

DR-4724-HI Hawaii Wildfires

Media Analysis Report

Monday, Dec. 16, 2024

Media Analysis/Synopsis

Noteworthy

- Several local news sources shared FEMA news release on debris removal. One news source shared: With residential properties cleared, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is shifting its attention to commercial properties in the effort to clear Lahaina of debris and ash from the wildfires on Aug. 8, 2023. A
- A local news source shared that Karisa Bayudan spent her junior year of high school moving between hotel rooms after her family lost their home in last year's Lahaina wildfires. She did her homework from the couch when she didn't have space of her own. Now a senior at Lahainaluna High School, things are better — for her and her classmates. She's keeping up with her coursework and taking classes at a local community college. And school spirit is better, she said, with students more eager to participate in homecoming traditions and volunteer events.
- A national news source shared that PBS [Frontline's](#) new documentary, "[Maui's Deadly Firestorm](#)," a year-long investigation into the devastating August 2023 wildfire that claimed 102 lives and destroyed the historic town of Lahaina in Maui, Hawai'i. The film explores the causes of the deadliest American wildfire in a century and the missed warnings that made it so unstoppable. The film will have a digital premiere on Dec. 17 on YouTube, PBS.org/frontline + PBS App. It will premiere on PBS on Jan. 7, 2025 ([check local listings](#)).
- A local news source reported that A new report is revealing some of the struggles and concerns faced by one of the most vulnerable communities impacted by last year's Lahaina wildfires. At a community event at the Lahaina Civic Center on Sunday, nonprofit leaders released data from a "[Comprehensive Report on the Needs and Recovery of Filipino Survivors of the Lahaina Fires](#)" aimed to give Filipino immigrant survivors a voice.



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FEMA

FEMA expects all commercial lots to be cleared of debris and ash from the 2023 wildfires by early 2025 ([Maui News](#))

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With residential properties cleared, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is shifting its attention to commercial properties in the effort to clear Lahaina of debris and ash from the wildfires on Aug. 8, 2023.

According to FEMA, debris removal has been one of the major challenges for residents, business owners and government agencies in the recovery process. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was assigned to clear residential and commercial debris after the fires, and debris and ash was reported cleared from all 1,390 residential properties by this August.

As a result, the agency's focus is now on commercial debris removal. Currently, FEMA says all but eight commercial properties in Lahaina have been cleared, and all of the commercial properties are projected to be completed by early 2025.

According to FEMA, once a permanent debris storage site is available, the agency will manage moving the debris and returning the temporary site to its original condition. Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen has announced [a plan to use 79 acres of former quarry land](#) next to the Central Maui Landfill for the disposal of debris and other future waste.

According to FEMA, special consideration has been given to the cultural context in Hawai'i throughout the debris clearing process.

"The culture in Hawai'i is so paramount that we could not ignore it when we were putting our debris plan together," said Joseph Grunditz, FEMA Debris Task Force Lead, in a statement.

According to the agency, FEMA and Army Corp of Engineers staff received cultural training and cultural monitoring conducted on-site to protect Hawai'i's cultural heritage and honor Native Hawaiian traditions with Native Hawaiian, Maui-based cultural advisors leading the effort.

FEMA says historic properties also received special care.

The agency says a designated team has assessed historic landmark structures, and one such structure is the Hawaiian Kingdom Courthouse, which FEMA says will be repaired. Furthermore, FEMA says that with the Army Corps of Engineers serving as the project manager, it has subcontracted 95% of work to local construction companies.

Overall, the Army Corps of Engineers has identified 29 historic and culturally significant properties that would require extra steps to save the buildings, according to FEMA.

FEMA also says six of those properties were selected for a technique called shoring and bracing, which will allow preservation of the remaining shells for restoration. Four of the six identified properties have been cleared of debris and completed.

“I can’t wait to see how the community rebuilds this beautiful town,” Grunditz said.

For the latest information on the Maui wildfire recovery efforts, visit mauicounty.gov, mauirecovers.org, fema.gov/disaster/4724 and facebook.com/fema. People can also get disaster assistance information and download applications at sba.gov/hawaii-wildfires.

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[More modular homes to be delivered to the Kilohana temporary group housing site \(Maui News\)](#)

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The Hawai’i Department of Transportation is expecting possible traffic delays as modular homes for wildfire survivors are transported from Kahului Harbor to FEMA’s Kilohana temporary group housing site in Lahaina over the next two weeks.

On Dec. 15 and Dec. 22, trucks will be moving the modular homes from Kahului Harbor to a temporary staging site near the Kahului boat ramp next to Kahului Beach Road. The transport will be from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. Trucks will travel from Hobron Avenue, then head west on Ka’ahumanu Avenue and turn right onto Kahului Beach Road and make its way to the staging site.

On Dec. 16 and Dec. 17, beginning at 8 p.m., the homes will be moved from the staging site to Kilohana, which is near the northern terminus of the Lahaina Bypass. There may be up to two convoys per night.

From Dec. 26 through Dec. 29, one convoy of trucks per night will be hauling the homes to Kilohana, also beginning at 8 p.m.

The route the convoys will take begins at the Kahului boat ramp where trucks will head south on Kahului Beach Road and turn left heading east on Ka’ahumanu Avenue, then turn right onto Hāna Highway. The trucks will then turn right onto Elmer F. Carvalho Way and head west, linking with Kūihelani Highway.

At the intersection with Honoapiʻilani Highway, the trucks will turn left and head west to Lahaina. In Lahaina town, the trucks will make a right turn onto Keawe Street and make a left turn to the project site, which is mauka of Lahaina Gateway shopping center.

Motorists may encounter traffic slowdowns and stops in both directions along the route due to the size of the modular units. There will also be escorts during the transport. Highway users should heed all signs along with directions from traffic controllers.

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FEMA extends Lahaina help into 2026 ([Maui News](#))

12/13/2024

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has approved the state of Hawaii's request to receive financial and direct temporary housing assistance for Lahaina wildfire survivors through Feb. 10, 2026. The initial 18 months of aid was scheduled to expire on Feb. 10, 2025.

More than \$476 million in federal assistance has been made available to survivors of the Aug. 8, 2023, wildfires on Maui, according to FEMA.

According to the agency, assistance includes \$63.3 million for more than 7,150 individuals and households for housing and rental assistance as well as other needs.

The assistance currently includes FEMA leases for survivors in modular housing, also known as Alternative Transportable Temporary Housing units, at the Kilohana temporary group housing site in Lahaina on Fleming Road and Malo Street. The agency plans to provide temporary housing in 167 modular units and had its first resident in November.

Some 1,170 households are living temporarily in FEMA's direct-lease housing, the agency said.

Homeowners in the Direct Housing Program may be eligible to place an alternative transportable temporary housing unit on their property to live in while they rebuild their home.

The property must meet lot size requirements and be outside of the high hazard coastal floodplain.

FEMA also is seeking to lease vacant lots from property owners who do not intend to rebuild on them within the next two to three years. These properties will house individuals and families who were displaced by the wildfires and will be selected by FEMA for placement on the leased property.

The property must meet lot size requirements, be outside of the high hazard coastal floodplain and allow for the placement of two or more temporary units.

Survivors, who will receive a 30-day advance notice prior to the deadline for meeting their rental requirements, are encouraged to stay in touch with their FEMA recertification advisor, the agency said.

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RECOVERY

Congressional delegation continues to support Maui survivors ([Honolulu Star Advertiser](#))

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STAR-ADVERTISER / 2020 A survey of Lahaina residents showed a preference to rebuild the historic town as it was before the Aug. 8, 2023, wildfire, but to modern-day standards. Front Street, where numerous shops and restaurants operated, was long a popular stop for visitors and local residents.

A bipartisan bill sits on President Joe Biden's desk that would exempt survivors of disasters, including the 2023 Maui wildfires, from having to pay federal income tax on settlement money.

The bill was co-sponsored by U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz of Hawaii, who said passage of the Federal Disaster Tax Relief Act represents "very good news for Maui families."

It will not count any compensation for expenses or losses incurred from a fire disaster for income tax purposes.

Schatz said any settlements paid to Maui survivors must stay in their hands and not go to the federal government.

In a statement, U.S. Sen. Mazie Hirono, also a Democrat from Hawaii, said, "The Federal Disaster Tax Relief Act will help to ease the financial burden on communities impacted by wildfires, as well as other disasters, across our country. ... I will continue working to help ensure our communities have the necessary resources to support themselves and I look forward to President Biden signing this crucial legislation into law."

At the same time, Schatz and U.S. Rep. Jill Tokuda, whose district includes the neighbor islands, continue to push their colleagues in the Senate and House to pass disaster relief funding that would help Maui survivors as well as people in states devastated by hurricanes this year.

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"It's absolutely bipartisan, " Schatz said. "Disasters do not discriminate between red and blue states."

He hopes his Senate colleagues pass a bill by the time they adjourn at the end of this week.

But the question remains how close they'll get to the original funding proposal of more than a \$100 billion, which would mean more than \$1 billion for Maui.

"We have a divided government and it's an intense time for Congress as we wrap up our work, " Schatz said. "I am telling everyone that we must not adjourn this Congress without providing disaster relief. We've never

adjourned without passing disaster relief. I don't consider that an option. I am more hopeful than I was six weeks ago."

