsbridge. I am one of only two full-time mental health professionals working 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 **SB2969 SD1**.

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.

Please also find attached a brief fact sheet of our findings and letters of support written by The Hawaii State Council on Mental Health for our grant seeking opportunities. This is NOT a letter of endorsement for any specific bill but is a generalized letter of support which highlights their support for us to seek funding to keep our important work going.

Thank you for taking the time to listen.



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%)

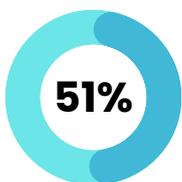


Low self-esteem

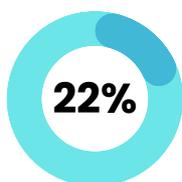
CHANGES OVER TIME (ADULT FOLLOW-UP) (n = 424 with Year-1 → Year-2 data)

- 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



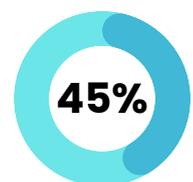
Severe depressive symptoms



Low self-esteem



Signs of anxiety disorder



PTSD symptoms

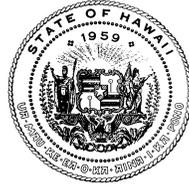
Highest burden observed among:

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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Behavioral Health Administration

WEBSITE:

scmh.hawaii.gov

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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.

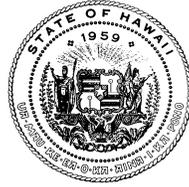
Sincerely,



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
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September 9, 2025

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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.

Aloha Chair and members of the Ways and Means 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 SB 2969**, 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 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 patient, 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 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,

Martina Kamaka, MD

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 7:38:13 AM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Elizabeth Kiefer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Dr. Elizabeth Kiefer and I am a physician and medical school faculty 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.

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. 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.

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. 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. 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.

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. 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.

Elizabeth Kiefer, MD MPH

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 9:14:36 AM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ann Marie Quinlan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a participant in this study, I urge you to continue to fund MauiWES. WE ONLY HAVE ONE CHANCE TO GATHER THIS DATA. This valuable information will provide guidance to any and all fire-stricken communities in the future. Please vote YES.

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 1:19:17 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

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 SB2969 SD1, 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 SB2969 SD1 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 SB2969 SD1 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

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 2:29:00 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Celina Tong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Celina Tong, and I am a nursing student from UH Manoa. I am writing in strong support of SB2969, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

My experience as a volunteer for MauiWES has been inspirational, as I see how this organization has made a meaningful impact on patients' lives. I truly see how grateful people are everytime they come in and leave the clinic.

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 SB2969 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,
Celina Tong

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 6:08:39 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Samia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Samia Dutra and I am a nurse and faculty at the University of Hawaii. I am writing in strong support of SB2969, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

I have been volunteering in the weekends to support Maui wildfire survivors and it is evident the need for continuous screening and support to connect with much needed resources. This initiative also contributes to the development of Healthcare professionals as nursing and medical students have the opportunity to provide care and connect with the community.

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 SB2969 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

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 7:11:03 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ashley Tone	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in support of 2969 SB RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY.

The study is providing critical data to ensure that communities that have suffered through a wildfire disaster. Health, socioeconomic, mental health, and environmental outcomes post-disaster, short and long-term, are critical for those affected by the Lahaina Wildfires AND for future disasters.

Community members are NOT ok. They are struggling to return to "normal" life, and amid all this uncertainty, the MauiWes study is one way participants can feel they are doing something to contribute back.

To reiterate, I am writing in support of SB2969.

**Testimony of Dr. Ruben Juarez
In Strong Support of SB2969 SD1 – Funding for the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study
(MauiWES) and Maui Health Registry**

Aloha Chairs and Members of the Ways and Means 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 **SB2969 SD1**, which would provide critical funding to sustain and expand this work to up to 3000 Maui residents.

