

## Testimony for Maui County Council Budget Hearings FY26

Aloha and good morning. I'm Dr. Lisa Labrecque, CEO of Maui Humane Society.

Last year, I stood here and shared the challenges of an uncertain future for animals on Maui following the Lahaina fires.

- We expected that displaced and affected families would continue to make the difficult decision to surrender their beloved animals.
- We expected that veterinary care would be desperately needed due to financial strain and limited access.
- We expected to see a higher "length of stay" for animals in our care, as housing became more limited than ever, especially for dogs.

This year, these fears *have* become our reality. We have never been called upon in this way before, and while our small-but-mighty staff and volunteer base have risen to the challenge, we need additional support from the County in order to continue supporting those who need us most.

We are deeply grateful for the County's support, which covers approximately 60% of our animal sheltering costs. The remaining 40% is funded by Maui Humane Society using donor contributions, grant funding, investments, and other sources of revenue. Last year, we did not receive an annual increase to account for inflation, making it harder to keep up with rising costs. Then in December, Hawaii Animal Rescue Foundation – the second-largest animal welfare organization on the island – closed their doors, further straining our resources.

In previous years, the Mayor's budget has included a line item of \$150,000 for HARF. This has been dropped from the FY26 budget, at a time when MHS is being asked to do more than ever before. When HARF closed, we took in the animals in their care, and hired several of their staff members. Animals are staying in our care for longer than ever before due to housing shortages as well as impacts from the Los Angeles fires, which have severely limited the number of animals we are able to send to our shelter and rescue partners on the continent.

I respectfully request that this Council approve the full amount we requested for animal sheltering (\$2,236,000), rather than flat funding (\$2,033,000) for the second year in a row, and in addition, the \$150K that was previously earmarked for HARF, so that we can continue the critical work of providing housing and care for the homeless animals in our community.

Mahalo for your consideration.