

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 23, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker McCarthy, Leader Schumer, Minority Leader Jeffries, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairs Granger and Murray, and Ranking Members DeLauro and Collins:

We write to you regarding the ongoing emergency on the island of Maui and request your assistance to secure the federal funding necessary to support survivors and rebuild communities burned to the ground by wildfire.

On August 7 and 8, wildfires broke out on Maui amid severe drought conditions and red-flag level winds from an offshore hurricane. Despite heroic efforts, fires that traveled one mile every minute overwhelmed firefighters. Eighty-mile-per-hour winds spread the fires and hampered response efforts.

The current death toll of 115 makes the Maui wildfires the deadliest wildfire disaster in the United States since 1881. Sadly, at the time of writing, search, and recover operations continue, and we expect the fatality count to increase. The fire has displaced thousands from their homes, damaged, or destroyed nearly 3,000 structures, and burned more than 2,100 acres. The hardest-hit area is the town of Lahaina, a culturally significant community with 200-year-old historic buildings. Lahaina was the capital of the Kingdom of Hawaii in the 19th century and its schools, buildings, homes, and businesses are now gone.

Given the extraordinary extent of damage from the deadliest wildfire since the 19th century, the federal share of costs will be measured in billions of dollars. Federal response and recovery

efforts are particularly challenging on Maui, an island 2,500 miles from the mainland United States. The wildfires exacerbated Maui's isolation by destroying or damaging port and road infrastructure that provides the only connections to devastated areas.

High costs will add challenges to recovery. Hawaii has the highest consumer prices of any state, more than 13 percent above the national average, while personal income remains near the national average. In the Lahaina community specifically, more than 60 percent of residents had low or moderate incomes. Extremely high housing prices present a particular recovery challenge in Lahaina and across Maui. Before the wildfires, the median single-family home price in Lahaina was \$1.7 million, and the median condo price was \$840,000. Lahaina's median asking rent is \$3,000, leaving more than 51 percent of renters rent-burdened and 26 percent severely rent-burdened, spending more than half of their income on rent. These conditions are mirrored across the island, creating challenges for residents displaced to other areas. Maui has the highest median asking rents in Hawaii, and Hawaii has the highest rents of any state. As a result, a cost adjustment factor will need to be applied to the limitations of assistance for federal programs that do not accommodate the unique high cost of the noncontiguous states that are geographically isolated and resource challenged.

We ask for your commitment that Congress will approve supplemental funding for disaster relief on Maui. Maui needs assistance to ensure all appropriate federal resources are available to address the ongoing emergency. We are deeply concerned that the immediate federal response cannot be sustained without congressional action. A supplemental spending bill must provide federal agencies with the resources they need to support a robust response and full recovery that can rebuild shattered homes, communities, and livelihoods. While we will continue to work with federal, state, and local stakeholders to identify their precise needs, we see immediate funding requirements in the following agencies:

- **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA):** Congress must fund the urgent and ongoing activities FEMA is conducting for survivors and their communities.
 - Disaster Relief Fund support for FEMA's Public Assistance efforts is a top priority. Maui will require one of the most complex debris removal operations FEMA has ever conducted, including a significant and urgent effort to remove sunken vessels from the nearby waters and remediate the environmental impact. Burned public facilities and infrastructure need federal support to rebuild. Public assistance is also being used to support non-congregate sheltering. Further, fire management and hazard mitigation grants are crucial in an area that has never previously experienced wildfires of this magnitude.
 - FEMA's Individual Assistance programs are a lifeline for residents who have lost homes, livelihoods, and loved ones. Survivors who lost their homes and belongings need temporary housing, home repair and replacement, and support with other disaster-caused expenses beyond the capacity of private insurance. Survivors can also benefit from FEMA's support for disaster case management, crisis counseling, and disaster legal services.
- **Department of Housing and Urban Development:** Congress must provide supplemental funding for Community Development Block Grants for Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) and mitigation of disaster risks. Areas like Lahaina destroyed by the fires have a long road to

recovery and a multitude of unmet needs, from housing to infrastructure. While it is too early to know the exact unmet needs figure, and the process of recovering fatalities from the fire has delayed damage assessments, we know it will be in the billions of dollars. Congress must act to provide the recovery resources that we know Maui will need.