Two weeks ago, the House passed Tokuda's Lahaina National Heritage Area Study Act to recognize Lahaina's historic and cultural significance. It would direct the National Park Service to study the possibility of designating Lahaina as a National Heritage Area.

Maui County surveys of Lahaina residents overwhelmingly showed a preference to rebuild Lahaina like it was before the fires, but to modern-day standards, while providing ways to reduce the risk of future disasters.

There are 62 National Heritage Areas in the country but none in Hawaii, according to Tokuda's office, although Kaena Point remains under consideration.

The Lahaina National Heritage Area Study Act moves over to the Senate.

Some 16 months after the fires, landlords continue to raise rents, exacerbating a housing crisis that only intensified with the loss of hundreds of homes.

Getting fire survivors into permanent homes remains a priority, Schatz said.

"We have to have a singular focus on housing, housing, housing," Schatz said. "Lahaina can't recover without housing. People still want a home with a kitchen and a driveway and several bedrooms and a place for the kids to study and maybe a little front yard for the kids to play."

Rebuilding Lahaina also needs to include fortifying it against coastal inundation, wildfires and storms, Schatz said.

While most survivors want Lahaina to look the same, Tokuda said, "we have to rebuild smarter, better. It's planning for the future. We know we need wider streets and we need underground utilities."

Along with housing, Tokuda also wants to ensure mental health needs are provided "for all our survivors," she said. "The need will continue and there will be a lot of secondary, tertiary trauma. We need to make sure mental health support is available when they need it. It's the disaster that comes after the disaster."

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Lahaina Schools Are Recovering From The Fires, But Challenges Remain ([Honolulu Civil Beat](#))

12/16/2024

Growing enrollment and providing mental health services remain a top priority for schools, although teachers believe students are better positioned to learn this year.

Karisa Bayudan spent her junior year of high school moving between hotel rooms after her family lost their home in last year's Lahaina wildfires. She did her homework from the couch when she didn't have space of her own.

Now a senior at Lahainaluna High School, things are better — for her and her classmates. She’s keeping up with her coursework and taking classes at a local community college. And school spirit is better, she said, with students more eager to participate in homecoming traditions and volunteer events.

But there are still challenges ahead. Bayudan is worried about what will happen when her family’s temporary housing ends in the spring. And the consequences of the devastating Lahaina fires on Aug. 8, 2023, can be seen in her classmates’ academic scores and attendance, even as Hawai‘i’s education department has struggled to bring more mental health support to the schools.

“I’m in a much better head space now than I was in junior year, especially since I’m in more stable housing at the moment,” Bayudan said.

earlier this month about recovery at Lahaina schools since the fires. (Kevin Fujii/Civil Beat/2024)

Recent data from the Hawai‘i Department of Education illustrate just how difficult last year was for Lahaina students, with math and reading proficiency rates dropping by nearly half at some schools between 2023 and 2024.

The department received a \$2 million federal grant to support student learning and mental health earlier this year, but a shortage of behavioral specialists and therapists has prevented schools from hiring necessary personnel. Instead, most of the funds spent so far have gone toward bus services allowing students to commute from Central Maui to Lahaina for school.

Only two-thirds of Lahaina students have returned to their schools since the fires, which destroyed King Kamehameha III Elementary and closed three other campuses from August to October 2023. Some families are skeptical that Lahaina schools will ever return to previous levels of enrollment and staffing, especially as teacher burnout is high and some students move away from West Maui.

But educators like Jarrett Chapin, who teaches at Lahainaluna, believe their students are benefitting from the stability and structure of this year. Kids are more engaged in class and attend school regularly, teachers say, and schools are doubling down on tutoring and personalized check-ins, with an eye on ensuring kids graduate on time.

“The fire is a landmark or touchstone that everyone has in common, but it’s not as raw,” said Chapin. “I think school life has improved.”

Improvements In Learning

At Lahainaluna High School, Chapin said his students were in survival mode after the fires. It was difficult for students to stay focused and motivated, he added, especially when they were facing so much uncertainty at home.

Last year, 5% of Lahainaluna students tested proficient in math, down from 10% in the 2022-23 school year. The school's college enrollment rate dropped from 48% to 40% between 2023 and 2024, despite the University

of Hawai'i's offer of full scholarships to students who graduated from Lahainaluna in June. [Some seniors last spring struggled](#) to keep up in their classes after the fires and complete graduation requirements.

Test scores for the current school year won't be released until next fall, and it's unclear what long-term effects the fires will have on student learning. But at least it's a less chaotic year.

"Kids still go through stuff, but gosh, it was so raw last year," Chapin said. "We are so much further away from that."

U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, meeting with state leaders and Lahaina principals earlier this month, emphasized the importance of high-quality support for students as they continue to grieve after the fires, and for staff, who may be experiencing burnout.

Students at King Kamehameha III Elementary experienced some of the greatest disruptions, missing over 50 days of school last year. In the spring, roughly a third of students tested proficient in math and reading, down from 45% the year before.

Mindi Cherry, a teacher at King Kamehameha III Elementary, said her first graders seem to be on track with their learning this year. To curb absenteeism, the school is offering ice cream parties to classes with the highest attendance rates, she said. Teachers will also offer tutoring in January to students who have fallen behind.

DOE said recruiting and retaining teachers also remains a priority, although the drop in student enrollment at some schools has corresponded to the loss of some staff. Lahainaluna lost a few teachers in the math and English departments, Chapin said, but the remaining staff has been able to serve the existing student population, which fell by 200 kids this year.

Erin Vegas, who taught fourth grade at Princess Nāhi'ena'ena Elementary last year, said she's worried schools could continue to see a drop in their staffing in the future with the high cost of living and lack of affordable housing in West Maui.

"They won't be able to retain anybody if there's this huge fear that so many teachers will never be able to stay," Vegas said, adding that she moved to O'ahu after she wasn't able to find housing at the end of last school year. The education department plans to build [affordable housing](#) on Lahainaluna's campus that could be available for teachers starting next summer.

Where Did The Students Go?

While Lahaina's student population dropped by a third this year, not all students left at the same rate.

Before the fires, roughly half of Lahaina students were low-income. Now, at least about three-quarters of students at Lahaina schools are, according to data from standardized tests issued every spring.

King Kamehameha III Elementary teacher Robert Livermore says wealthier families may have moved out of Lahaina schools since the fires and transitioned to private or charter schools.

"Those who could did, those who couldn't went without," Livermore said, adding that he sees more students coming to school without snacks or supplies this year.

It's more difficult to explain declining enrollment trends among other groups of students. For example, white students made up over 45% of King Kamehameha III Elementary's student population before the fires but have since dropped to less than 30% of the overall enrollment. English language learners now make up more than a third of the elementary school's population, compared to only 18% before the fires.

The department did not respond to questions about enrollment, and there's little data available on how the overall population of Lahaina has changed since the fires.

Shrinking student populations in Lahaina could mean cuts in staffing and budgets in the coming years, since enrollment determines a large part of schools' budgets. DOE Deputy Superintendent Tammi Oyadomari-Chun said the department plans on slowly reducing Lahaina schools' budgets over the next few years to prevent schools from losing resources and teachers entirely.

Some families who sought other learning options after the fires still haven't returned to Lahaina schools.

David Weeks chose to enroll his children in Hawai'i Technology Academy, a charter school with a Lahaina campus, when he didn't feel safe sending his children to DOE schools near the burn zone last year. While his daughter returned to Lahaina Intermediate this fall, Weeks added, his son has remained at HTA.

Kaliko Storer, a parent at Princess Nāhi'ena'ena Elementary, said some families simply don't have the money or time to wait for housing to open up in West Maui. She's hopeful more students will return to Lahaina schools in the future, but she also understands if families don't want their children to keep moving campuses.

"It's a work in progress," she said.

A Need For More Services

But while there are some indications that academics are on the upswing in schools, staff and students say they're worried about having enough mental health resources to help those who are still processing the events of last year.

Heather Long, program director for Maui Youth and Family Services, said some students are only now understanding the loss and trauma they experienced after the fires. When Lahaina schools reopened last year, she added, many students were still focused on securing their basic needs and weren't fully processing their emotions.

"Dealing with the trauma now, I actually do think it gets worse," Long said, adding that a shortage of counselors and therapists on Maui can make it harder for students to connect with trusted adults or focus on their schoolwork if they're struggling emotionally.

King Kamehameha III Elementary Principal Ian Haskins said the elementary school has two counselors and a behavioral specialist for students, but it's still a struggle to find providers [amid an islandwide shortage](#). After the

fires, DOE trained Lahaina staff to help students cope with mental health struggles and trauma, and partnered with Kaiser Permanente and other organizations to offer support groups for students.

The Lahaina complex and surrounding region is hiring five positions focused on student behavior and mental health, with some of the positions vacant since January, according to DOE's [job posting website](#).

But the department has struggled to spend much of a \$2 million federal grant supporting mental health and academics. So far, Chun said, DOE has spent roughly \$600,000 on bus services for students who are commuting to Lahaina schools from other parts of the island, but hasn't been able to hire mental health professionals like it intended under the grant.

The grant will run until next summer.

In the meantime, school principals say they're worried about students and staff who spent the last year running on adrenaline. Teachers are tired, said Lahainaluna Principal Richard Carosso, and many were burned out at the end of last school year.

