

EDB Committee

From: Jessica Pazos <jessica@islandsofhopemaui.com>
Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2020 4:01 PM
To: EDB Committee
Subject: Testimony For Housing

Aloha,

I sit with tears in my eyes, tired, scared, trying to hold together the life my husband and I worked so hard to build.

Moving to Hawaii is everyone's dream but sustaining that life when you are living on a shoestring is not exactly easy to plan for.

My husband and a few friends spent 3 years building a business from the ground up. We faced financial challenges, marriage challenges, housing challenges. But we never felt times were as bleak as they are now. There were always options or a way to shift our momentum and focus so we could live a comfortable life and provide for our children. But year 4 rolled around and my husband's tourism-based business hit their stride and we were in a place we have never been. Comfortable with the actual ability to plan for the future. I was working for them for supplemental income, completing my MSW, and accepted my dream job surrounded by my mentors.

Their business had a million-dollar revenue year with no signs of slowing down.

Then, COVID.

I have worked in social services for about ten years and I am intimately familiar with programs that help families maintain housing and food and how to link them with family strengthening agencies so they too can thrive. I have seen pain and uncertainty and recently completed my MSW so I could further work in this field and move forward into more advocacy and policy work. I can see this world through different lenses and know with best intent policies are made to support the most vulnerable but those policies are not sustainable long term and they are not build to life people up for more than a month at a time.

One housing payment in a jobless economy allows a family 30 days to fear for what happens the next month *NOT* the ability to be forward-thinking. There are *amazing* opportunities on the island right now and programs that will pay for those without the necessary training to obtain it with little to no cost.

But where does that fit in with virtual learning, having to become full-time educators for grade-schoolers, learning to use a computer for those who do not have experience doing so, having stable internet, thinking about where food is going to come from when halfway through the month SNAP is exhausted because even though grab and go meals are available they are not accessible if you have children at more than one school? So, then what one child eats and you hope there is something left for the others in the home?? And if you know anything about young children if it's a lunch item they don't like you then feel guilt for picking it up, arguing about why they need to eat it, making macaroni, and eating the lunch yourself because you don't want to throw it away.

Programs are available and I have applied as a means to stop the hemorrhage.

August 13th I applied for assistance. Septemeber 9th I got an email saying they are MONTHS behind.

The nonprofits and government agencies that are tasked with distributing relief funds are desperately understaffed. For example, MEO and Catholic Charities are tasked with processing requests for housing assistance. They need more staff to process requests in a timely manner. Maui does not even have a staff person at the moment for Catholic Charities. Prior to the new program that opened *TUESDAY*, everything was being processed inefficiently through Oahu. And people were being denied because they could not show they were sustainable.

HOW is one supposed to do that when they are not qualified or unable to take a new job?

Relief funds must be used to support the infrastructure to distribute assistance, as well as providing direct aid. Use the funds to hire workers who can help people apply for assistance, process the applications, and distribute the aid. There are enough skilled and unemployed workers on Maui that if funds are allocated to hire them, a response to a request for aid should be issued within days, not weeks or months.

People talk often about a cliff. I am one family, one story and we are hanging off the side of the cliff holding on with paper clips.

We need help. I am not comfortable with our options being:

leaving the island, giving up on everything my husband and I dedicated our lives to building for the future of our family, to move in with his elderly mother in a 2 bedroom 600 sq ft apartment in a retirement home because getting off this island will leave us with nothing. Then essentially starting over.

Or selling a car to last a few more months hoping something changes.

Not paying rent and floundering with an insurmountable amount of debt.

None of these are good options.

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