



Hawai'i Community Health

info@hawaiicomunityhealth.org | www.hawaiicomunityhealth.org

February 6, 2026

To: Senate Education Committee

Re: **Strong Support for SB 2969 – Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry**

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura 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 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. **SB 2969 is essential not only to expand MauiWES and the Registry, but also to fund 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
- Distribution of PPE, medical and oral health supplies, clothing, and essentials
- Education and training for providers and the community, including 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 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.

SB 2969 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 SB 2969.**

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,

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



Testimony of
Jonathan Ching
Head of Government Relations

Before:
Senate Committee on Education
The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
The Honorable Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

February 11, 2025
1:00 p.m.
Via Videoconference
Conference Room 225

Re: SB 2969, Relating to The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry.

Chairs, Vice Chairs and committee members, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on SB 2969 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 SB 2969.

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.

SB 2969 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 SB 2969 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.

Aloha Senator Mercado Kim and committee members,

As someone who worked in the medical field for 25 years (including at Maui Memorial for many years) I have seen first hand how MauiWES's free health check ups are changing folks' lives. There have been numerous instances where keiki and young adults found out they had diabetes when they had no idea, because they had no symptoms. Patients have come into the emergency department (there is only one on Maui) after a MauiWES appointment & found out they have chronic kidney disease, again no symptoms. The sooner they can start treatment the better the outcome will be for them.

I know some of UH Maui's brightest young nursing students being at these events & learning valuable skills that help prepare them for working in our community after they graduate. Maui is severely short staffed with medical providers of all types. Building these relationships while in school helps them become more well rounded students & gives them hands-on experience. This is the type of education that doesn't come in a book, & is more likely to keep these young folks invested to stay here on Maui after they graduate.

This type of investment in our community is a trifecta. It supports local students, our education system & most importantly our lahui on Maui that have been affected by the wildfires. Please show us that we still matter by investing in our wellbeing & continuing these invaluable services that MauiWES provides.

Mahalo nui loa for your time.

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 (iron) didn't even register on their machine & told me to go immediately to urgent care or see my doctor. I went to the doctor the next day and my hemoglobin was 2.2 (you need a blood transfusion so you don't die at around 9 or 10). I got 5 units of blood and they told me if I had waited another day I would have died! These free health check ups are literally saving lives, please allow them to continue. We need this on Maui. Please don't forget about us.

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 10:57:52 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Peggy Latare	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

My name is **Dr. Peggy Latare**, and I am a resident of Kailua and health care worker (family medicine physician). 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.

For the past year and a half, I have been volunteering with the Maui wildfire exposure study at the screening clinics on Maui. I have seen for myself, and as a physician, 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. 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,

Dr. Peggy Latare

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

Friday, February 9, 2026
1:00 PM – Room 229

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

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 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

2025 Hawaii
Leadership Board

Travis Kikuchi, *Chair*
Senior Vice President
Central Pacific Bank

Lori McCarney, *Immediate*
Past Chair Community
Advocate

Tricia Medeiros, *Past Chair*
Chief Operating Officer
The Plaza Assisted Living

Gina Fujikami, *MD*
The Queen's Medical
Center

Kai Ohashi,
Financial Advisor Edward
Jones

Michael Robinson,
Vice President Hawaii Pacific
Health

Kimberly Soares, *Vice*
President Atlas Insurance

Gino Soquena,
Executive Director
Hawaii Building and
Construction Trade Council

Gordon Takaki, *Past*
President Hawaii Island
Chamber of Commerce

Cary Tanaka,
Past President
Island Insurance
Companies

Caroline Witherspoon,
President Becker
Communications

LJ R. Duenas,
Executive Director
Alzheimer's Association

Testimony to the Senate Committees on Education and Health and Human Services Wednesday, February 11, 1:00 PM Hawaii State Capitol, Conference Room 225, and Videoconference

RE: Senate Bill No. 2969 – RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY

Chair Kim, Chair San Buenaventura, and Members of the Committees:

The Alzheimer's Association submits comments on SB2969 and offers an amendment to support the collection of one additional longitudinal data point on cognition within the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES) and Maui Health Registry.