- **Small Business Administration (SBA):** Congress must ensure that the SBA has the resources to help devastated businesses recover. Rebuilding the business sector will provide needed employment for survivors to regain their financial independence. SBA Disaster Loans are essential to cover home and personal property restoration beyond what insurance and FEMA assistance can provide. The high cost of housing on Maui makes access to significant capital essential for families and homeowners to rebuild. Our delegation has separately asked the SBA administrator to consider increasing disaster loan limitations, which could necessitate the need for more funding for the agency. While the SBA has recently increased the limits, this move was long coming and does not specifically meet Maui's needs.
- **Economic Development Administration (EDA):** EDA will be one of the most important sources of funding for the recovery effort after the initial emergency response concludes. The fires have caused extensive infrastructure damage, destroying the Lahaina port, potentially compromising the integrity of the water system, and downing cell towers and power lines. On both the state and county levels, EDA grants can facilitate construction and non-construction work to repair infrastructure and help mitigate future disasters. Recognizing the important role of EDA grants in disaster recovery, Congress appropriated almost \$500 million for EDA's FY 2023 disaster supplemental, which will allow EDA to assist with the recoveries from natural disasters that occurred in 2021 and 2022. Congress must similarly appropriate funds that can be tapped to aid the recovery effort on Maui.
- **Department of Transportation:** Road connectivity in West Maui was damaged significantly by the wildfires. Congress must ensure that the Federal Highway Administration's and Federal Transit Administration's Emergency Relief Programs have the funding to reimburse for these damages and keep West Maui transportation in service. Further, transportation projects in Maui from previous competitive awards are impacted and the state will need an extension for the period of availability to properly meet all federal requirements.
- **Department of Agriculture (USDA):** Congress must ensure that the USDA can support emergency disaster loans and recovery assistance programs for agricultural producers impacted by the fires. Just like other businesses, farmers on Maui will need support to recover from fire damage, alleviate market losses, and mitigate the risk of future wildfires. Congress must also fund the USDA Rural Development programs that can help Maui communities rebuild housing, essential facilities, and water infrastructure.
- **Department of Labor:** Congress must fund programs that help workers who have lost their jobs or experienced reduced hours due to the disaster.
 - Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) is crucial for Maui residents who have and will lose their jobs or experience reduced hours because of the disaster. Maui's economy faces massive impacts from the evacuation of tourists and the interruption of accommodations and hospitality, services, agriculture, and other economic activity. Given the long road to recovery and long-term impacts on the tourism industry, Congress must proactively extend DUA assistance to 52 weeks for unemployed workers.

- Congress should provide additional funding for Disaster Dislocated Worker Grants under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to ensure that Maui workers dislocated by the fire's economic disruptions can assist in the recovery efforts and transition into new jobs, if needed.
- **Department of Health and Human Services:** Congress must provide funding to address the significant behavioral health impacts of this disaster, rebuild critical health infrastructure that was lost, support the ongoing deployment of the National Disaster Medical System, and support emergency child care through the Administration for Children and Families.
 - Survivors will need immediate and longer-term crisis counseling, mental and substance use disorder treatment, and other supports. First responders will also need targeted assistance. The demand has already far surpassed Maui's behavioral health capacity, which before the disaster was already facing an estimated 50 percent shortage of adult psychiatry, 62 percent shortage of child and adolescent psychiatry, and 12 percent shortage of social workers. Congress must proactively help to address these workforce shortages to meet the behavioral health needs of the impacted community, including funding to increase local capacity and augment staffing through the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.
 - At least four health clinics were destroyed in Lahaina—including a rural health clinic, a satellite office for a federally qualified health center, and a dialysis center. Congress must provide funding to address critical health access points lost in West Maui.
 - The Disaster Mortuary Operations Response Team was rapidly deployed to support local mortuary services to quickly and accurately identify victims and reunite them with their loved ones. Congress must fund the National Disaster Medical System to ensure these federal supports are available to Maui for as long as mortuary services are needed.
 - Child care providers will need financial assistance to rebuild facilities destroyed by the wildfires. Hawaii already has a child care shortage, and the loss of providers on Maui will only exacerbate this crisis. Congress should provide funding so that displaced families have access to safe and reliable child care options.
- **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA):**
 - Congress should fund NOAA's Oceans and Coastal Security Fund (OCSF) to provide resources to maintain and strengthen ecosystem services that would address the fire's threats to coastal water quality and coral reefs that help mitigate the impacts of sea level rise and coastal flooding. In addition, the OCSF should support the strategic restoration of coastal wetlands to mitigate the impacts of coastal flooding, and to help slow the spread of wildfires. Funding both of these actions would create resilience for the homes, buildings, and infrastructure that are restored with federal funding.
 - In addition, the bill should explicitly confirm the eligibility of coastal water quality monitoring in the aftermath of the fire, along with monitoring for impacts to the health and function of the coastal ecosystem.
- **Legal Services Corporation (LSC):** Congress should fund civil legal assistance for low-income survivors. Survivors will likely require immediate legal assistance to file for FEMA assistance and insurance benefits and to deal with evictions, unemployment, and document replacement. Disaster victims may also need assistance in response to fraud or scams.

