

April 8, 2026

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MEMO TO: Members of the Budget, Finance, and Economic
Development Committee

F R O M: Yuki Lei K. Sugimura, Chair *Yuki Lei K. Sugimura*
Budget, Finance, and Economic Development Committee

SUBJECT: **UPCOUNTRY RESIDENCY AREA MEETING REGARDING THE
FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET** (BFED-1)

On April 1, 2026, the Council's Budget, Finance, and Economic Development Committee held a public meeting at the Mayor Hannibal Tavares Community Center regarding the proposed FY 2027 Budget. Present for the meeting were: Committee Chair Yuki Lei K. Sugimura, Committee Vice-Chair Kauanoë Batangan, and members Tom Cook, Gabe Johnson, Alice L. Lee, Tamara Paltin, Keani N.W. Rawlins-Fernandez, and Shane M. Sinenci. The meeting started at 6:01 p.m. and adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

The Committee received oral testimony from 44 individuals. Unless otherwise indicated, the following oral testimony was received in support of funding for the organization, program, or project noted:

1. Eight people expressed appreciation for Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc., including its transportation and paratransit services, Head Start Program, B.E.S.T. (Be Empowered and Stay Together) Program, Agricultural Micro Grant Program, and Business Development Center.
2. Fourteen people expressed support for Maui Economic Development Board, including its STEMworks education-to-workforce programs.
3. Thirteen people expressed support for the Maui Mountain Bike Coalition Cycle Strong program.
4. Four people—Gerry Ross, Ethan Romanchak, Theresa Thompson, and Warren Watanabe—testified in support of the Maui County Farm Bureau. Warren Watanabe noted that the Mayor's budget does not reflect the full request made by the Farm Bureau. He added that the organization would be seeking additional funds through other competitive County grants.

5. Gerry Ross also testified in support of the Maui Coffee Association, Hawai'i Farmers Union United, and F.A.M. (Farm Apprentice and Mentoring) Program. He also highlighted the importance of waste diversion and farm-to-table and table-to-farm opportunities, such as composting.
6. Theresa Thompson also testified in support of the Maui Cattleman's Association.
7. Two people urged support of The Maui Farm and noted that the budget increase they requested due to rising health insurance premiums is not reflected in the Mayor's proposed budget.
8. Annette Niles and Tiare Lawrence requested additional support for farmers and ranchers, specifically for deer management.
9. Tiare Lawrence also requested a revitalization plan for Hali'imaile Park and funding for high-speed public Wi-Fi and drone technology for lifeguards. She also requested that the County stop funding additional speed bumps and instead consider other road safety methods.
10. Deb Marois noted Ho'oikaika Partnership is not included in the Mayor's proposed budget despite receiving funding in the past. She requested \$175,000 in continued funding plus a modest increase due to increased costs for 'Ohana Fest and child abuse prevention efforts.
11. One individual requested the Council's oversight and support for damages to the Wailuku Water System and restoration of water to the corresponding service area.
12. One individual requested additional funding for settlement compensation.

Your Committee also received the attached written testimony.

For questions relating to the Upcountry residency area meeting, please contact OCS staff (Kasie Apo Takayama at ext. 7665, Maria Leon at 7866, or Jean Pokipala at ext. 8006).

Members of the Budget, Finance, and Economic Development Committee
April 8, 2026
Page 3

If you have any questions relating to the FY 2027 Budget, please contact the Committee staff (Kirsten Szabo at ext. 7662, James Krueger at ext. 7761, Jarret Pascual at ext. 7141, Clarissa MacDonald at ext. 7135, or Pauline Martins at ext. 8039). Thank you for your cooperation.

bfed:2027bgt:Residency area meetings:260401Upcountry:kmatt

Attachments



THE MAUI FARM

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P.O. Box 1776 • Makawao, Hawaii 96768