"I don't think summer was long enough for our staff," he said earlier this month in a meeting with state and federal leaders.

Bayudan, the senior at Lahainaluna, said she's grateful for the therapists available on campus but wishes students received more encouragement to seek care. Many of her friends and classmates are hesitant to open up about the emotions and challenges they're facing, she added.

"I don't think what we have right now is serving us enough," Bayudan said.

Civil Beat's education reporting is supported by a grant from Chamberlin Family Philanthropy.

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PBS FRONTLINE documentary: 'Maui's Deadly Firestorm' premieres Dec. 17 ([Maui Now.com](#))

12/16/2024

PBS [Frontline's](#) new documentary, "[Maui's Deadly Firestorm](#)," a year-long investigation into the devastating August 2023 wildfire that claimed 102 lives and destroyed the historic town of Lahaina in Maui, Hawai'i. The film explores the causes of the deadliest American wildfire in a century and the missed warnings that made it so unstoppable.

The film will have a digital premiere on Dec. 17 on YouTube, [PBS.org/frontline](#) + PBS App. It will premiere on PBS on Jan. 7, 2025 ([check local listings](#)).

In August 2023, the deadliest US wildfire in more than a century reduced much of the Hawaiian town of Lahaina to ashes, displacing thousands. Sparked by a downed power line, the fire and a chaotic emergency response unfolded as Hurricane Dora brought high winds to Maui.

Coming in the wake of a state investigation that found a broad cascade of failures, [*Maui's Deadly Firestorm*](#) investigates critical missteps that day — and in the years prior, as the county and state were advised to invest more money in prevention and preparedness, and as experts and residents raised concerns.

“I yelled and screamed all these years, but nobody was listening,” says Ke‘eaumoku Kapu, a Lahaina community leader who warned Maui officials in 2018 that the county was unprepared for a major wildfire. “Now that this has happened, I blame myself.”

Written, produced and directed by Xinyan Yu, a filmmaker who is part of FRONTLINE’s Investigative Journalist Equity Initiative, and produced by Christina Avalos, the documentary draws on harrowing footage filmed by those in the path of the inferno and firsthand accounts from survivors, victims’ families and friends, first responders, and local and state authorities.

“For sure I thought that we’re gonna burn in there, because there is no way out and we cannot see anything — all smoke and fire around us,” said survivor Lily Nguyen, who was trapped in traffic in her car for hours as the fire and downed electric poles and lines blocked the town’s main evacuation routes.

Through these accounts as well as a detailed analysis of over 1,000 911 calls and public records across multiple government agencies, *Maui's Deadly Firestorm* provides a harrowing, moment-by-moment reconstruction of the fire and its aftermath. It examines how changes to the climate and landscape have made Maui vulnerable and probes the factors that made this fire such a deadly event.

The documentary also investigates missed opportunities and controversial decisions before and during the response — including a choice not to activate emergency sirens — and raises difficult questions about who and what are to blame for the fire’s heavy toll.

“There are so many challenges in a fire like this,” Hawai‘i Gov. Josh Green tells FRONTLINE. “And it was the speed and ferocity of the fire that ultimately took Lahaina. But that doesn’t mean they couldn’t have done better. We owe answers to everyone. And we also owe it to ourselves to be ready for the next tragedy or the next challenge.”

For the full story, watch *Maui's Deadly Firestorm*. The documentary will be available to stream on pbs.org/frontline, [YouTube](#) and in the [PBS App](#) starting Dec. 17, 2024, at 7/6c. It will premiere on PBS stations ([check local listings](#)) on Jan. 7, 2025 at 10/9c. The documentary will also be available on the [PBS Documentaries Prime Video Channel](#). [Subscribe to FRONTLINE's newsletter](#) to get updates on events and more related to *Maui's Deadly Firestorm*.

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Maria Lanakila rededicated 16 months after devastating Lahaina wildfire ([Maui Now.com](#))

12/15/2024

Maria Lanakila Catholic Church reopened last week in downtown Lahaina, resplendent in white Christmas lights and even capped by a three-quarter moon high over its spire in the West Maui night sky.

“It’s a miracle,” said Joybelle Agustin, a Wailuku resident and Divine Mercy devotee who attended the historic church’s first Mass since the August 2023 wildfires. She recalled that, in the immediate aftermath of the fire, even flowers at the altar didn’t wither, despite flames that consumed most of Lahaina.

Most Reverend Larry Silva, Bishop of Honolulu, presided over the rededication Mass on Wednesday for the 151-year-old church.

Thankfully, the wildfire did not burn Maria Lanakila (Our Lady of Victory), Silva said in his homily. But access to the church was affected, and “that is why you were not able to come here for over a year,” he told an overflow crowd of parishioners. “We’re now very joyful that we are here.”

The devastating wildfire spared the church, its rectory and a classroom building at neighboring Sacred Hearts School. Public access to the church property at the intersection at Waine’e and Dickenson streets has been strictly restricted by immediate post fire search-and-rescue emergency operations and, later, hazardous debris removal from surrounding properties.

Silva noted in his homily that Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris also reopened recently, five years after a fire burned the 860-year-old church’s roof, destroyed its iconic spire and damaged its roof and upper walls.

Both Maria Lanakila and Notre Dame are named after the Blessed Virgin Mary, Silva said, dedicating Wednesday’s Mass to her and to her “yes to God, the invitation that she received to be the mother of God.”

“And at that moment, the Holy Spirit entered her, and the word, the Eternal Word, became flesh,” he said. “As we recall that great moment in Mary’s life, we remember that a church is important because it is here that we gather together for the Word to come into us, for the Word to take flesh in us.”

Silva said that, the wildfire brought horrible “loss of life, loss of hope, loss of jobs. There were many tears that were shed at that time. There were also those who reached out to those in need, embracing them in their love, giving them food when they were hungry, finding shelter for them.”

“There were thousands and thousands of ways that that Word that had become flesh in us in this church,” Silva said.

While progress has been made, “there is much, much work ahead,” he said, noting that Sacred Hearts School, the convent, the parish center and the entire town of Lahaina need to be rebuilt.

“So there is so much more to do,” he said. “But we come here in hope and even in joy in the face of that because it is the Word of God, Christ made flesh in us, that will enable us to do all that the Lord wants us to do.”

The [Maria Lanakila website](#) has a listing of Mass times for both Maria Lanakila in Lahaina and Sacred Hearts Mission Church in Kapalua. Christmas Eve Mass at Maria Lanakila will be at 5:30 p.m. Christmas Eve Mass will start at 5:30 and 9:30 p.m. at Sacred Hearts Mission.

Christmas Day Mass will be at 7 and 9 a.m. at Maria Lanakila. The celebration will be at 7 and 10:30 a.m. that day at Sacred Hearts Mission. A Latin Mass will be celebrated at 1 p.m. Christmas Day at Maria Lanakila.

Within days after the wildfire, Sacred Hearts School relocated temporarily to Sacred Hearts Mission Church in Kapalua and then to 2530 Keka'a Drive mauka of the Kā'anapali Beach Resort. To learn more about the school and about opportunities to support Catholic education for its students, visit its [website here](#).

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Hirono and Markey introduce Public Archives Resiliency Act to protect vital records from climate impacts ([Maui Now.com](#))

12/15/2024

Following the 2023 fires that destroyed or severely damaged eight historic sites managed by the nonprofit Lahaina Restoration Foundation—resulting in the loss of tens of thousands of artifacts and records from the former capital of the Hawaiian Kingdom—US Senators Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Ed Markey (D-MA) introduced the Public Archives Resiliency Act.

The proposed legislation would authorize grants to support the preservation, climate resilience, and continuity of vital government records, while protecting historically and culturally significant documents. It would fund public archives, libraries, museums, educational institutions, and nonprofits, with companion legislation introduced in the US House by Rep. Alma Adams (D-NC).

“Public records are essential to the preservation of our history and culture,” said Hirono. “The Public Archives Resiliency Act will help to better protect them from the effects of climate change, including natural disasters like wildfires or floods.”

Government records are generated through birth, death, marriage, taxes, military service, education, immigration, property ownership, and much more. Many institutions that manage these records however, are at risk of environmental damage and lack resources to protect themselves and their communities. When these public records are destroyed or become inaccessible, it can delay an individual's ability to access key government benefits and services, as well as result in the loss of irreplaceable cultural artifacts.

“The importance of this bill cannot be overstated,” said Janel Quirante, head archivist, at 'Ulu'ulu: The Henry Ku'ualoha Giugni Moving Image Archive of Hawai'i. “This bill provides crucial support to libraries, archives and museums that care for historic and cultural materials endangered by the impacts of climate change. Infrastructure support would allow for critical improvements to aging HVAC systems, especially in Hawai'i and other tropical climates where high temperature and humidity pose major challenges to maintaining a safe long term preservation environment for archival films. Digitization support would allow for the preservation, access and sharing of our cultural heritage documented on films and videos that are increasingly susceptible to loss from climate disasters.”

“Historic records and artifacts left by our kūpuna (ancestors) serve as foundational blueprints, offering invaluable guidance for addressing present-day challenges and shaping our future,” said Kai Kahele, chairman of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs Board of Trustees. “The Public Archives Resiliency Act, which allocates additional funding to repositories, greatly strengthens the capacity of Hawai'i's archives to preserve and access

essential historical records. This support is particularly critical as we confront the challenges of climate change, as recently underscored by the devastating wildfires on Maui in 2023.”