Emergency funding will support additional attorneys, resources, and disaster coordinators to provide disaster-related services.

- **Department of Defense (DoD):** Congress must ensure DoD has funding for its Defense Support for Civil Authorities operations on Maui. The Department has over 500 personnel operating on the island conducting air and sea transport, mortuary affairs, aerial fire suppression, and barracks billeting for emergency responders. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also is tasked with providing temporary generators and debris removal, which will be a complex, difficult, and time-consuming task based on the extent of the devastation and the required forensic considerations. DoD support has also included multiple helicopters, cargo planes, and heavy trucks. Finally, it is extremely important that DoD has the resources to continue to approve requests from the Hawaii National Guard to support Title 32 status requests. Title 32 status will continue to allow guardsmen to receive federal pay and benefits while remaining under the command and control of the Governor of Hawaii.
- **Department of the Interior:** Historic Lahaina Town, which was completely destroyed in the fire, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its national significance. Congress must ensure that there are dedicated historic preservation resources to help restore important historic and cultural features that were lost.
- **Department of Energy:** Congress should provide funding to improve the resilience of Hawaii's electric grid and to assist with rebuilding the generation, transmission, and distribution infrastructure on Maui that was destroyed. Hawaii's power system faces a unique and diverse set of threats and vulnerabilities, and the state's geographic isolation makes a resilient grid critically important to disaster response, recovery, and hazard mitigation.
- **Department of Treasury:** Congress should provide funding to the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund to provide financial assistance to CDFIs operating in Maui. CDFIs have local insight and the ability to hasten economic recovery for households, finance much needed housing, and support small businesses. Congress recognized the potential of CDFIs to support economic recovery in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis with more than \$1.7 billion in funding and should do so again to support Maui's recovery.
- **Department of Education:** As of this writing, more than 3,000 students have been forced to enroll in alternate institutions due to the fire. Congress should provide funding to support disaster recovery programs through the U.S. Department of Education—including Project SERV, which can be used to fund short-term education programs for local education agencies and institutions of higher education recovering from traumatic or violent events. While the Hawaii State Department of Education is still assessing its needs on the ground, additional resources will be needed to fully restore education programs for the communities in West Maui.
- **Department of Justice:** Firefighters and first responders braved extremely dangerous conditions in fighting these wildfires and in so doing were exposed to airborne toxins. The full impact on their health may not be realized for quite some time. As such, we request that the Public Safety Officer Benefits (PSOB) program be extended to cover cancers typically associated with firefighters.
- **Citizenship and Immigration Services:** Many noncitizens living in Lahaina lost all of their official documents including visas, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) paperwork, and employment authorization documents in the wildfire. Being required to pay

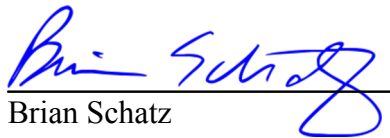
fees to replace these documents is untenable for someone who has just lost all of their belongings. Congress must provide USCIS with a sufficient funding to allow for a blanket waiver of all fees associated with replacing lost immigration paperwork.

We respectfully request your commitment to work with us to ensure that survivors are made whole to the fullest extent possible. Congress should assure that federal agencies working on Maui will have their expenses covered so that they can continue to commit the resources needed to respond to the wildfires.

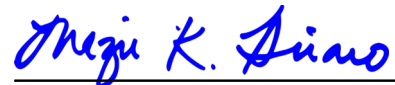
Maui's experience is testament to the uncertainties and dangers that could befall any community in America. Now that the worst has happened, we must come together to provide robust funding to help Maui residents survive and recover. Federal investments will help Maui address the emergency and begin to repair the damage.

We are grateful for the nation's attention to Maui's loss. We ask that it be matched with sustained action so that the impacted communities can rebuild and recover from this immense tragedy. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Ed Case
Member of Congress



Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress