

January 9<sup>th</sup> 2020

Council of the County of Maui

Healthy Families and Communities Committee

Re: County Communication 19-248 relating to the feral cat problem on Maui

Aloha members of the committee,

My name is Hanna Mounce. I am the coordinator of Maui Forest Bird Recovery Project, the executive director of Na Koa Manu Conservation, a mother, an avid home gardener, and a local small business owner.

Thank you for putting the feral cat problem on your committee agenda. You also have a copy of my testimony. The hundreds of thousands of free ranging cats that we have on our island has grown to a staggering level. I would like to urge the Council to give time and resources evaluating, and then eliminating this issue as soon possible. My interest falls under two major categories, disease and wildlife.

#1 As a mother and a farmer, the disease issues that free ranging cats present to us and our children is unacceptable. This is a non-native, human-caused and human-supported pest that I am forced to tolerate and embrace on my own property, in public parks, and at our children's schools. The presence of outdoor cats in Hawai'i contaminates the environment with the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*, spreading the disease toxoplasmosis to not only other wildlife but also our born and unborn children. The threat of this disease is often ignored as a public health threat yet people impacted from the disease may have a host of serious health consequences including multi-organ failure. Recent deaths of species that do not directly interact with cats, such as Hawaiian monk seals, suggest that neighborhoods, beaches, and waterways may be heavily contaminated with this parasite. This puts us at risk when recreating or growing food in our yards because of other people's irresponsible pet ownership. If these free-ranging cats are owned, they need to be contained.

#2 I am biologist and someone who values our amazing and unique biodiversity in Hawaii. Cats are one of the most effective and indiscriminate predators on the planet. Our iconic species and remarkable biodiversity has been almost completely wiped out by these such

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introductions. Predation by free-ranging cats kills more than 2.4 billion birds every year in the United States alone. Every single cat that is outside plays a role in this and we have cats on Maui from the top of the summit, down to the ocean. Our remaining wildlife is in such a critically endangered state that any and every death caused by a cat that we have allowed to remain on the landscape is devastating beyond words. We may only have fifty individual kiwīkiū left on the planet and we are not doing anything as a community to remove cats from the island even though they are a documented predator. How we can tolerate this for another year is difficult to understand.

We introduced cats as pets and they should be controlled and treated as such, not free-ranging on the landscape.

Currently the County of Maui is not only not addressing the free ranging cat issue but we are funding a non-profit organization that is promoting and encouraging the continued presence of free ranging cats.

If we choose to allow cats to continue to roam freely across the island, we are choosing the perceived welfare of those individual cats over the welfare of our children and our wildlife. Maui could be one of the first places in the national to take a stand and say that we value our children and our native species over the poor lives that these outdoor cats have. Doing nothing is a choice.

Mahalo, and thank you for your time.

Dr. Hanna Mounce

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hanna Mounce', with a long, sweeping underline.

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