“The Public Archives Resiliency Act will provide essential support to Hawai‘i’s repositories dedicated to the preservation and accessibility of historic documents and artifacts,” said Kale Hannahs, research systems administrator at the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. “These institutions serve as vital stewards, empowering and educating the communities they support. OHA’s partnership with the Lahaina Restoration Foundation serves as a timely example of the importance of digitizing historic documents for the purpose of preserving Hawai‘i’s history and provides a foundational framework upon which we build our future.”

Full text of the legislation is available [here](#).

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New report reveals impact of Lahaina wildfire on local Filipino community ([Hawaii News Now](#))

2/15/2024

A new report is revealing some of the struggles and concerns faced by one of the most vulnerable communities impacted by last year’s Lahaina wildfires.

At a community event at the Lahaina Civic Center on Sunday, nonprofit leaders released data from a [“Comprehensive Report on the Needs and Recovery of Filipino Survivors of the Lahaina Fires”](#) aimed to give Filipino immigrant survivors a voice.

Krizhna Bayudan was born and raised on West Maui. Her family is among thousands of Filipino immigrants displaced by the Lahaina wildfire.

Despite millions of dollars in aid flowing to Maui, many survivors say they had trouble getting help, faced with language and cultural barriers.

“People are still very much stressed about their housing situations,” Bayudan said. “They are very stressed for the incoming FEMA program where they’re going to start collecting the HUD spare market rent beginning, I believe February or March of 2025, many of them have expressed that they can’t *“urnong”* money, which is they cannot save up money.”

Seeing the frustration and unmet needs in her community, Bayudan interviewed fellow survivors for nonprofits Tagnawa and the Hawaii Workers Center to create a first-of-its-kind report and urge policymakers and agencies to ensure more equitable distribution of aid. Nearly 800 survivors were surveyed.

“Considering the context that Lahaina is 40% Filipino, there needs to be a greater consideration of the Filipino experience after the fire,” said Tagnawa director Nadine Ortega.

“A lot of them are women. A lot of them work in the service industry. A lot of them have elderly in their families and children.”

One of the big takeaways of the report: 68% of Filipino survivors lived in multigenerational households that complicated their eligibility to receive aid and find housing.

Because FEMA and Red Cross aid rules define a household as only immediate family, extended families were broken up, causing more trauma. Many lost critical support for childcare and caregiving.

“What was once this big multigenerational household is now just separate smaller units and we lost the sense of community and help that our multigenerational house houses provided,” Bayudan said.

Other concerns included increased mental health issues in youth, along with rising food, transportation and housing costs.

The report offers culturally-informed steps to recovery — from offering community building events to multi-language outreach programs.

“Implementing county rent assistance programs because that is the number one issue is people are afraid of becoming rent burden again,” Bayudan said.

Advocates hope the report motivates officials to step up for a community considered the backbone of West Maui’s economy.

“They put in so many years of hard work into, into Lahaina and they don’t imagine living anywhere else. So we need to honor these people and we need to ensure that they have the housing stability and security that they so much deserve,” she said.

Read the full [“Comprehensive Report on the Needs and Recovery of Filipino Survivors of the Lahaina Fires” here.](#)
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IRS provides penalty relief to Maui wildfire victims ([Maui Now](#))

12/12/2024

The Internal Revenue Service today announced new penalty relief for Maui wildfire victims impacted by the historic 2023 wildfires, which caused a reported \$5.5 billion in damages.

The IRS will be providing failure to pay penalty relief to nearly 600 Maui taxpayers, which equates to about \$300,000 in relief – an average of about \$500 per taxpayer. This is separate from [disaster relief previously announced in August 2023](#), that postponed various tax-filing and tax-payment deadlines for individuals and businesses in Maui and Hawai’i counties until Aug. 7, 2024.

Due to the widespread damage and closure of postal facilities, the IRS did not mail the initial notice, typically the CP14 notice, to taxpayers who filed a balance due return in Maui and Hawaii counties, between Aug. 17, 2023, and Jan. 30, 2024. As a result, the IRS is removing any failure to pay penalties added to balance due tax periods from the date the IRS would have normally mailed the notice until the date the penalties were fully paid or through Dec. 30, 2024, whichever is earlier.

Qualifying taxpayers with an impacted disaster address on the day the notice would normally have been issued are eligible, regardless of if their address has changed since then.

This penalty relief is automatic. Maui wildfire disaster taxpayers don't need to take any action to get it. Eligible taxpayers who already fully paid these penalties will benefit from the relief, too. If the penalties have been paid, the IRS will issue a refund or credit the payment toward another outstanding tax liability.

Receive the latest notices from the IRS

The IRS understands that some Maui residents may still be displaced. Affected taxpayers are urged to contact the IRS to update their address as soon as possible to ensure they receive future correspondence. The IRS advises wildfire victims in Maui and Hawaii counties to update their current address with the IRS by calling the IRS Disaster Hotline at [866-562-5227](tel:866-562-5227), or by filing [Form 8822, Change of Address](#). The IRS also recommends that taxpayers notify the post office serving the old address, if their address has changed.

The IRS will mail impacted taxpayers a notice in the next couple of weeks informing them why their penalties were removed and any refund amounts or balances due remaining on the affected tax years.

Improving taxpayer service and help for Maui taxpayers still needing assistance

The IRS has taxpayer services available in person, over the phone and online. The IRS reminds taxpayers with unpaid tax debts that there are a number of [payments options](#) and online tools [available to help](#).

The IRS also encourages taxpayers unable to fully pay their tax balance to sign into and create an [IRS Online Account](#) where they can learn about payment plan options and apply for a new payment plan. This account allows taxpayer to view:

- The amount they owe.
- Payment history and any scheduled or pending payments.
- Payment plan details and revise details of an existing payment plan.
- Digital copies of select notices from the IRS.
- Most recently filed tax return, including adjusted gross income, and access transcripts or tax compliance reports.

Eligible business taxpayers also now have the option to sign in and create a [Business Tax Account](#) to view and submit balance due payments. Additionally, the [Tax Pro Online Account](#) has more self-service options for tax professionals, including easier navigation to secure two-way messaging where authorized tax professionals can digitally communicate with the IRS on behalf of their clients.

What taxpayers should know about interest

The IRS is required by law to charge interest when a tax balance is not paid on time. Interest [cannot be reduced](#) due to reasonable cause. Interest is based on the amount of tax owed for each day it's not paid in full. The interest is compounded daily, so it's assessed on the previous day's balance plus the interest. Interest rates are determined every three months and can vary based on type of tax; for example, individual or business tax liabilities. More information is available on the [interest](#) page of IRS.gov.

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DAMAGE AND DEBRIS REMOVAL

West Maui residents invited to recycle bulky items ([Hawaii Public Radio](#))

12/12/2024

West Maui residents will have a chance to recycle bulky items on Saturday, Dec. 14.

The program allows free disposal of air conditioners, batteries, large appliances, tires, scrap metal and electronics.

Commercial drop-offs will not be accepted.

The drop-off event is hosted by the nonprofit Mālama Maui Nui in partnership with the County of Maui Department of Environmental Management.

Drop-off is at the Lahaina Civic Center from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For information on how to sign up for an appointment, visit malamamauinui.org/gogreen.html.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

The Long Crusade To Build A West Maui Hospital Hits Another Snag ([Honolulu Civil Beat](#))

12/13/2024

The idea of building a hospital in West Maui has been around for at least a quarter-century.

Maui Memorial Medical Center is about 40 minutes away — if there is no traffic or road flooding. Kula Hospital is more than an hour away.

“We need this facility here more than ever after Lahaina being gone,” state Rep. Elle Cochran said, referring to the devastating 2023 fire that burned much of the town. “We don’t even have a clinic.”

So will it ever be built?

Proponents and possible developers are still pursuing the proposed hospital in Kā'anapali, but they say the county has backpedaled on a key component — a commitment to be the guarantor of state-issued bonds to kickstart construction.

“I just think they’re just throwing out every excuse in the book to just not want to support it,” Cochran said of Maui Mayor Richard Bissen’s administration.

Bissen says otherwise. While his administration fully supports the hospital project, the county must carefully evaluate the financial feasibility and potential risks of every project, he wrote in an email to Civil Beat.

The West Maui Hospital Foundation manages the proposal and its fundraising. It turned to the Legislature in 2023 to authorize \$20 million in special purpose revenue bonds to start construction. The foundation’s president said the county had agreed to be the guarantor, which is vital to find a lender.

Ultimately, up to \$120 million more would be needed to complete construction.

“Over the past year, the parameters of the foundation’s request have changed, and proposed funding sources have not materialized, which posed significant challenges,” Bissen said, adding his administration is “grateful for the dedication and persistence” of the foundation.

The hospital is basically ready to be built, with essential infrastructure laid down and all legal conditions fulfilled, according to Newport Hospital Corp. president Brian Hoyle. An experienced hospital developer, he said he has invested more than \$20 million in the project over the last 17 years.

“I spent the last 40 years of my life building hospitals,” Hoyle said. “I built 50 hospitals of all types, you name it, medical buildings, nursing homes, and I’m still involved in health care ownership.”

