

Aloha Councilmembers,

My name is Brian Etheredge. I'm the sitting President and co-founder of the Maui Wedding and Event Association, Vice President of Fresh Help Maui (which has distributed over 50,000 pounds of fish to our food-insecure community since August 8<sup>th</sup>), a board member of the Maui Food Bank, and owner of Cutting Edge Catering, Private Maui Chef, and father of four beautiful keiki. I've been lucky to call Maui home for 27 years.

Since the fires, our industry hasn't waited to be asked...we've been showing up by organizing donations, preparing meals, delivering supplies, and contributing our time and talent to help our community heal. I've already submitted written testimony in support of funding event recovery, so today I want to speak from the heart about *who we are* and *why this matters*.

Our association now represents over 100 locally owned businesses, most of them small, family-run, and deeply rooted in this place. The first six months, we were focused on governance, growing our membership, and, most importantly, listening. We met with Kumu from Lahaina (Makalapua and Vene) and asked not *if* we could return to work, but *how*. We asked for permission, for guidance, and we've built our values around that kuleana.

We're aligning ourselves intentionally with both state and county efforts to shift from an extractive model to one of education and ecological stewardship. As part of that, we're requiring every member to go through cultural training rooted in respect for Maui, the Hawaiian culture, and our local community. We believe we are ambassadors, responsible for teaching our visitors how to treat our home and our people. Our clients listen to us.

And that's why we're asking for support, not just for ourselves, but for a larger vision. At the proposed Engage Summit, we have a rare opportunity. 350 of the world's top luxury event professionals could be here on Maui. This is a captive audience, ready to hear our message of aloha, and to carry pono practices back to their clients before they ever set foot on the island. This is the time and an amazing opportunity to enlist the help of these professionals to help shift perceptions and grow awareness of culture, pono practices.

This isn't just marketing—it's transformation. And we're ready to do this work, together with you.

Mahalo for your time.

Brian D. Etheredge

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