MauiWES and the Registry were established to track long-term health effects following the 2023 fires—an unprecedented disaster for Hawai'i—and now follow thousands of residents with multi-year surveys, biospecimens, and health screenings. Adding a simple, age-appropriate cognitive measure at follow-up intervals would leverage this infrastructure with minimal burden and high future value.

Why a Cognition Data Point Matters:

- It would allow Maui researchers to observe cognition over time alongside existing respiratory, mental-health, and chronic-disease metrics already tracked by MauiWES.
- It enables analyses of linkages with other risk factors or conditions (e.g., stress, access to care, cardiopulmonary outcomes) documented in the cohort.
- It supports age-stratified insights (keiki, adults, kūpuna) into recovery and resilience after a major wildfire event.
- Monitoring would allow any cognitive changes among survivors to be identified and addressed more proactively.

Proposed Amendment:

On page 2, line 16, after the word "services," insert "including cognitive health," so the sentence reads: "...to expand and sustain the Maui wildfire exposure study and the Maui health registry, including cognitive health, ..." (see attached)

This modest clarification simply authorizes UH and partners to include a brief, validated cognitive item and/or biomarker test within existing follow-ups—enhancing the Registry's long-term usefulness for families, clinicians, and policymakers, and positioning Hawai'i to contribute meaningful evidence on cognition across the lifespan following one of the most severe wildfire disasters in the United States.

Thank you for your attention and support. We urge you to back initiatives that expand access to biomarker testing, ultimately improving the lives of those impacted by Alzheimer's disease. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support! If you have questions, please contact me at 808-451-3410 or ckchock@alz.org

Coby Chock
Director of Public Policy and Advocacy
Alzheimer's Association - Hawaii

JAN 23 2026

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH
REGISTRY.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the 2023 Maui
2 wildfires were the deadliest natural disaster in state history
3 and the deadliest wildfire in the United States in over a
4 century. Beyond the immediate destruction, survivors of the
5 wildfires continue to face toxic exposures, respiratory illness,
6 and mental health trauma. Children, first responders, kupuna,
7 and medically vulnerable individuals remain at especially high
8 risk.

9 The legislature finds that, in response, the university of
10 Hawai'i and its partners established the Maui wildfire exposure
11 study and the Maui health registry, which together represent the
12 most comprehensive social and health biomonitoring effort ever
13 conducted in the State. To date more than two thousand
14 residents have received services, including medical and mental
15 health screenings, biomonitoring, and referrals to care.
16 Residents and families receiving health care services improves

S.B. NO. 2969

1 the resilience of communities and reduces the higher financial
2 burden of long-term health complications and preventable
3 hospitalizations. Community trust has also been built with
4 Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Filipino, Hispanic, and
5 Asian, and immigrant populations, ensuring that underserved
6 groups are reached.

7 The legislature further finds that additional funding is
8 needed to continue providing these services, to ensure long-term
9 follow-up care for all participants, and to expand services for
10 up to three thousand individuals, with a focus on children and
11 other high-risk populations.

12 SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general
13 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$3,000,000 or so much
14 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the
15 university of Hawai'i, in collaboration with community partners,
16 to expand and sustain the Maui wildfire exposure study, including
17 cognitive health, and the Maui health registry, including follow-up
18 and expanded services for children, first responders, kupuna, and
19 medically vulnerable residents.

20 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the university of
21 Hawai'i for the purposes of this Act.

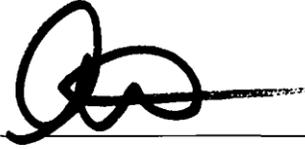


S.B. NO. 2969

1 SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

2

INTRODUCED BY: _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke, is written over a horizontal line.

S.B. NO. 2969

Report Title:

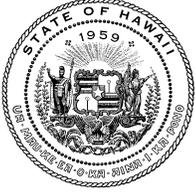
University of Hawai'i: Maui Wildfire Exposure Study; Maui Health Registry; Appropriation

Description:

Appropriates funds for the University of Hawai'i to expand and sustain services provided by the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry.

The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.