Plans for the proposed 25-bed critical access hospital include a 24-hour emergency room, three operating rooms, a lab, radiology services, a pharmacy and outpatient services, Hoyle said. The nonprofit hospital would be built on a 5-acre portion of a 15-acre land owned by Hoyle. The rest of the land would be leased by private health care businesses.

To begin the first phase of construction, proponents hoped the county would be the guarantor for \$20 million in special purpose revenue bonds [authorized last year](#) by the Legislature and Gov. Josh Green.

Hoyle said the bonds would be sold in a public market so private investors would put up the money as long as Maui County is a guarantor. He said state officials, then-county finance director Scott Teruya and the Maui bond counsel had told him and other stakeholders this was possible last year.

But [Teruya was fired](#) earlier this year, and Hoyle said the new finance director, along with the new bond counsel, are now saying this isn’t possible.

Jo Anne Johnson Winer, president of the [West Maui Hospital Foundation](#), said she thought the August 2023 wildfires would bring more urgency to having a hospital on West Maui, but “the current administration seems to feel that housing is a greater urgency than medical care.”

Johnson Winer said full funding to build the entire hospital will more than likely come from a combination of resources, including federal allocation, private donors, philanthropic efforts and loans.

“None of us knows what that formula is going to be, but we just want to get to first base,” she said of the need for a guarantor of the state bonds. “That’s all we’re asking. They can talk all that they want, but if your local government is unwilling to put their money where their mouth is, how can you get to first base?”

Still, she remains optimistic. As a County Council member from 2000 to 2010, Johnson Winer supported the hospital since its early stages of planning.

“I believe that the hospital will be built; I don’t have any doubt about it,” Johnson Winer said.

After Legislative Success, A Curveball

Cochran successfully co-sponsored [House Bill 1255](#) in the 2023 legislative session, which was signed into law as Act 73 by Green, authorizing the issuance of the bonds. Since the bonds’ debt service needed backing, Cochran said, the county had agreed to be the guarantor.

Fast-forward to last October, when the Maui County Council had a [resolution](#) on the agenda introduced by council member Tamara Paltin urging the county to “provide for the establishment of the proposed West Maui Hospital and Medical Center through the guarantee of state purpose revenue bond issuance.”

At that council meeting, consultant Charles Slaton gave a [short presentation](#) on the project’s status. He is also the CEO of Critical Access Healthcare Management, the company contracted to build and manage the hospital. Hoyle and Slaton have a long history of working together to develop hospitals.

Slaton’s presentation was followed by county managing director Josiah Nishita, who started by stating Bissen’s support for a private hospital in West Maui.

Everything pointed to the hospital finally coming to fruition. But then came the curveball.

“I’m not aware of our bond counsel seeing this as a low-risk investment,” Nishita said. “In fact, I believe it’s the opposite.”

There is a reason other hospitals have not agreed to be part of the project, he said.

“If it was a low- or no-risk investment, there would be definitely more consideration from other entities like Kaiser or Queens or what-not to participate,” Nishita said, adding that hospitals generally lose money in Hawai‘i.

“I would have really wished that they had told us this 18 months ago, because then I would not have wasted my time.”

Jo Anne Johnson Winer, West Maui Hospital Foundation

This surprised Johnson Winer, who said it was the first time she heard the county would not be the guarantor for the bonds’ debt service.

“I would have really wished that they had told us this 18 months ago, because then I would not have wasted my time,” she said. “We could have been out doing fundraising.”

The county, however, says it did not change the agreement. It was the foundation that changed the terms and the use of the funds, making it challenging for the county to assist them, Laksmi Abraham, county communications director, wrote in an email to Civil Beat.

“It is the county’s understanding that when the special purpose revenue bonds were originally discussed, the West Maui Hospital Foundation had a plan for the capital stacking for the remainder of the project, including USDA funds and private sources,” Abraham said.

The county had supported funding for the hospital’s construction, Abraham said. But since then, she added, the funding to complete the project has not come to fruition, and the foundation was proposing to buy land with the bonds rather than constructing the hospital as part of the original agreement.

Abraham said the administration had also agreed to the original proposal for the bonds because the foundation had committed the land as collateral in case it defaulted on the bonds.

Johnson Winer, however, said buying the land was not in the foundation’s original plans; it only proposed it because the county wanted collateral. But since Hoyle, who owns the land, agreed to a “very reasonable” 60-year lease, she said funds would be better spent by building the hospital rather than acquiring the land.

Pulling Back From The Guarantor Role

While acknowledging the bonds’ marketability with the county acting as the guarantor, Nishita told the council this is not a requirement in the legislation.

House Bill 1255 had in its [original language](#) a requirement for the county to be the guarantor for the bonds’ debt service, but that was pulled out in the bill’s [final version](#).

On March 14, Bissen sent [testimony](#) in support of the bill. Two weeks later, he sent [more testimony](#), still in support of the bill but now asking lawmakers to remove references to any guarantor for any debt service on the bonds.

“It is our intention to continue to work with the West Maui Hospital Foundation in an effort to move this project forward,” Bissen wrote in the later testimony.

Johnson Winer said she also asked lawmakers to remove the county as a guarantor because it could have caused legal problems for the bill. But it was just to keep the legislation within legal parameters — she still thought the county would not back out from being the guarantor.

Nishita said when Bissen submitted testimony to the Legislature, the project was different. The hospital was supposed to be a six-bed facility, but now it is projected to have 25 beds. With that, he said, the cost went from \$40 million to \$140 million.

But Johnson Winer said the original plan was for a 25-bed facility. The reason the foundation once considered a smaller hospital, she said, was because the U.S. Department of Agriculture was being tapped for a loan that would be easier to obtain with the smaller model.

Slaton said he was working closely with the USDA Rural Development Department toward a loan for the hospital in 2022 — he had already found financing for three hospitals elsewhere doing this. But recent changes in federal policies, he said, caused the plans for a USDA loan to fall through.

“It’s basically shovel-ready. We have all the entitlements. We have water rights, the water and sewer lines are all in.”

Brian Hoyle, Newport Hospital Corporation president

Since the USDA is not involved as a lender anymore, Nishita said the total cost of the hospital could be “in some way tied up to the county.”

It would include the \$20 million in guarantee for the bonds, he said, plus \$120 million more to complete the hospital construction, potentially from a Community Development Block Grant Disaster Relief fund through the federal Housing and Urban Development agency — if the county receives this grant.

Johnson Winer said she hopes HUD’s block grant would finance the hospital, but there are no guarantees the county will receive it, how much the grant would be for, and if it would be used for the hospital.

The foundation can also still utilize a special purpose revenue bond through the state government without the county acting as a guarantor, Abraham said.

The council’s hospital resolution was eventually thrown in a pack with other bills and resolutions deferred to the chair of the next council term starting Jan. 2. But not before current council chair Alice Lee said she wanted to “remind everybody that this is in the West Maui Community Plan, so it is a priority. The community came in force supporting this.”

The day before Thanksgiving, Slaton, Hoyle, Cochran, Johnson Winer and their attorney met with Nishita and other county officials to propose an alternative. Since the county didn’t want to be a guarantor anymore, they asked for a \$5 million reimbursable grant or a \$5 million grant in matching funds. Hoyle said they presented a budget to county officials, who said they would get back to them.

Abraham said that after that meeting, county officials recommended the foundation prepare a formal grant application including an updated budget, pro forma financials and building specifications.

“This was encouraged in light of preparation of the fiscal year 2026 budget which will be presented to the council on March 25, 2025, so there is time for the foundation to request a grant,” Abraham said.

Hospital Foundation board members Alfred Arensdorf and Howard Hanzawa. (West Maui Hospital Foundation/2016)

A Project With A History

In 1999, the nonprofit [West Maui Improvement Foundation](#) successfully fundraised for a fire and ambulance station in Napili. Its board then decided to fundraise for a hospital.

A few years later, after Kā'anapali Land Management Corporation donated a 15-acre parcel behind the Lahaina Civic Center for the hospital, WMIF president Joe Pluta said Hoyle approached him with interest in the project.

“He was the only one who was saying he was willing to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars and take the risk,” Pluta said of Hoyle. “He funded all the consultants and fees, and refunded us all the money that we had previously paid out.”

But two weeks before a final land subdivision approval, the Hawaii Supreme Court issued a decision that no ceded lands — lands that belonged to the Hawaiian Kingdom when the monarchy was overthrown — could be used for permanent easements, sold or conveyed without authorization from three-quarters of the Legislature, Pluta said.

The land itself wasn't affected by the court's ruling, but the problem was an easement less than a hundred yards long that was part of ceded lands and could not be used anymore. Essentially, the foundation had the land but no access to it.

“It set us back three years,” Pluta said.

“God bless his heart for never throwing in the towel and giving up.”

Rep. Elle Cochran, referring to hospital developer Brian Hoyle

Another 15-acre parcel next to Kā'anapali Coffee Farms was then identified as a viable site in 2014. Unlike the original parcel promised as a donation, the new land had more improvements, Pluta said, and Hoyle had to pay landowner Kā'anapali Land Management Corporation \$4 million.

“It was such a terrible turnaround for him,” Pluta said. “I'm so sorry that I was powerless with that whole thing. There's nothing I can do about it.”

Eventually, Hoyle would part ways with Pluta and found the West Maui Hospital Foundation to take over the project. Despite the initial downturn, Hoyle kept pushing for the hospital.