(808) 579-8271

www.themaufarm.org

April 1, 2026

Board of Directors

FY2027 Maui County Budget request of \$323,304

Introduction & Position

Luke C. Estes
Chairperson

Royle Taogoshi
Vice-Chair for Finance

Wendy Rice
Vice-Chair for Marketing

Gloria Navarro Buckingham
Vice-Chair for Governance

Beth Mathias
Director

Mark Vaught
Director

Manoa Ka'iokulani Martin
Director

J. Scott Meidell
Advisor

Emily Erickson
Executive Director

Aloha Chair, and members of the Council. My name is Emily Erickson, and I am the Executive Director of The Maui Farm. I took over daily operations in October 2025 after serving for 15 years on the board of directors. I am here today to speak in **strong support** of the Mayor's proposed budget, specifically, The Maui Farm. We are respectfully requesting an increase in our allocation this year of \$43,638 above last year's funding level.

The "Why"

The Maui Farm has been in operation on County-leased land for 40 Years. We serve as transitional housing with a farm component, providing a safe community and a healing lifestyle for families facing homelessness. Our Family Strengthening Program operates **five residential homes** where we integrate life-skills training with the therapeutic power of the land and our animals. Each home is shared by 2 or more families; we currently have 8 Mommies and 15 Keiki living at The Maui Farm.

Homelessness is at a crisis level in our state. Our families typically come to live with us for a year. While they are with us, we help them pay off debt, repair or purchase vehicles, maintain a monthly budget, secure childcare and employment, and eventually find long-term housing.

Our county grant makes up 1/3 of our overall budget. We make up the remaining shortfall with private grants, donations, and fundraising.

The Solution

The challenge we face is the reality of operating our facility in today's economy. This requested \$43,638 increase is a direct solution to inflationary pressures, the rising cost of animal feed, utilities, cost of living salaries, and essential farm and housing maintenance required to keep our five residential homes safe and functional.

Conclusion

Investing in The Maui Farm is an investment in our island community proven by four decades of success. By approving this \$43,638 amendment, you are ensuring that our Makawao farm remains a place of hope and resilience. I urge the Council **to support the Mayor's budget and approve our requested increase.** Mahalo.



The Maui Farm, Inc. is exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions are tax deductible.

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Testimony 1 from a current resident at The Maui Farm

My name is Brandy Dias-Christian and I am writing in support of the Maui Farm family strengthening program. I have lived at the Maui Farm for 3 months and have participated in the Family strengthening program.

Before I came to the Maui Farm, I was at the Women Helping Maui shelter. I literally had the clothes on my back, no identification, and nothing else.

Being that I had a limited time there I was so stressed and had no idea of where I would go or what I would do, because I lost everything. One of the advocates at Women Helping Women told me that I should put into an application into the Maui Farms.

The relief of me getting accepted into the farm was a life saver. Honestly, If I did not have this place I would have no choice but to be homeless, and probably go back to my abuser. I feel so blessed to be in a safe, supportive place in where I have my own room in which I feel more independent and comfortable.

The staff here is golden, each one of them has a way of making me feel that I can be open, honest, and gives me the strength to look to the future. Each of them individually has a soft approach which makes me feel so comfortable being that I came from a very abusive environment before. The fact that I could sleep, eat, and take care of myself is such a dramatic change in my life that I am actually looking forward to the future. The staff helps me with goal setting and accomplishment weekly. They assist in transportation with appointments, shopping, and anything that I need and they always has a smile on their face and never makes me feel that it is an inconvenience, where I hate to ask people for help. Not only that, they are always open to listen to me venting or just getting things off my mind. I owe the Maui Farms my life. If it wasn't for the Maui Farms, I honestly would not have made it and wouldn't be alive because I would have to go back to my abusive situation in which I barely escaped.

Mahalo Nui for Helping. Aloha.