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. Alika 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 **SB2969 SD1** 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

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 7:21:41 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marina Karides	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Marina Karides and I am writing in **strong support of SB2969**, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

As a researcher, I am convinced that further data collection is essential to support the well-being of those who survived the fire and provide more lessons on how to care and treat persons exposed to such toxic harm. Numerous students and colleagues were impacted by the fires and continue to suffer duress.

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 SB2969** 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,

Marina Karides

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 7:22:02 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Niki Jabari	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Niki Jabari, and I am a community member. I am writing in strong support of SB2969, 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 SB2969 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,

Niki Jabari

Aloha e Chair Dela Cruz and members of the WAM 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.

I am writing to express my **strong support for SB2969, 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.

SB2969 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, **SB2969** 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 SB2969**.

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 black ink, appearing to read 'Alika', written in a cursive style.

Alika K. Maunakea, PhD

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 10:20:07 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Natsuko Kanome	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I have many friends on Maui who have shared how much Maui West has helped them in so many ways. I have also personally seen how Maui West supported my coworker, who lost her childhood home and her mother shortly after the fire. They do more than just research — they truly care and work with kōkua for the Lahaina community. Please support this bill.

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 12:24:50 AM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

My name is Jenifer Winter, and I am an educator. I am writing in **strong support of SB2969**, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

I have worked with many students 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 SB2969** 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

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 4:01:41 AM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Robert O Wright	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am submitting a brief reiteration of prior testimony in support of this bill. I am a pediatrician and environmental scientist with over 30 years of clinical and research experience. Wildfire smoke is extremely hazardous- with direct toxic effects to the lungs. What is sometimes overlooked is that the nanoparticles in wildfire, because of their small size, can also enter the blood and cause toxicity to other organs, including the brain and heart. Longterm health effects are most common in those most vulnerable- children, pregnant women and the elderly. A long term health monitoring and healthcare program is critical for the local Maui community to address the long term effects of wild fire exposure. Dr Robert Wright MD MPH.

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 6:40:39 AM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
robin knox	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please continue the WES studies. This is crucially important to our local families affected by the fire, and important information that can help others worldwide

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 9:54:38 AM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rachel Carafello	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this mission as someone who has worked directly with those impacted by the 2023 Maui Fires, I have seen the extremely negative impact of the fires on peoples' physical, psychological/emotional, financial well-being. The community in Lahaina are some of the most resilient and kind people I have met and they need all the support they can get to help restore the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the community at this time.

3/2/26

My name is Lisa Sanchez-Johnsen and I am a healthcare worker and researcher. I am writing in **strong support of SB 2969**, which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

I was born and raised in Hawaii and have been involved in this study for the past few years. I was on Maui providing support to individuals affected by the Maui wildfires in the days after the fires and continue to be involved in research in this area.

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,

Lisa Sanchez-Johnsen



LATE

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 SB2969, 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', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Veronica Mendoza
Maui Roots Reborn, *Founding Executive Director*
El Pueblo en Accion Maui, *Founding Coalition Member*

LATE

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 4:53:57 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

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

Comments:

The Maui WES saved my life!

I am writing to ask for your support for SB2969 SD1. I barely escaped Front Street the day of the Lahaina fire only to fight for my life just 1 year later.

I participated in the wildfire study for 100\$ cash. My daughter was turning 13 and I didn't have money for her birthday gift. The doctor at the study said my Hemoglobin was so low it wouldn't register a number on their equipment. I was sent to the Emergency Room and admitted for multiple blood transfusions and months of treatment.

I did not know I was sick. I had fatigue and shortness of breath with activity that I attributed to turning 50.

Participation in the study saved my physical life and also my mental health. I have gotten help for PTSD after the questionnaire helped me realized I needed it. As a single mother I am grateful to still be here for my children. Mahalo for allowing me to tell my story. Please continue to fund the Maui WES for healing the island of Maui and the lahui.

LATE

SB-2969-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 5:00:59 PM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha e Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki 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 SB 2969**, 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 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,

Councilmember Tamara Paltin West Maui