



March 30, 2026

TO: **Honorable Carol Fukunaga, Chair**
Honorable Chris Lee, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on
Public Safety and Military Affairs

Honorable Glen Wakai, Chair
Honorable Stanley Chang, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on
Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs

FROM: Legislative Advocacy Committee
American Institute of Architects, Hawai'i State Council

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A Chapter of the
American Institute of Architects

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Dear Chairs, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committees,

The American Institute of Architects Hawai'i (AIA Hawai'i) strongly **SUPPORTS SR 176**, which urges the County of Maui to adopt ordinances establishing wildland-urban interface (WUI) safety standards for plantation towns and other high-risk communities.

SR 176 appropriately recognizes the growing risk of wildfire in Hawai'i's built environment and the urgent need to integrate resilience into land use, planning, and building practices. As noted in the resolution, recent disasters—particularly the 2023 Maui wildfires—demonstrated how quickly wildfire can transition into urban conflagration, resulting in catastrophic loss of life, property, and cultural resources.

As Maui County considers future implementing ordinances, AIA Hawai'i respectfully recommends that WUI provisions be developed as clear, objective, and measurable standards that can be consistently applied through existing building and fire code frameworks. Requirements should be coordinated with established permitting and enforcement processes to avoid duplicative or conflicting review pathways.

In addition, it is important that any new requirements maintain the appropriate allocation of responsibility among design professionals, contractors, and enforcement agencies. WUI standards should not inadvertently shift responsibility for construction means and methods, ongoing maintenance, or code enforcement onto design professionals beyond the current standard of care.

The WUI framework is not new. It is part of the International Code Council (ICC) family of model codes, and many states and counties across the country have already incorporated WUI provisions into local zoning ordinances and building codes. These measures—such as ignition-resistant construction, defensible space, and vegetation management—are widely recognized best practices that reduce risk from ember intrusion and structure-to-structure fire spread.

From a design and construction perspective, clear, codified standards are essential. Practitioners benefit from consistent and predictable requirements rather than relying on interpretation, particularly when addressing known and publicly understood hazards. Establishing WUI standards at the county level will provide much-needed clarity for architects, engineers, planners, and builders working to deliver safer, more resilient communities.

SR 176 also aligns with post-disaster recommendations from federal agencies such as FEMA, which emphasize the importance of integrating wildfire mitigation into planning, zoning, and building practices. Encouraging Maui County to adopt locally tailored WUI ordinances—while learning from efforts such as Kaua'i's Plantation Camp District ordinance—represents a thoughtful and context-sensitive approach to resilience.

As an organization representing design professionals across the state, AIA Hawai'i believes that resilience to climate-induced hazards must be embedded in how we plan, design, and build. The adoption of WUI standards is a critical step toward protecting Hawai'i's communities, particularly historic plantation towns where unique urban form and environmental conditions increase vulnerability.

For these reasons, AIA Hawai'i respectfully urges the adoption of SR 176.
Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Melanie Islam, AIA
President
AIA Hawai'i