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

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

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

JOHN C. (JACK) LEWIN, MD
ADMINISTRATOR

February 10, 2026

TO: SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Honorable Members

LATE

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

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

HEARING: Thursday, February 11, 2026 @ 01:00 pm; Conference Room 225

POSITION: SUPPORT with COMMENTS

The State Health Planning and Development Agency is in **strong support of SB 2969**, 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** and guarantee that Maui residents continue to receive the care, follow-up, and protection they deserve.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

■ -- Jack Lewin MD, Administrator, SHPDA

**Testimony of Dr. Ruben Juarez
In Strong Support of SB 2969 – 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 **SB 2969**, 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 SB 2969 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

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 3:38:18 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stephanie Villalobos	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha Chair Donna Mercado Kim and Members of the Committee,

My name is **Stephanie Villalobos**, and I serve as the **Lead Community Care Navigator with Roots Reborn**. I work directly with immigrant and mixed-status families in Lahaina and across Maui, helping them navigate access to healthcare, housing stability, and recovery resources. I am writing on behalf of Roots Reborn to respectfully request that SB 2969 be placed on the hearing schedule.

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 immediately. Only now are they beginning to face breathing complications, mental health challenges, and concerns related to toxic exposure—often without insurance, stable housing, or consistent access to care.

Through our partnership with the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES), I have witnessed firsthand how transformative this work has been. Community members who had never been screened before were finally able to understand what was happening to their bodies, receive referrals, and feel seen and supported. For many immigrant families, this was the first time they felt safe enough to engage in care.

I work with clients for whom obtaining health insurance has been life-changing—something they never imagined possible. To be 60 years old and to have never seen a doctor while living in the United States is a reality for many in our community. The barriers they face—language access, immigration status, fear, and financial instability—have had profound and lasting impacts. Programs like this do not just provide data; they restore dignity and access.

SB 2969 would allow this critical 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 findings are deeply concerning. Many are showing signs of respiratory illness, toxic exposure, and significant 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 simply research. It is about early detection, connection to care, and ensuring families do not fall through the cracks—especially those who already face systemic barriers to healthcare access.

Lahaina continues to carry the burden of the deadliest wildfire in the United States in over a century. SB 2969 represents a compassionate and practical step to ensure that recovery includes long-term health support—not just rebuilding infrastructure, but rebuilding lives.

We respectfully ask for your leadership in scheduling SB 2969 for hearing this session. I would welcome the opportunity to speak further or provide additional insight from the families we serve.

Mahalo for your time and for your continued commitment to Maui's communities.

Warm regards,
Stephanie Villalobos

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you for taking the time to listen.



Dr. Christopher Knightsbridge, Psy.D.

Head of Mental Health Research Team

University of Hawaii Wildfire Exposure Study (MAUIWES)

www.Mauiwes.org

MauiWES

Mental Health Outcomes

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



Depressive symptoms



Moderate-severe anxiety



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

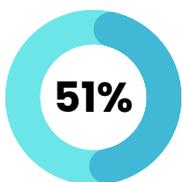


Low self-esteem

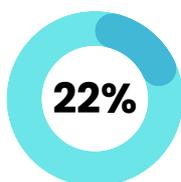
CHANGES OVER TIME (ADULT FOLLOW-UP) (n = 424 with Year-1 → Year-2 data)

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

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



Depressive symptoms



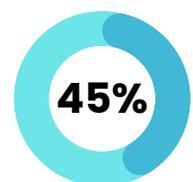
Severe depressive symptoms



Low self-esteem



Signs of anxiety disorder



PTSD symptoms

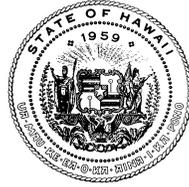
Highest burden observed among:

Filipino, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino youth

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

RECOVERY IS UNDERWAY — BUT INCOMPLETE.

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



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

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

August 12, 2025

CHAIRPERSON

Katherine Aumer, PhD

1st VICE CHAIRPERSON

Kathleen Merriam, LCSW CSAC

2nd VICE CHAIRPERSON

John Betlach

SECRETARY

Mary Pat Waterhouse, MHA MBA

MEMBERS:

Tianna Celis-Webster

Naomi Crozier, CPS

Lea Dias, MEd

Jon Fujii, MBA

Heidi Ilyavi

Jackie Jackson, CFPS

Christine Montague-Hicks, MEd

Ray Rice, MEd

Asianna Saragosa-Torres

Forrest Wells, MSCP, LMHC

Kristin Will, MA, CL, CSAC

EX-OFFICIO:

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.

