



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs
Wednesday, March 13, 2024 at 3:00 p.m.

By

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And

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And

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HB 2805 HD1 – RELATING TO HEALTH

Chairs Kim and Wakai, Vice Chairs Kidani and Elefante, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **support** of HB 2805 HD1, provided its adoption does not impact priorities as indicated in our Board of Regents Approved Budget. This measure appropriates moneys for the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization (UHERO) to conduct a multiethnic cohort study regarding the 2023 Maui wildfires.

The full impact of the Maui wildfires and the resulting devastation on the affected communities remain largely unknown. The effect of the wildfires on the health and welfare of Maui residents as well as the needs of the community should be examined carefully so that informed decisions can be made toward the implementation of policies necessary to the recovery process.

This bill, which supports the University of Hawai'i Economic Research Organization (UHERO), within the Social Sciences Research Institute, in collaboration with the John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM), the UH Cancer Center, the UH Pacific Disaster Center (in Kihei, Maui), and numerous community-based organizations, seeks to conduct a comprehensive social and health study on the impacts of the 2023 Maui wildfires on a diverse group of individuals. Additionally, the study aims to establish a registry of those affected by the wildfires to assess their long-term health and well-being, and the impacts on communities. We firmly believe that this research endeavor will provide invaluable information for the State of Hawai'i, local organizations, and policymakers.

The UHERO and related University of Hawai'i partners, including JABSOM, are ideally positioned to conduct a multiethnic cohort study which would provide policy makers with vital information concerning the Maui wildfires, health risks, and both short-term and long-term community needs.

UHERO has already begun the process of inviting Maui residents to participate in the study. Recent recruitment drives for the Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES), has been incredibly successful but also financially challenging. As of February 2024, nearly 700 participants across ten sessions were recruited. However, further recruitment efforts were paused as the initial seed funding from HCF was exhausted. Although additional bridge funding is being sought, a state commitment would be invaluable to ensure that the project completes both the recruitment and analysis of its findings.

Providing the funds needed to continue the study would benefit Maui and the state as a whole. The information gained from this study will add to the knowledge gained from work done in partnership between members of the Maui community, emergency, social and health systems with many University of Hawai'i units and additional JABSOM investigators exploring mental health, preparedness, response, recovery, and resiliency efforts. All of this will be helpful to mitigate the consequences of future disasters, including those attributed to climate change.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this matter.