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Testimony 2 from a current resident at The Maui Farm

My name is Lucie Teamer, and I am writing to express my strong support for The Maui Farm's Family Strengthening Program. I have been a resident of The Maui Farm for the past six months, where I have participated in the program alongside my daughter, who will turn three in April 2026.

Prior to my arrival at The Maui Farm, I was residing in a domestic violence shelter and facing significant challenges in establishing stability and security for my family. Transitioning into The Maui Farm's program marked a critical turning point in our lives.

The Maui Farm has helped me develop important life skills, strengthen my ability to live independently, and work toward long-term goals for my family. I have received guidance, structure, and support that have increased my confidence and my ability to provide a stable and nurturing home for my child. The Maui Farm has also connected me with valuable resources and a supportive community, which has played a significant role in my personal growth and our overall well-being.

Please continue to support The Maui Farm in providing these needed services for families on Maui.

Sincerely,
Lucie Teamer



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Testimony 3 from a current resident at The Maui Farm

My name is Mardee and I am writing in support of The Maui Farm's Family Strengthening Program. I have lived on The Maui Farm for 2 months, going on 3, with my 2 year old and 3 year old as participants in the Family Strengthening Program.

Before coming to The Maui Farm, we were in a toxic and abusive environment.

The Maui Farm has helped me with emotional support. Just having a group of women who are going through similar situations and not feeling alone. Not only are the staff supportive but also the women I've entered the program with.

The Maui Farm's staff and Program has helped me by working on myself, my financial, and support of those around me.

Please continue to support The Maui Farm in providing these services for families on Maui in situations just like mine. I honestly find the strength in these different women coming out of these situations, knowing I could be someone who comes out of it positively too.



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Budget, Finance, and Economic Development Committee (BFED)

FY27 Residency Area Meeting April 1, 2026

Submitted by: Deb Marois, Coordinator, Ho'oikaika Partnership

Aloha Chair and Councilmembers,

My name is Deb Marois. I serve as Coordinator for Ho'oikaika Partnership. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify, and for your continued commitment to strengthening families in Maui County.

Ho'oikaika Partnership is a countywide coalition that brings together health and human service providers, community organizations, and public agencies to prevent child abuse and build a stronger, more coordinated system of support for our 'ohana. We focus on strengthening protective factors so families can thrive and challenges do not escalate into crisis.

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. Last year, this Council unanimously recognized that in Resolution 25-92, affirming the County's shared kuleana to protect keiki and support our 'ohana and workforce. You also unanimously approved \$175,000 for our work. That investment was meaningful, and our 2025 outcomes reflect it.

We applied for FY27-28 funding through the Department of Human Concerns RFP process. However, the Mayor's proposed FY 27 budget does not include Ho'oikaika Partnership. I am writing on behalf of Ho'oikaika Partnership to respectfully request that the Council include a dedicated funding line of \$199,200 in the FY27 budget, sustaining and modestly increasing support for something proven and essential.

You Have Already Said This Matters

In Resolution 25-92, this Council affirmed that cross-sector collaboration creates a seamless safety net for families; that Healing the Healers demonstrates the need for ongoing workforce investment; that the 2023 wildfires placed extraordinary demands on our social service providers; and that the County has a moral obligation to protect every child on Maui, Moloka'i, and Lana'i. Those words were not ceremonial. We are asking that you fund them.

The Need Has Not Gone Away

As we discussed in January, nearly 1 in 5 adults in Maui County report having four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) before age 18, traumatic events that increase lifelong risks of chronic disease, mental illness, substance use, and child welfare involvement. That statistic was measured *before* the 2023 wildfires.

Two-plus years later, families are still struggling. Providers are still stretched thin. Federal funding is contracting. And for a coalition whose strength lies in coordination, consistency, and trust, funding gaps are deeply destabilizing.