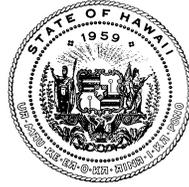
Sincerely,



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

CHAIRPERSON

Katherine Aumer, PhD

1st VICE CHAIRPERSON

Kathleen Merriam, LCSW CSAC

2nd VICE CHAIRPERSON

John Betlach

SECRETARY

Mary Pat Waterhouse, MHA MBA

MEMBERS:

Tianna Celis-Webster

Naomi Crozier, CPS

Lea Dias, MEd

Jon Fujii, MBA

Heidi Ilyavi

Jackie Jackson, CFPS

Christine Montague-Hicks, MEd

Ray Rice, MEd

Asianna Saragosa-Torres

Forrest Wells, MSCP, LMHC

Kristin Will, MAEL, CSAC

EX-OFFICIO:

Marian Tsuji, Deputy Director
Behavioral Health Administration

WEBSITE:

scmh.hawaii.gov

EMAIL ADDRESS:

doh.scmhchairperson@
doh.hawaii.gov

Dr. Ruben Juarez

Dr. 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'.

Katherine Aumer, Ph.D.

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

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

Sierra Jansons

From: Tamara A. Paltin <Tamara.Paltin@mauicounty.us>
Sent: Sunday, February 8, 2026 10:21 PM
To: EDU Committee
Subject: SB296

You don't often get email from tamara.paltin@mauicounty.us. [Learn why this is important](#)

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Aloha e Chair Kidani and Vice Chair Kim 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 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 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.

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. I'm not sure why this measure was removed from the public hearing, I hope the funding is still on the table.

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

Sincerely,

Councilmember Tamara Paltin West Maui



fightcancer.org

Senate Committee on Education
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Angus McKelvey, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Monday, February 9, 2026

ACS CAN SUPPORTS SB 2969 – 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 – 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.



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 Education

and

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Monday, February 9, 2026 at 1:00 p.m.

By

Denise Eby Konan, Dean

College of Social Services

And

Vassilis Syrmos, PhD

Interim Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

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

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

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa is in strong support of the intent of SB 2969. SB 2969 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 SB2969 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 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.



Hawaii Medical Association

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

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

Date: February 9, 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 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

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



Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i

February 8, 2026

**Letter of Support for SB 2969
Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry**

Aloha Chairs and Members of the Committees on Health and Human Services and Education,

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 SB 2969**, 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.

SB 2969 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 SB 2969. 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



February 9, 2026

The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
The Honorable Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
The Honorable Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Education and Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

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

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair McKelvey, and Members of the Committee:

Hawaii Medical Service Association (HMSA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 2969, 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.

HMSA appreciates the efforts of the University of Hawaii to study the long-term health impacts of the 2023 West Maui wildfires. The data will provide the State, local organizations, and future policymakers with critical information and the ability to address imminent community needs and inform the long-term recovery process with an empirical foundation.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of SB 2969.

Sincerely,

Walden Au
Director of Government Relations



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

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 10:04:50 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaohimanu Dang Akiona MD	Testifying for Kohala Coast Urgent Care/Moloka`i Family & Urgent Care	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Kidani and McKelvey, and Esteemed Members of the Education and Health and Human Services Committees,

My name is **Ka`ohimanu Dang Akiona, MD** and I am a **Rural Family Medicine Physician serving Hawai`i Island AND Maui county, and** 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.

Wildfires affected Maui, my area of the Big Island on the Kohala Coast as well as Moloka`i and over the last 2 years, I have served a number of survivors, patients and family members impacted by the wildfires. While the immediate health needs and concerns were fairly straightforward, we know from previous wildfire disasters that the long term impacts and health challenges require ongoing, longitudinal support.

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.

Please note that although many patients impacted by the fires remained on Maui, some chose to relocate to Moloka`i and Hawai`i Island where they had support and other family members. These are areas where the healthcare access are already at crisis levels preceding the fires and as such, many have been lost to follow up due to lack of appropriate resources and support for coordination of care. This project and study provides a crucial aspect of continuity and allows us to both support and better understand the immediate and long term needs and challenges faced by those impacted by the wildfires.

