



**Governor Josh Green, M.D.
Remarks on Maui Wildfire Recovery
September 8, 2023**

Today marks one month since deadly fires devastated Lahaina and other areas of Maui, and since then we have been working constantly to shelter survivors, deliver supplies and medical care, and locate the missing and reunite them with their families.

Over the past several weeks, FEMA search and rescue teams and our first responders have completed search efforts in Lahaina, and as of today, there have been a total of 115 fatalities. Our hearts have broken 115 times.

The FBI has reported that 66 of our people are potentially still unaccounted for based on calls and emails that they have received, and in many cases they only have names of these individuals on a list and no other information. This number was initially over 3000, dropped to 385 as of last week, and now, I repeat is at 66.

The Maui Police Department continues to make daily progress on missing person reports and encourages families to share information about any missing loved ones.

Since August 16, the American Red Cross, the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, and FEMA have relocated over 7,500 displaced survivors from shelters to a total of 29 hotels and hundreds of Airbnbs. 15,931 individuals have filed for FEMA relief.

These accommodations will continue to provide meals, casework services, financial recovery resources, and other disaster relief assistance until we are able to move into the next phase of our recovery.

However, hotels can't be our long-term solution to housing in West Maui.

We have entered into an agreement with the Red Cross to house our people for a minimum of 36 weeks. We are also pursuing relationships with large numbers of homeowners who have historically used their properties as short term rentals to convert them into long-term rentals to accommodate displaced residents. Residents may then enter agreements to receive housing through FEMA.

FEMA will continue to assist us with direct leases and rental assistance grants to ensure that people stay housed well into 2025, and these costs will be covered by federal assistance, state resources, and humanitarian aid.

For those who would like to provide housing, I have worked with the Hawai'i Housing Finance and Development Corporation to launch the Hawai'i Fire Relief Housing Program, which identifies available units to those devastated by the Maui Wildfire tragedy. To get involved in this program and help survivors, you can reach HHFDC through hhfdcfirereliefhousing@hawaii.gov.

We also intend to contract with 3 to 5 local hotels able to lease their entire properties long-term for the recovery effort, which serve as an additional housing safety net.

Finally, a smaller number of transitional, temporary housing units in the form of kauhale communities will be built to aid those not housed in long-term rentals or hotels.

But housing alone will not be enough to get our people through this incredibly difficult time.

Generosity from around the world has poured into Hawaii — to the American Red Cross, the Hawaii Community Foundation, and the Maui United Way.

The tens of millions of dollars donated to these and other worthy organizations are providing life-sustaining support to supplement state and federal aid.

I have authorized \$100 million dollars from a special revenue source called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, to support what others donate, magnifying the power of their generosity.

Because Lahaina businesses have been totally destroyed and many others across Maui County are struggling to survive, I have also authorized immediate relief to help prevent business bankruptcies.

Working with House and Senate leaders and in partnership with Maui County and the Hawaii Community Foundation, we will make \$25 million available immediately in the form of \$10,000 and \$20,000 bridge grants to help businesses all across Maui survive until the economy recovers.

The Maui Economic Opportunity team will help us distribute these grants.

Now we turn to Lahaina town and our road to recovery and healing.

Many displaced survivors have asked when can return to their homes and businesses to survey the damage.

In the coming weeks, we will begin to schedule supervised visits for displaced people to return and view their property under safe conditions. The ash we are told is quite toxic, so we need to be careful.

Once the EPA has completed the removal of hazardous materials from the affected areas, which will take 3-4 months, we can begin the removal of the remaining debris.

We are in a partnership with FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers in this effort, which will take the better part of a year and over \$1B to complete.

We have engaged 25 cultural practitioners to help guide this effort and ensure that Hawaiian traditions are respected during this process, and we will make every effort to use local workers and local companies to complete the work.

I am incredibly proud of the entire West Maui community for their courage and commitment as they continue to show aloha and support for survivors, and for their patience as this arduous process unfolds.

We are grateful to all of our federal partners including FEMA, who have worked so hard over the last thirty days to support our emergency response and deliver aid and assistance to survivors.

We have received assurances of continued federal support and investment to help West Maui recover and rebuild, and we will support and care for all the survivors of this disaster for as long as it takes.

I especially want to thank President Biden for his unwavering support from the very beginning of this crisis — he has been a rock solid partner throughout our entire response and recovery effort.

I'd also like to thank Speaker McCarthy and the entire bipartisan Congressional delegation for the attention and concern they have shown the people of Maui.

Working with these federal partners and others, I will continue to make sure that Maui receives every resource available, and that these resources get to the people who need it.

As we recover we will be faced by many extraordinary challenges, including finding ways to deliver support to survivors who have lost loved ones and homes, while protecting our people from predatory business practices.

Many donors from around the world have sent generous support to our devastated communities.

However, others have descended on Maui seeking an opportunity to profit.

Some of these outsiders seek to take as much as one-third or more of the compensation that the survivors of this tragedy are due.

This kind of opportunism and profiteering on the suffering of our people is not *pono*, so I am taking action to prevent it.

I have instructed my team to explore the possibility of forming a recovery fund for those that have been impacted.

This is intended to eliminate the need for those who have been affected by the fire to go through years of costly and painful litigation, with eventual recovery uncertain.

In the spirit of aloha, local attorneys who seek to represent Maui survivors will be humbly asked to support and represent survivors on a pro bono basis or at a greatly reduced rate, so survivors can receive more of the settlements they deserve, and I am calling on our local legal and business leaders to support this effort.

The people of Maui must have as much time as they need to heal and recover, and we will begin to rebuild only when they are ready, according to the timeline they choose.

Lahaina belongs to its people — and we are committed to rebuilding and restoring it the way they want it.

I want to emphasize again — the land in Lahaina is reserved for its people as they return and rebuild, and I instructed the Attorney General to impose enhanced criminal penalties, including up to a year in prison, on anyone who tries to take advantage of survivors by the unsolicited acquiring of property in affected areas of Maui.

I have also ordered a full investigation of the cause of the fires and the emergency response.

We will get answers to exactly what happened and there will be full accountability and transparency to the public.

Regarding travel to Hawaii, outside of West Maui all other areas of Maui and the rest of Hawaii are safe and now open to visitors, and we invite everyone to travel to our state, which will support the local economy and help speed the recovery of those who have already suffered so much.

Many have asked when it will be the right time to reopen West Maui to visitors.

There is no easy answer to this question, but I can say that if we support Maui's economy and keep our people employed, they will heal faster and continue to afford to live on Maui.

Beginning October 8th, all travel restrictions will end and West Maui will be open to visitors again, so people from Hawaii and around the world can resume travel to this special place and help it begin to recover economically.

This difficult decision is meant to bring hope for recovery to the families and businesses on Maui that have been so deeply affected in every way by the disaster.

We also, as a part of the most recently issued emergency proclamation, have lifted the suspension of the water code.

To help support the people of Maui, I remind everyone to please give to the American Red Cross or the Hawaii Community Foundation's Maui Strong Fund, both of which will make sure the resources go to those in need.

Thank you again for supporting the survivors of this tragedy as they mourn, grieve, and begin to recover.

I will continue to keep you updated on our aid and relief efforts as we move forward, both in daily updates and in more comprehensive monthly assessments of our efforts.

It's going to be a long process for us to rebuild and heal, and we are grateful for the love and support coming to Maui from around the country and around the world.

Please keep Maui in your hearts and your prayers as we start our long road to recovery.