

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 14, 2018

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for your prompt action to issue a Presidential Disaster Declaration for areas impacted by the ongoing Kīlauea Volcano eruptions, which included public assistance and hazard mitigation. Since that time, the situation has materially worsened for the residents of lower Puna, and we request your urgent action on Hawai'i Governor David Ige's request for the full suite of individual assistance programs. A copy of the Governor's request is attached for your reference.

As you know, on May 3, Kīlauea volcano erupted following a series of earthquakes. This eruption opened up fissures across Puna; included earthquakes that have severely impacted infrastructure; triggered lava geysers several hundred feet high; discharged ash and toxic gases into the air; and, sent catastrophic flows of lava over roads, housing developments, and electricity lines on their paths to the sea. As of today, lava flows have destroyed roughly half of the Leilani Gardens subdivision, and almost all of the Vacationland and Kapoho subdivisions.

As lava reaches the sea, it creates "laze"—short for "lava haze"—a corrosive seawater plume laden with hydrochloric acid and fine volcanic particles that can irritate the skin, eyes, and lungs. The situation has become more serious over the last month as more land is overrun, more people are displaced, and roads and power infrastructure are lost.

As detailed in Governor Ige's request, Hawai'i County estimates that 455 residential dwellings have been destroyed, and has confirmed that 192 of these structures were primary residences. As of June 6, 2018, there have been 5,417 overnight stays in emergency shelters, and more than 400 people remain at two shelters. More than 930 homes are without power in the affected area, and there can be no attempt to restore power to more 800 of these customers until the area is deemed safe.

This is a unique and wrenching natural disaster. When a volcano erupts, it permanently and fundamentally changes the land. The land now covered in lava is no longer usable. The defining features of the landscape that attract visitors and play an economic role in the community are no longer there. Homes and businesses are destroyed. Properties and farms not destroyed have become inaccessible and unusable. The damage to health and economic opportunity spreads

further than the footprint of the lava flows: Winds carry toxic gas and ash into neighboring areas, and the eruption also produces “vog”—volcanic smog—harming the health of humans, as well as farms, local plants and animals. Lastly, there has been a 50 percent drop in future hotel bookings, suggesting that tourism to the island may be seriously disrupted.

Based on the severity of the damage that has occurred since May 11, 2018, an amendment to your initial Declaration to include eligibility for Individual Assistance is warranted, and we urge your expeditious approval of Governor Ige’s request for this additional aid for impacted individuals.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senator



COLLEEN HANABUSA
Member of Congress



TULSI GABBARD
Member of Congress