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,

Ka`ohimanu Dang Akiona MD

Kohala Coast Urgent Care and Moloka`i Family & Urgent Care



February 10, 2026

To: COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

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

Hrg: February 11, 2026 at 1:00PM

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 SB2969 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 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

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 9:10:04 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Annie Alvelais	Testifying for Maui Roots Reborn	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha kākou,

My name is Annie Alvelais, and I am a Maui resident.. 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 moved to Maui in 2024 through my previous employment in the disaster relief space. What was meant to be an 8 month contract led me to meeting one of the most inspiring, resilient and innovative communities I had the privilege of serving over the course of 5 years around the world. The organizations, community efforts and movements that were born out of this disaster are unlike anything I've ever seen and I hope that the world is able to learn from the tenacity and aloha that this community is rebuilding with. MauiWES is just one of the many initiatives that could and should be easily replicated to ensure that the longterm health impacts of disasters don't go unnoticed and untreated.

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.

Aloha mai,

Annie

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 8:14:31 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Evelyn Del Valle	Testifying for Roots Reborn	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Evelyn Del Valle, and I am writing on behalf of Roots Reborn, a community-based organization that works closely with immigrant and mixed-status families in Lahaina and across Maui. I also write as someone who grew up on Maui, raised in this community, and shaped by what I saw around me.

Growing up, I watched many of the adults in my life struggle without access to health care. People worked hard, took care of their families, and showed up for their community, yet seeing a doctor was often delayed or avoided entirely because of cost, fear, language barriers, or immigration status. Those experiences are what drive my work today and why SB 2969 matters so deeply to me and to the families we serve.

More than two years after the August 2023 wildfires, the health impacts on our community are still unfolding. Many families did not experience symptoms right away. Only now are they beginning to face breathing problems, mental health struggles, and concerns related to toxic exposure—often while still displaced, uninsured, or navigating an already fragile system of care.

Through our partnership with the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES), we have seen firsthand how powerful and necessary this work is. Community members who had never been screened before were finally able to understand what was happening to their bodies, receive referrals, and feel seen and supported. For many immigrant families, this was the first time health care felt accessible and safe.

SB 2969 would allow this critical work to continue by supporting screening and follow-up care for up to 3,000 additional residents, with a focus on children, first responders, and kupuna—those most exposed and most vulnerable. More than 2,000 residents have already been screened, and the findings are concerning. Many are showing signs of respiratory illness, toxic exposure, and serious mental health challenges. Among children screened, more than half showed signs of depression, while 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 because of language, immigration status, or lack of insurance.

Lahaina continues to carry the weight of the deadliest wildfire in the United States in over a century. Recovery cannot stop at rebuilding homes and roads. SB 2969 is a compassionate and practical step to ensure long-term health support for the people who call Maui home.

We respectfully ask for your support on the SB 2969.

Mahalo for your time and for your continued commitment to Maui's communities.

Warm regards,
Evelyn Del Valle
Roots Reborn

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 4:44:53 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

My name is Jenifer Winter, and I am an educator. 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 have worked with many students whose lives were dramatically altered 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 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,

Jenifer Winter

SB2969

Aloha Chair and Members of the Board,

My name is Nancy Valdez, I am submitting testimony regarding the bill relating to the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry.

While I understand the importance of studying the health impacts from the 2023 Maui wildfires, I have several concerns and questions that I believe need clarification:

1. Cost to taxpayers – How much will this program cost, and how will it be funded? Will the funding come from the state budget, and what portion would be paid by residents?
2. Duration of the study – How long is this study and registry expected to run? Is it a short-term project or intended to continue for many years?
3. Access to results – Will residents affected by the fires have access to the findings? How will the results be shared so that the community can benefit?
4. Purpose and outcomes – What is the specific goal of this study? How will the information collected help improve health services, disaster response, or policy decisions?
5. Use of existing research – Since national agencies and other experts already study wildfire exposure and health effects, why is it necessary for the University of Hawai'i to conduct a separate local study? Could the state use existing research to avoid duplication and reduce costs?

I respectfully ask for answers to these questions to ensure transparency, responsible use of taxpayer funds, and meaningful benefits for residents. Clear information will help our community understand the value and impact of this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Nancy Valdez
Concerned Resident

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura and Members of the Committees,

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 – RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY. In project 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 SB2969.

