

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



MAJOR GENERAL KENNETH S. HARA  
DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

JAMES DS. BARROS  
ADMINISTRATOR OF EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT  
PHONE (808) 733-4300  
FAX (808) 733-4287

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII  
**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**  
**KA 'OIHANA PILI KAUA**  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT  
4204 DIAMOND HEAD ROAD  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96816-4420

August 30, 2023

Maona N. Ngwira  
Federal Coordinating Officer  
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Dear Mr. Ngwira:

**Subject: Request for Direct Housing Assistance**

On August 10, 2023, FEMA issued a Major Disaster Declaration authorizing Individual Assistance (IA) for the State of Hawaii. The Hawaii wildfires have destroyed homes, land and communities throughout the island of Maui and have resulted in health and economic impacts throughout Maui County. The west Maui community of Lahaina, population 12,000 and once Hawaii's capital sustained the most fire damage.

The response and recovery efforts continue to be significantly challenged due to the high level of fatalities caused by this disaster. The loss of life in this disaster is greater than any fire event in more than a century; standing at more than 115 lives confirmed lost as of August 29, 2023. The ongoing search for remains is a priority over debris removal and recovery. As of August 28, 2023, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reports that there are 388 credible reports of missing persons that have yet to be resolved. The overall recovery will be measurably delayed by the need to find, identify, and reunite the departed with their loved ones and next of kin.

The Maui fire now ranks among the top 10 deadliest U.S. wildfires on record since 1871, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and is the largest natural disaster in Hawaii's history.

- Lahaina Harbor destroyed
- Over 2,142 structures damaged
- 9,806 estimated displaced population
- 7,800 gallons of water is needed per day
- There are currently 1,031 households without power



which are further than the average commuting distance from the area of highest damage concentration.

#### Availability of Affordable Housing

The lack of available rental housing in the affected area, and in the County of Maui in general, poses a significant challenge for disaster survivors to recover; the lack of affordable housing is a critical issue for the impacted population. Many survivors are longtime Maui residents; their recovery is complicated by the higher cost of housing in other parts of the county. Public Housing is also at capacity.

| Direct Housing Eligible<br><i>Data from FEMA 8/29</i> |         |       | Rental Resources Available<br>up to 125% FMR<br><i>Data from Zillow 8/29</i> |         |         |         |       | Additional Rental Resources<br><i>Data from Hawaii Fire Relief<br/>Website 8/29</i> |         |         |         |       |
|---|---------|-------|--|---------|---------|---------|-------|---|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Owners  | Renters | Total | 1<br>BR  | 2<br>BR | 3<br>BR | 4<br>BR | Total | 1<br>BR   | 2<br>BR | 3<br>BR | 4<br>BR | Total |
| 87  | 1,473   | 1,560 | 4  | 6       | 3       | 2       | 15    | 61  | 29      | 12      | 1       | 103   |

Due to all the challenges listed above, Rental Assistance will not sufficiently meet the housing needs of all eligible survivors, even with the previously approved Rental Assistance rate increase to 125% of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Fair Market Rent. Additionally, other Federal, State, Local, and voluntary organization programs remain insufficient to meet the disaster-caused needs. **Direct Housing Assistance is needed to ensure the survivors recover in a timely manner and preserve the integrity of the impacted communities. Therefore, I am requesting Direct Housing Assistance to assist disaster survivors in Maui County.**

Maui County and the State of Hawaii continue to evaluate all potentially viable options to address the housing challenges in coordination with the Sheltering and Housing Task Force. The unique housing challenges for this disaster will require innovative direct housing solution(s); these challenges include the loss of buildable land, the cost and logistics of deploying resources to an island, and building code requirements. Placement of these solutions must consider the impacts to existing utility infrastructure and the need to reconfigure that infrastructure which may further delay repairs and rebuilding.

Maui County and the State of Hawaii are jointly submitting this request to FEMA, emphasizing the importance for response through a comprehensive range of strategies. Our intention is to address the critical housing needs following recent events. To ensure the effectiveness of the proposed solutions, we kindly urge FEMA's thorough assessment include but not be limited to the following options:

1. Direct Leasing and Multifamily Facility Repairs: We advocate for the exploration of direct leasing and repairs to multifamily facilities as immediate housing solutions.
2. We propose the deployment and utilization of FEMA alternative housing units as deemed appropriate, available, and feasible.
3. Due to the housing shortage and unique challenge of building housing OCONUS we request that FEMA discuss with Maui and the State all options available under FEMA's Permanent Construction authority.

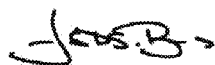
In alignment with our commitment to cultural, social, and environmental sustainability, we request the prioritization of housing solutions that adhere to the following priorities:

1. **Long-Term Suitability:** Housing options should be well-suited for extended use, accommodating the unique composition of households and the everyday lifestyle in Maui for a period of at least 18 months.
2. **Residual Community Value:** In consideration of prudent financial management, preference should be given to housing options that leave a lasting positive impact on the community, even beyond use in the immediate crisis.
3. **Reasonable Commute Time:** It is vital that the selected housing solutions maintain an acceptable commute time for Maui residents to access essential services, such as schools, workplaces, transportation, food, medical facilities, places of worship, postal services, daycare, and laundry. We propose that this commute time does not exceed a 20 percent increase from the pre-disaster average commute. Given that the average commute was 21 minutes before the disaster, an acceptable threshold would be 25.2 minutes.
4. **Continued Engagement:** We acknowledge that some FEMA survivors may opt for immediate housing solutions that do not precisely align with the prioritization set forth by Maui and the State. We request that FEMA continues its commendable efforts to assist eligible individuals and families beyond initial placement. We propose that this assistance persist until the housing options meet the criteria specified by Maui and the State or until survivors secure permanent housing solutions that eliminate the need for future relocations and reliance on disaster funds for sustainability. Our ultimate objective is to provide survivors with the best long-term recovery by not forcing a choice between the known and unknown; or forcing the choice between immediate improvements to their housing situation versus solutions that truly optimize their long-term recovery.

We appreciate FEMA's collaboration in this endeavor and look forward to a housing program that not only meets the immediate needs but also fosters enduring resilience within our community. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Should you have any questions, please contact Darrick Ching, DR-4724 Joint Housing Task Force, at (808) 798-1804, or [darrick.j.m.ching@hawaii.gov](mailto:darrick.j.m.ching@hawaii.gov).

Sincerely,



JAMES DS. BARROS

Governor's Authorized Representative  
Hawaii Emergency Management Agency