“God bless his heart for never throwing in the towel and giving up,” Cochran said.

Hoyle's company, Newport Hospital Corporation, graded and built improvements on the land for the proposed hospital.

“It's basically shovel-ready. We have all the entitlements. We have water rights, the water and sewer lines are all in,” Hoyle said. “It's a matter of just getting financing, which has been difficult for the foundation because it's not part of a larger entity like Hawaii Pacific Health or Queens.”

West Maui Hospital, he said, is a startup enterprise, but it would also be a nonprofit hospital.

“It’s one of the last things Jo Anne (Johnson Winer) and I will ever do in our lives, it’s going to get built one way or the other,” Cochran said. “It’s just we really would wish we could get it going now.”

Abraham said the county has been working with the foundation since March 2023. Hospitals are generally not funded by counties, she said; they are either privately run or work in coordination with the state.

“The West Maui Hospital Foundation is asking the County of Maui for taxpayer resources, and as such due diligence needs to occur to ensure public funds are utilized properly,” Abraham said.

Civil Beat’s coverage of Maui County is supported in part by a grant from the Nuestro Futuro Foundation.

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INSURANCE

Judge decries ‘knife fight’ in court over Maui wildfire settlement fund ([Hawaii News Now](#))

00/00/22 | Article URL

The \$4 billion Maui wildfire settlement is still up in the air — and led to what the judge called a “knife fight” in court Friday.

This time the fight was between attorneys for groups of victims. Meanwhile, the settlement itself is still awaiting a key decision by the Supreme Court and victims wait for compensation.

In court Friday, the settlement was described like a big pot of soup, with the money having to be ladled out to victims.

But there are several classes of victims, including One Ohana applicants who lost loved ones in the fire, about 1,300 victims who have individually hired lawyers and there are those who might file a claim later through a class action which could bring in 8,000 more claims.

Kyle Smith, speaking for the class action attorneys liked Judge Peter Cahill’s use of the soup kitchen analogy.

“We’ve only got a certain pot of soup and the settlement has nine bowls,” he said.

He argued that the class action process will service people with legitimate claims who don’t want to hire attorneys yet, but Cahill said he wasn’t clear on who that might be.

“I read your complaints and I, I’m just like, mystified. I just don’t understand all these claimants,” he said.

The class action lawsuit welcomes people with everything from wrongful death to travel loss claims.

Lawyers who have been hired by individual families and businesses, represented in court by Maui Attorney Cynthia Wong, said they represent the most suffering.

“So we really want to make sure that the true victims get the majority of the share of the money that is being allocated in the settlement,” she said in an interview.

The reason the victims are fighting over the limited \$4 billion pot of money is because that’s all that Hawaiian Electric, the state, landowner Kamehameha Schools and others’ responsible for the fire are willing to pay.

If the settlement is ultimately approved, it’s expected that it would be administered by a court appointment master or administrator and opened to people who wanted to file claims directly, without an attorney.

The judge expressed frustrated at seeing a fight among victims.

“And now the knives are out, as usually happens,” he said. “And this is a knife fight. Somebody should bring a gun, though, so this will go quicker.”

Cahill set a mini trial for January for arguments over how much each class of victims should get, with highly restricted evidence and arguments and allowing only one attorney to speak for each side.

“You get eight hours they get eight hours. You put it all on the table and then I decide on a number, and that’s the end of the story,” he said. “What’s fair and adequate is what I say is fair and adequate.”

Although whatever he decides could be changed later, attorneys argued having the apportionment of the fund would speed the process of getting money to victims later.

Meanwhile, a lawsuit challenging the settlement by insurance companies who paid out over \$2 billion in claims will soon be heard by the Hawaii Supreme Court.

The industry lawyers also felt the judge’s wrath after mistakenly listing a mainland attorney as approved to appear on the case on their paperwork.

“I could disqualify him, report him to ODC (Office of the Disciplinary Counsel) and you and all the other lawyers who signed on this pleading. Don’t trust them when they are doing that it’s a misrepresentation and an outright fabrication — he is not admitted in this case,” Cahill said at the conclusion of Friday’s hearing.

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BUSINESS

‘Slow progress’ ahead for Maui County’s economy with tourism lagging ([Maui Now.com](#))

12/13/2024

With visitors choosing to go elsewhere, Maui County can expect “slow progress” in its economic recovery in the wake of the August 2023 wildfire disaster, according to economics professor Carl Bonham, executive director of the University of Hawai‘i Economic Research Organization.

“The recovery is ongoing, and the place we think it’s going to be slowest, besides housing, is tourism,” said Bonham, who spoke with reporters via Zoom Thursday in advance of today’s release of [UHERO’s fourth quarter economic forecast for Hawai‘i](#). “At the moment, tourism is really suffering. And, you know, there was some optimism around the tournament, the (November) basketball tournament. But if you looked at the daily passenger counts, and you just barely could see any impact of that.”

The UHERO forecast predicts — in rounded numbers — 2.6 million visitors in 2025, 2.7 million in 2026 and 2.8 million in 2027. Those visitor arrivals compare with other, previously more robust years: 2.8 million in 2017, 2.96 million in 2018, 3.1 million in 2019 and 2.97 million in 2022. (The COVID pandemic year saw 807,308 visitors to Maui County.)

Aside from visitor arrivals to Maui, hotel occupancy rates have been anemic too, he pointed out.

In October, Maui County had the lowest hotel occupancy rates in the state at 54.9%, according to the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism’s Hawai‘i [Hotel Performance Report](#). Statewide, hotel occupancy rates were 70.4% — 77.5% on O‘ahu, 65.7% on Hawai‘i Island and 74% on Kaua‘i.

The Maui hotel occupancy rates “hasn’t been this low in many, many years,” he said. It would be necessary to “just probably have to go back to, I would say, maybe even the Great Recession, to see occupancy rates this low. And, essentially, what’s going on is just after the residents moved out of the hotels, you know, we haven’t seen the push to bring visitors back in a way that’s adequate to fill the rooms back up.”

Regarding the vacation rental phase-out proposed by Mayor Richard Bissen, Bonham said UHERO is working on a report on the subject, and he didn’t want to discuss it in much detail. (The report is expected in the first quarter of 2025.)

However, “it’s not rocket science to know that if you take in 2025, 30% of the visitor plant off of Maui, it’s going to have a negative impact on the number of visitors who are on island and the amount that they will spend. And that will then impact the recovery of Maui employment, of jobs, particularly in areas like food service and retail, in restaurants. These are the places that have been hit the hardest by post-fire loss of visitor spending, and so you know . . . that policy will make available from housing, and it will have an impact on housing costs, and it will also have an impact on holding down job growth and overall recovery.”

Bonham acknowledged that some visitors would stay in hotels, rather than vacation rentals if they’re unavailable.

“If you lose say, 20% of your visitor plant, your accommodations, it doesn’t mean that visitor spending falls by 20%, and that you know, then visitors necessarily fall by 20%; that some of the visitors will switch from short-term rentals to other accommodations.”

“You could also have some new short-term rentals popping up in areas where they are permitted, where they’re already permitted in resort areas,” he said. “Room prices will probably go up, so you would end up with some extra spending for that reason.”

“So, yeah, it’s kind of a complicated mess, but it’s pretty hard to come up with any analysis that would tell you that you won’t end up with too many negatives,” Bonham said of forecasting the impacts of a vacation rental phase-out on Maui. “Any way you slice it, you know, even with additional spending because of higher prices and because of people staying in hotels or resort condos that are legal, you’re still going to end up with a decline in spending and therefore some impact to jobs and overall household income. Just no way to avoid that.”

The UHERO report summarizes Maui’s economic forecast, saying: “Visitor numbers remain subdued, with occupancy rates at historic lows and labor force participation constrained by post-fire disruptions and outmigration. Maui has regained more than half of the jobs lost to the wildfires, but employment remains well below pre-fire levels. Rebuilding efforts will provide ongoing support, but a full tourism recovery is years down the road.”

The UHERO report says “Hawai’i’s labor market is softening, shaped by both the Maui wildfires and broader national trends.”

The total number of new hires statewide fell from 74,000 in the first quarter of 2022 to 62,000 by the third quarter of this year. Also, fewer employees are leaving jobs, with job departures down 26% from the first quarter of 2022.

“This reduced labor market activity reflects slower economic conditions on Maui since the wildfires, as well as softer overall Hawai’i economic activity,” the report says.

It points out that Maui County’s seasonally adjusted unemployment rate has gone down from a high of 8% in September 2023 (a month after the wildfires) to just more than 3% in October.

“While declining unemployment can indicate an improving labor market, in this case it primarily reflects workers leaving the labor force,” the report says. “Since the fourth quarter of 2023, the number of employed workers in Maui County has fallen by 200, while the labor force has declined considerably more, losing 2,700 potential workers over the same period. Some of these workers appear to have relocated to other islands or left the state entirely. Estimates from our Maui Recovery Dashboard suggest that nearly 5% of West Maui residents have relocated to the Mainland or another country. Additionally, 3% have moved to another island within the state.”

For Hawai’i overall, the UHERO report’s main takeaway is that there’s “broad uncertainty” about the impacts of the incoming administration of President-elect Donald Trump.