Mahalo for your consideration,

Dr. Daniela Bond-Smith

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 3:00:51 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Dear Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

My name is Dr. Marsha Lowery, and I am a naturopathic physician on Maui. I am writing to urge your support for SB 2969, 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 SB 2969 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

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 3:08:32 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alexis K Maunakea K Stang	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Alexis K Maunakea Stang is in support of SB2969 WesMaui and its significant impact on Maui residents these past years and I believe this ongoing research is needed to help Maui fire victims and all Maui 'ohana and funding is critically needed for the Future of Maui. The fire impacted Lahaina and beyond and we All know that it was once Hawai'i's capitol and 'Aina of our Ali'i with our 'iwi kupuna which can never be the same as before but its research & results shared should be done forever since Lahaina can't recover as it once was. This important research is significant to the well being of ka po'e 'o Maui and its future generations. I urge our legislature, fellow constituents to vote in favor of more funding. 'Eo 'o Maui, Maui no ka 'oi. Mahalo e ke Akua! E malama pono ia 'oukou! 'O au iho no, Alexis K Maunakea Stang

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 3:08:45 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

My name is Miriam Stark and I am a Honolulu resident. . 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.

Although I live in Honolulu, my condo neighbors have parents in Maui whose house was destroyed. Luckily, they were able to move in with relatives for more than a year. But even their health is compromised, and there are hundreds of Hawai'i residents who could not find homes.

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,
Miriam Stark

500 Univerity Avenue Apt. 1437

Honolulu HI 96826

Aloha e Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

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

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



Alika K. Maunakea, PhD
(Submitting in a personal capacity)
Honolulu, HI 96826

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 4:22:08 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha,

I am a pediatrician at the Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center and have over 25 years of experience working with Hawaii’s families. I am writing in strong support of SB2969 which would provide funding to continue and expand the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

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

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

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

I kindly ask that you support SB2969.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

May M. Okihiro, MD

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 9:27:49 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jana Ireijo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

My name is Jana Ireijo. I am a former Maui resident, and I went to high school on Maui. I'm writing to express my strong support for SB 2969, which would continue and expand funding for the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

Although I no longer live on Maui, my connection to the island runs deep. Many of my friends, classmates, and extended community were directly impacted by the August 2023 wildfires, and I continue to carry concern for their health and well-being.

For many in the community, the impacts of the wildfires did not end when the fires were extinguished. Residents are still experiencing ongoing health concerns, including respiratory issues and mental health challenges, and there is understandable worry about long-term effects, especially for children, kūpuna, and other medically vulnerable individuals.

The Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry are critical, community-based resources. They offer trusted care, early identification of health concerns, and connections to follow-up services that might otherwise be out of reach. Continued funding helps ensure that people are not forgotten and that health issues are addressed before they become emergencies.

I respectfully urge you to support SB 2969 and help 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.

Mahalo nui,

Jana Ireijo

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 6:09:33 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 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 SB 2969, 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 SB 2969 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 SB 2969 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

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 11:59:13 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Noelani Ahia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

My name is **Noelani Ahia**, and I am the director of Maui Medic Healers Hui, an organization that has been and still is caring for fire survivors since August 9, 2023. 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.

Maui Medic Healers Hui has been involved with the study from its inception. We have seen the positive impacts it has had on our community. It has removed an access barrier for many folks who wouldn't otherwise have screenings. The data collection to track potential impacts from the fire are critical to providing care both now and in the future.

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,
Jennifer Noelani Ahia

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 6:03:13 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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 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 Alike and Rueben for you continued service!

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 7:33:03 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Dear members of the Education and Health and Human Services Committees,

My name is Daewon Kim, and I am a resident. 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 heard that lots of fire in hawaii is happened, and it affects negatively to hawai`i residences. As a student at UH, I want to support to make their life more better.

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,
Daewon Kim

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 7:09:41 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 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 **SB 2969**, which would provide critical supplemental funding for 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 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.

SB 2969 would help sustain and expand the study and registry to reach up to 3,000 individuals, ensuring that those affected 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 **SB 2969**.

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

Sincerely,

Manmohan Yadav

Honolulu, Hawai‘i

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 11:06:25 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Esther Arvizu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, my name is Esther Arvizu. I am a Marriage and Family Therapy Master's Student, a therapy intern with Maui Healing, and a volunteer with Maui WES. I was born and raised in Lahaina, attended Lahainaluna High School, and returned to Lahaina once I completed my undergraduate education for the opportunity to work in my most precious community which I love and deeply honor. On August 8, 2023, I lost every thing I once loved in the Lahaina fires and since then, have involved myself wherever I may to do my part in its rebuilding and rehealing.

I support SB 2969 for a myriad of reasons. On one hand, I have had the privilege of not only being a participant of MauiWES, but also allowed to volunteer with the group on days that don't conflict with my participation. This is particularly special for me as a Master's student in therapy. I have always known my dreams were to build a career back in my hometown. Growing up, I had always been aware of the limited affordable services available in West Maui for the local communities. MauiWES has been one of the few resources that are meant to service the local population without any discrimination of affordability. They have allowed me access to work with the community that I hope to service for many, many years to come, helping me build a contextual foundation of what impactful, efficient work means on Maui. And moreso, being able to work with my community within an area that is so essential to their well-being and my personal interest is most fulfilling as a student.

MauiWES is not simply a research group, but it is also a center for Maui residents to understand what new and current resources are available for them to consider in response to the data results they are receiving. Maui WES connects participants with local volunteer doctors and therapists to give them a brief overview of what their results are and give them guidance on how they can continue to care for their health. They contextualize many factors such as lung capacity, toxins screenings, weight and high blood pressure management, signs of depression and anxiety, or even where they can start to get affordable healthcare so they can ask more questions to certified practitioners to better their health. They don't leave participants hanging in unclear results and make sure to provide interpreters to avoid language barriers. Through this work, they've become an outreach center for many, showing residents across the island where they can receive better information and how to better care for themselves and their loved ones.

MauiWES is also being recognized as a valuable asset to Maui because of its work with the keiki. Oftentimes, a family's only priority is the well-being of their children and MauiWES has filled in so many gaps by providing those personable and inviting assessments to our young

population. They take their time in assuring both children and parents the purpose of the study and offer them support through its process as well as its findings post-sessions. While many resources did arrive to Lahaina post-fire, none have stayed consistent for long the way MauiWES has. Because of MauiWES, I as a therapy intern have seen an increase of families and children seek therapeutic and psychiatric support since the fires as they finally understand the need to prioritize their mental well-being.

I want to thank anyone and everyone who has taken the time to read through my testimony. I stand behind the vision of MauiWES and have seen and felt its direct impact first hand. I believe supporting MauiWES will allow them to expand their services to reach more Maui children and more individuals without discrimination in order to gain more understanding of the fire's long-term impact. This research not only helps Maui, but ultimately all of Hawai'i and viturally any other place on Earth in which the governments care for their communities affected by natural wildfires. I pray blessings over you from Lahaina town.

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 5:56:43 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kathy Ferguson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear members of the Education and Health and Human Services Committees,

My name is Kathy Ferguson and I am a resident of Honolulu and a scholar studying the effects of the Maui wildfires. 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.

Since that horrifying day when Lahaina burned, I have been studying the history of Native Hawaiian agriculture and its consequences for fire prevention. I hope to contribute to changes in the control and use of land and water on our islands that could lessen the threat of future fires. Understanding the full consequences of the 2023 fire is essential to my research, and the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and Maui Health Registry are key sources for that information as well as essential services for those affected.

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. The public reporting these programs provide is essential for those of us seeking to understand the full costs of the fires and to design effective alternative arrangements for land and water useage.

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,

Dr. Kathy E. Ferguson

Departments of Political Science and Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 9:51:47 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha to whom it concerns,

My name is Freddie Lao, and I've been volunteering with the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study for the past year, and I am undergraduate student in kinesiology and public health at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa on a pre-med track. I am writing to express my strong support for SB 2969 and the continued funding of both the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study and the Maui Health Registry.

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

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

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

I respectfully ask that you support SB 2969 so these outreach programs can continue serving the people who rely on them. Mahalo for your leadership and for your commitment to the health and future of our communities.