“Under the assumption of policy changes that are sharp but limited in scope, we will see a short-term boost to Mainland tourism and local income, but there will be medium-term supply challenges and an uptick in inflation. State tax cuts will provide local support. Maui rebuilding will add to an already-buoyant construction cycle, even as home affordability woes continue,” the report says.

The report says UH economists are adopting policy assumptions of “limited magnitude.”

“The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will be extended, and the corporate tax rate will be reduced,” it says. “Tariff hikes will be more limited and targeted than many expect, resulting in a 5 percentage point increase in the tariff rate. Other countries will retaliate with similar tariff hikes. Through deportations, the administration will be able to reduce the number of unauthorized immigrants by 350,000 per year. The policies as a whole will provide a moderate near-term US economic boost, but will result in higher inflation and slower growth in the medium term.”

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UHERO Forecast for the State of Hawai‘i: Outlook more uncertain as federal policy changes loom ([Hawaii Free Press](#))

12/13/2024

Hawaii’s economic expansion continues, but slowly. Now the incoming Trump Administration introduces uncertainty. Under the assumption of policy changes that are sharp but limited in scope, we will see a short-term boost to tourism and local incomes, but medium-term supply side challenges and an uptick in inflation. Maui rebuilding will add to already-buoyant construction, even as home affordability woes continue.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hawaii’s economic expansion continues, but slowly. Now the incoming Trump Administration introduces broad uncertainty into the outlook. Under the assumption of policy changes that are sharp but limited in scope, we will see a short-term boost to mainland tourism and local income, but there will be medium-term supply challenges and an uptick in inflation. State tax cuts will provide local support. Maui rebuilding will add to an already-buoyant construction cycle, even as home affordability woes continue.

- Because of uncertainty surrounding Trump Administration policies—and Congressional and legal challenges—for now we are adopting policy assumptions of limited magnitude. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will be extended and the corporate tax rate will be reduced. Tariff hikes will be more limited and targeted than many expect, resulting in a five percentage point increase in the effective tariff rate. Other countries will retaliate with similar tariff hikes. Through deportations, the Administration will be able to reduce the number of unauthorized immigrants by 350,000 people per year. The policies as a whole will provide a moderate near-term US economic boost, but will result in higher inflation and slower growth in the medium term.
- Hawaii tourism, which has flattened this year, will show modest improvement in 2025, as visitor arrivals expand nearly 3%. U.S. mainland travel will strengthen, aided by federal tax cuts, but international markets may suffer from trade tensions and a stronger dollar. Tourism revenue will be constrained by stagnant per-person spending.
- Maui’s recovery continues to face challenges. Visitor numbers remain subdued, with occupancy rates at historic lows and labor force participation constrained by post-fire disruptions and outmigration. Maui has regained more than half of the jobs lost to the wildfires, but employment remains well below pre-fire levels. Rebuilding efforts will provide ongoing support, but a full tourism recovery is years down the road.

- Hawaii’s overall labor market has softened, with statewide job growth just over a half-percent this year. Job gains have been uneven across counties, with Oahu and the Big Island outpacing Maui and Kauai. With the direct negative wildfire effects now behind us, Maui job growth will turn upward in 2025, while labor market gains will slow statewide. Long-term job growth will be limited by an aging population and a slow-growing labor force.
- Construction activity remains a bright spot, supported by government contracts and Maui rebuilding efforts. At the same time, resource constraints and escalating costs are a concern for the industry. Employment in the sector will peak in early-2026 before this building cycle begins to wane.
- Housing affordability continues to deteriorate. The median price of a single-family home is up 9% statewide and 15% on Maui this year, and mortgage rates hover near 7%. Rising homeowner insurance premiums, driven in part by climate risks, are another headwind to housing affordability and housing market recovery. These challenges are compounded by slow progress in addressing Maui’s post-fire housing needs.
- Honolulu inflation remains elevated, as higher housing costs finally feed through to the consumer price index. While a slight moderation is expected in 2025, higher US tariffs and deportation actions will push inflation higher in the medium term, eroding to some extent real income gains for households.
- The outlook remains largely in line with the previous forecast, but policy uncertainty adds significant risks. Trade and immigration policies that are much harsher than we currently assume could have broader negative fallout here.

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A Guide to Traveling Responsibly in Hawai‘i ([Popsugar](#))

12/13/2024

For decades, travelers from all over the world have flocked to Hawai‘i for its beautiful beaches, aloha lifestyle, and rich culture. But in recent years since the pandemic and [Maui wildfires](#), native Hawaiians and locals have expressed [concerns of too much tourism](#) — and the harmful behaviors that some visitors exhibit. The reality is, when it comes to a vacation spot as popular as this one, bad tourist behavior can be pervasive. But as actor and native Hawaiian [Auli‘i Cravalho previously told PS](#), "Hawai‘i is beautiful, and to deny anyone from seeing a beautiful place is sad."

Now that the state is welcoming visitors, it's more important than ever before to prioritize respectful tourism. In October, I traveled to Kaua‘i and O‘ahu, where I was hosted by the Kaua‘i Visitors Bureau and O‘ahu Visitors Bureau, respectively, to experience all that the islands had to offer. On my trip, I learned about Hawai‘i's efforts to grow tourism sustainably and ways to respect and give back to the communities you're visiting. Based on my experience, here are my best tips for traveling mindfully to Hawai‘i — including advice, activities, and destinations — and whether it's OK to travel to the islands right now.

Is It OK to Travel to Hawai‘i Right Now?

Though there's been online debate about whether it's OK to visit Hawai'i, particularly following the pandemic and wildfires, the Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau, which works with the Hawai'i Tourism Authority, confirms that all of the islands are welcoming travelers. "With Maui in rebuilding mode, they, too, need tourism back and are sharing all the wonderful places available on Maui while Lahaina heals and rebuilds," says Sue Kanoho, managing director of the Island Visitors Bureaus and executive director of the Kaua'i Visitors Bureau. "Listening only to social media does not give a full picture of our destination." She recommends checking in with each of the island's visitors bureau offices for current updates.

How to be a Responsible Tourist in Hawai'i

While Hawai'i's tourism board encourages travelers to visit, it's important to be extra mindful when headed to Hawai'i. That means supporting the local economy and respecting the wishes of both locals and native Hawaiians.

Support Local Businesses

When you're eating your way through the islands, prioritize businesses that are local to Hawai'i. We had some of our best meals on Kaua'i at [The Fish Express](#), a busy takeaway restaurant that serves the freshest poke I've ever eaten; [Red Salt](#), an upscale eatery headed by Kaua'i native chef Noelani Planas; [Little Fish Coffee](#), a casual breakfast spot that uses local, Kaua'i-grown and organic ingredients whenever possible; and with Aletha Thomas of [Cooking Kauai](#), which offers culinary classes that focus on preserving Hawai'i's seasons and cultures. I also loved walking through the [Kaua'i Culinary Market](#), a weekly farmer's market at the Shops at Kukui'ula, where local vendors sell Kaua'i-grown fruits, vegetables, coffee, and more.

Aside from accommodations and food, you'll likely be spending a majority of your travel budget on activities. For activities like guided tours, cruises, and water sports, choose local businesses. On Kaua'i, we visited the famous Nāpali Coast, one of the most beautiful coastlines in the world, via [Holo Holo Charters](#), a boat tour company offering sightseeing and snorkeling excursions on its locally built vessels. The company also prioritizes eco-consciousness, emphasizing protecting marine life and even providing reef-safe sunscreen. We also visited [Lydgate Farms](#), a fifth-generation, family-owned chocolate farm, where we learned about and tasted the most exquisite chocolate, and the historic Kilohana Plantation, where we embarked on a [rum safari tour](#) to check out fruit orchards and farm animals while enjoying Kōloa Rum.

If you're in the market for clothes, accessories, or other artisan goods, consider spending your dollars at local businesses as well. Cravalho previously told PS one of her favorite spots on O'ahu is [Nā Mea Hawai'i](#), a craft store that sells pieces made locally or by artisans with Polynesian ties. On Kaua'i, I loved sifting through the selection of locally designed and handcrafted gifts at [Alakoko](#), a community-based nonprofit store.

Do Your Research

There's so much natural beauty to enjoy in Hawai'i, but it's important to be prepared before venturing into any part of nature, whether that's while surfing, hiking, or snorkeling. It may seem obvious, but when a local or sign tells you to not to go any farther, listen. Kanoho notes there's been an increase in hiking incidents due to a lack of preparation. Before you go hiking anywhere, do a quick search on weather conditions, parking spaces,

designated trails, and whether you must enter with a guide. If you're hitting a trail alone, be sure to "let people know where you are going and when you expect to return," Kanoho recommends.

When you're headed out to the ocean, exercise caution, especially when there are strong currents or it's dark outside. It's also important to be respectful to marine life: Never litter, admire sea creatures from afar, and use reef-safe sunscreen. Hawai'i has [banned the sale of sunscreen](#) containing oxybenzone and octinoxate, chemicals that are harmful to coral, so double-check your sunscreen ingredients before packing.

As part of [Hawai'i's new bill dedicated to regenerative tourism](#), which aims to balance tourism with the well-being of local communities through active restorative measures, the state has implemented advance reservation systems for especially popular attractions, like the Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve on O'ahu and Hā'ena State Park on Kaua'i. In order to manage capacity and preserve the natural environment, make sure to be aware of and respect these systems.