Mahalo nui loa,
Freddie Lao

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 2:28:04 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry Support

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

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 8:34:16 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Honorable Senate Members,

As a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, the Fomer 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 essential and crucial mental health care for the people of Lahaina that were impacted by the devastating and historic wildfires. Real people and families from our wonderful State are being guided so that they may recover through medical and psychological assessments, mental health trauma treatment and other significant services. In the long run this study, if adequately funded will pay back the wealth and wellbeing of Hawai'i by continuing to reduce the impacts that we should not forget from this sweeping tragedy. While much of our society begins to move on, our government, educational and research institutions, and our care providers must persist in supporting the recovery of those who were harmed by this event. Please support ongoing care.

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 3:29:10 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kari Nadeau	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

My name is **Dr. Kari Nadeau** and I am a **Professor and Chair of Environmental Health at Harvard and Professor at Harvard Medical School. I also worked on the US Wildfire Commission and am a member of the National Academy of Medicine.** 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 have been to the site in Hawaii where there were wildfires and have reviewed the health and exposure data as an expert in this area. I have done research in wildfires for many years.

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,

Kari Nadeau (these opinions represent my own and are not part of a program's or university's)

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 1:53:41 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Salazar Hyman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

My name is **Michelle Hyman**, and I am a **community volunteer**. 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.

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,
Michelle

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/7/2026 10:02:43 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

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 SB 2969, 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 SB 2969 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

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/6/2026 9:58:47 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura,

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 SB 2969.

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 SB 2969 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

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 2:41:38 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
B.A. McClintock	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support this important bill. Mahalo.

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 11:16:50 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Regarding: THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY.

I am an emergency physician, medical toxicologist and environmental scientist with >30 years of experience in patient care and research in environmental health, including air pollution effects like wildfire smoke exposure and disaster response. I am based at Mount Sinai School of Medicine and my department hosts the World Trade Center Responders Clinic, treating workers exposed to the 9/11/2001 attack on NYC and those who cleaned and rebuilt the site. I have substantial expertise in the health impacts of events similar to those experienced in Maui. Even today, nearly 25 years following 9/11, we still see the health effects of that attack, the dust plumes and psychological trauma that remains. These types of events have long lasting physical and psychological impacts that require health surveillance, and healthcare provision (especially respiratory, cardiac, pediatric and psychological care) as well as vigilance to detect diseases that arise in clusters years later like cancers. I strongly urge the legislature to extend funding to this program and develop programs that address the needs of the local Maui community impacted by the wildfires. Having local, trusted community members as leaders and partners in the environmental, rebuilding and healthcare response is critical to establishing trust and enabling rigorous. I respectfully urge you to **support SB 2969** and ensure that Maui residents impacted by this fire continue to receive the healthcare, health surveillance, and services they deserve and need to recover

Thank you, Robert O. Wright MD MPH, Professor of Environmental Medicine, Mount Sinai School of Medicine



COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair

| COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
| Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
| Senator Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

HEARING:

Monday, February 9 at 1:00 pm | Conference Room 229 & Videoconference
State Capitol - 415 South Beretania Street

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT: SB 2969 - RELATING TO THE MAUI WILDFIRE EXPOSURE STUDY AND MAUI HEALTH REGISTRY.

Chair Kim, Chair Buenaventura, Vice Chair Kidani, Vice Chair McKelvey, 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 Mendoza', written in a cursive style.

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

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 3:08:15 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lisa Sanchez-Johnsen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Lisa Sanchez-Johnsen and I am a healthcare worker (psychologist) 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

SB-2969

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 6:27:51 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/11/2026 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Dear members of the Education and Health and Human Services Committees,

My name is Elizabeth Kiefer. I am physician trained in internal medicine and epidemiology on faculty at JABSOM. I am also a member of the Climate Change and Health Working Group.

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.

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.

Climate change is increasing the likelihood and risk of wildfires in Hawai‘i. When wildfires occur, smoke can travel long distances and degrade air quality in regions far from the fire. Smoke from wildfires can include many different pollutants, such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and fine particulate matter (PM2.5). Wildfire smoke can lead to many health implications, some of which are often overlooked such as respiratory irritation, reduced lung function, bronchitis, and exacerbation of asthma and heart failure.

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,

Elizabeth Kiefer, MD MPH

Assistant Clinical Professor of Medicine, JABSOM

Co-founder, Climate Change and Health Working Group