It's also a good idea to educate yourself on basic Hawaiian words and customs, such as the significance of a lei — and how you should never throw it into the trash or onto the floor — or why you should avoid referring to the continental US as the "mainland," as it can suggest Hawai'i's subservience to the continental US. Check out [this toolkit from the Hawai'i Tourism Authority](#), created in partnership with the Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association, for more information.

Book Accommodations With Good Values

Since accommodations are likely your largest expense, I'd recommend choosing hotels and Airbnbs that promote good values. I loved my stay at the [Ko'a Kea Resort on Poipu Beach](#) on Kaua'i, which was beautifully relaxing, while authentic to Hawaiian culture — offering free entertainment like ukulele lessons, lei making, hula performances, and live Hawaiian music.

Consider staying at a hotel that's also focused on regenerative tourism. The regenerative tourism bill also includes a corporate social responsibility program that gives both locals and visitors an opportunity to give back to the community. I spent a rejuvenating weekend at the [Halepuna Waikiki by Halekulani](#), which encourages visitors to take part in the [Mālama Hawai'i Program](#). As part of the program, you can receive a discount, credit, or even a free night when you participate in a hotel's dedicated volunteer activity, like cleaning up a beach, planting trees, or making a Hawaiian quilt to donate to elders.

Immerse Yourself in Hawaiian Culture

Eating, hiking, and swimming aside, Hawai'i has plenty to offer when it comes to arts and culture, from traditional lei making and learning hula to attending a lū'au. If you're looking to take a break from the sun, I stopped by the [Honolulu Museum of Art](#) on O'ahu, where I viewed an impressive collection of Asian art and artifacts. While on Kaua'i, we also took an immersive and intimate lei po'o making class hosted by [Elvrine Chow](#), a master lei maker.

Enjoy Being on Vacation

Traveling responsibly doesn't mean your vacation shouldn't be just that: a vacation. While immersing myself in the culture, I also made sure to indulge in several spa days — including a heavenly oceanside massage at [The Spa at the Ko'a Kea Resort](#) and a vibroacoustic experience and pedicure at the [Spa at Halekulani](#). On one quieter evening on O'ahu, I went on a sunset cruise with [Majestic by Atlantis Cruise](#), during which I got an incredible view of all of Honolulu.

The aloha lifestyle is all about slowing down and living in the moment — embrace that spirit as you enjoy being a tourist.

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CHARITY/VOLUNTEERS/FEATURES

Maui nonprofits invited to streamline their volunteer management systems with free POINT Pro subscriptions ([Maui Now.com](#))

12/12/2024

The Maui Volunteer Coalition for Recovery in partnership with the Ho'ōla iā Mauiakama Disaster Long Term Recovery Group, is offering a limited number of complimentary POINT Pro subscriptions to Maui's nonprofit organizations. This initiative aims to strengthen volunteer management systems and enhance capacity to support wildfire recovery efforts.

These one-year licenses grant access to a leading volunteer management platform, enabling qualified nonprofits to streamline operations and focus on their core missions during this critical time.

This special offering is funded by the Hawai'i Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (Hawai'i VOAD), a network of organizations coordinating disaster response and recovery in the state of Hawai'i.

Key Benefits of POINT Pro for Nonprofits

POINT Pro is a volunteer management platform designed to meet the needs of organizations striving for efficiency and effectiveness. With its user-friendly interface, robust analytics, and mobile compatibility, nonprofits can:

- **Simplify Operations:** Manage schedules, tasks, and communication with volunteers from a centralized platform.
- **Enhance Volunteer Relationships:** Build engagement with personalized communication and recognition tools.
- **Track and Report Impact:** Use analytics to measure outcomes and produce detailed reports for stakeholders.
- **Expand Capacity:** Seamlessly manage larger events and growing volunteer networks.

- **Showcase Professionalism:** Customize the platform with your organization’s branding for a consistent look and feel.

A limited 100 free POINT Pro subscriptions are available for eligible Maui nonprofits actively engaged in wildfire recovery and community rebuilding. Organizations are encouraged to act quickly to secure their subscription:

- **Sign up online** at www.mauinuistrong.info/nonprofits.
- Once your nonprofit is approved, you will automatically receive instructions on the next steps to onboard and begin promoting your volunteer opportunities.

A virtual Information Session will also be held on Dec. 16, 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. to walk you through the process and learn about the benefits of this volunteer management system. To register, go to the [EventBrite here](#).
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Hawai‘i’s foodbanks see uptick in food assistance needs [\(KHON\)](#)

12/16/2024

HONOLULU (KHON2) — Food insecurity is a growing issue in Hawai‘i, and the impact of rising food costs, natural disasters and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are deepening this crisis.

As Brandi Saragossa, the Operations Director for Maui Food Bank, explained, the need for food assistance on Maui and neighbor islands has increased dramatically over the last several years.

What was once a relatively stable number of people seeking help has now ballooned and has created a challenge for local organizations working to ensure food security for the most vulnerable.

“Yeah, the need has definitely grown not just since the fires, but also with the cost of living,” Saragossa said. “Agencies are telling us their numbers have doubled, which makes a lot of sense because prior to the fires we would do 250,000 pounds of food a month distributed. Now we’re closer to 800,000.”

The increase in demand for food assistance has prompted Maui Food Bank, in particular, to ramp up its operations significantly.

“Last fiscal year, we distributed 9.3 million pounds of food, up from 3 million the year before. It’s gone through the roof,” she said.

The struggle for food access is deeply intertwined with the high cost of living in Hawai‘i. The state’s food insecurity rate has been rising steadily with food insecurity in Hawai‘i climbing from 11.2% in 2018 to 16.8% by 2020. That is according to a study by the [College of Social Sciences at the University of Hawai‘i](#).

With a projected increase in the cost of living, many Hawai‘i residents are finding it increasingly difficult to afford basic staples which is leading to a surge in demand for food banks.

The impact of food insecurity is felt most acutely by the island's families, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet despite having two working parents.

"We're seeing families — full households, working-class families where mom and dad are both working, sometimes two jobs each — but they're struggling, especially with the transition people moving from their transitional housing into housing," Saragossa said. "We've also seen people need things like household items, cleaning supplies, dish soap, laundry soap—and we've been helping them through that as well because of the fire."

As Hawai'i's food banks work to meet these rising needs, the scope of the problem has widened. It's no longer just about providing food for families; the need for household items and essentials has also grown.

"The need is still there, even now, after the fires," Saragossa added. "It was a reported 60% growth in the needing of our services."

The shift toward greater food insecurity in Hawai'i is part of a broader trend that has been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. While Hawai'i has had relatively low infection rates compared to the mainland U.S., food insecurity has still increased significantly.

Between 2018 and 2020, food insecurity in Hawai'i rose by 5.6%, with child food insecurity being particularly concerning. "Hawai'i ranked 6th in the U.S. for the highest projected rates of child food insecurity in 2020," said Saragossa. "One in three children was estimated to live in a food-insecure household, just shy of 90,000 children."

While this trend is nationwide, the challenges are even more pronounced in Hawai'i, where the cost of living is among the highest in the country and wages often don't keep pace with the rising expenses of daily life.

According to [USDA reports](#), Hawai'i has one of the highest rates of poverty in the U.S.; and it's a significant predictor of food insecurity. Saragossa echoes this sentiment as she noted that food banks in Hawai'i are seeing an increase in people who are not only struggling with food but also with other basic necessities.

"It's not just food anymore," she said. "People are needing help with things like toiletries, cleaning supplies. These are the things that really add up for families who are already struggling."

The effects of the wildfires on Maui have only amplified the issue.

"The fires definitely had a significant impact, especially last fiscal year," Saragossa said. "We had to double up our staffing just to meet that need."

As families rebuild their homes and lives, the demand for food assistance has surged.

"The need is still double what it was before the fires, and that's where we are for the holiday season," she added. "It's still not going down. It's continuing to go up."

While the demand is high, Hawai'i's foodbanks are doing everything it can to keep up. They've expanded their services to reach underserved communities, including starting two mobile distributions to assist kūpuna, (elderly residents) who cannot leave their homes to get food.

"Our kūpuna program has grown in the last 14 months," Saragossa explained. "We've decided to start mobile distributions to reach underserved communities where kupuna or even other families can't leave their homes to get food."

The issue of food insecurity in Hawai'i is not just a matter of lacking food. It's about addressing the systemic factors that contribute to hunger, such as high living costs, a lack of affordable housing and insufficient wages.

"The alignment between organizations like the Maui Food Bank and the community is what makes a difference," Saragossa said. "When you're connected with an organization that has a mission, it becomes more than just a job. It's about a purpose, an assignment for your life."

As Hawai'i's food insecurity crisis deepens, local organizations like Maui Food Bank are at the forefront of providing essential services to those in need. But the road ahead will require more than just food; it will require systemic change to address the root causes of hunger and poverty in the state.

As the holidays approach, the need for food assistance remains critical.

"We're seeing a lot of people coming in who are struggling to make it through the holidays," Saragossa said. "The need is there, and it's not going away anytime soon."

She encourages anyone who can, to get involved, whether through donating or volunteering. So, this holiday season, consider giving your time to help those in need.

"It all starts with trying new things," Saragossa said. "That's why there are volunteer opportunities to make a difference in your community."

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