We experienced exactly that in 2025. A delayed grant release forced us to pause both Navigation Services and Healing the Healers for several months. We lost a key staff member and contractor. Navigation Services were only restored to full-time capacity in February; Healing the Healers relaunched just last month. Both are currently funded only through June 30. That disruption affects

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more than programs. It affects families seeking help, and providers who rely on a coordinated system to do their work. That is the real cost of fragmented, year-to-year funding.

Prevention requires consistency. Trust is built over time, and damaged when services disappear and reappear. County investment would provide the stability needed for continued success.

What Your FY26 Investment Achieved

In 2025, Ho’oikaika Partnership made progress across all five strategic goals, engaging dozens of agencies and hundreds of providers to strengthen coordination, reduce duplication, and improve how services reach families.

- The HP Navigator served 161 families representing 527 individuals, including families from Moloka’i and Lāna’i, helping them access food, clothing, and critical resources.
- HP engaged 3,910 families through 13 outreach events across the county and distributed more than 1,000 prevention and basic-needs items.
- 190 providers from 50 organizations attended our first in-person conference since 2019. 96% said it met or exceeded expectations; 90% gained new tools applicable to their work.
- Healing the Healers supported 54 providers from 23 agencies. 90% reported stronger peer connections and new strategies to prevent burnout.
- 95 people from 58 different organizations participated in monthly coalition meetings. 98% reported increased understanding of community resources, strengthening referral pathways and reducing duplication across the system.

Coordination Is a Direct Service

Research shows that every dollar invested in child abuse prevention yields up to \$7 in savings through reduced healthcare costs, lower incarceration rates, and decreased reliance on emergency services. Ho’oikaika Partnership is that upstream investment.

In a coalition model that uses a systems change approach; coordination is a direct service. Without it, 75 agencies stay siloed, families fall through cracks, and every other dollar invested in this system becomes less effective. The Navigator who knows the families on Moloka’i and in Hāna. The Healing the Healers facilitators who have earned the trust of frontline providers. The monthly meeting that keeps agencies coordinated: These take years to build and can be lost in a budget cycle.

Our coalition leverages funding from state agencies, philanthropy, and partner agency resources but the landscape is shifting. The Maui Strong Fund that supported much of our post-wildfire surge has wound down. Federal funding is less certain. County support is the stable, local investment that enables the whole system to function seamlessly.

A Request to Sustain What Works

Ho’oikaika Partnership is Maui County’s infrastructure for prevention. It is an 18-year-old coalition with demonstrated results, rigorous evaluation, and deep roots throughout the community. The primary challenge we face is not lack of impact. It is lack of stable funding.

We are requesting \$199,202 for FY27, a modest increase from last year that reflects the true cost of full-year Navigation Services, Healing the Healers, concrete support for families, public education, and

the workforce coordination, evaluation and communications infrastructure that holds everything together. With this investment, we will:

- Restore full-time Navigation Services for 150–200 families, including those from Molokaʻi, Lānaʻi, and Hāna;
- Continue workforce support and prevent burnout through Healing the Healers and other professional development;
- Reach thousands of residents with public education materials promoting protective factors and community resources; and
- Coordinate over 75 partner organizations to fill gaps, share resources, and prevent duplication so that every dollar invested in Maui's families goes further.

This is not an investment in one program. It is an investment in a stronger, more connected system of care for all of Maui County. Please include a line item for Hoʻoikaika Partnership in the FY27 budget. When we invest in prevention, we reduce long-term costs, strengthen our workforce, and ensure that all our keiki and ʻohana are healthy, safe, and supported.

Mahalo nui for your time and consideration.

Deb Marois, Coordinator

On behalf of Hoʻoikaika Partnership

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HO'OIKAIKA PARTNERSHIP

Working together to keep
our 'ohana safe and supported



'OHANA FEST

IN HONOR OF CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

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GROWING
STRONGER
TOGETHER



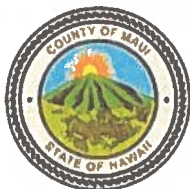
APRIL 11, 2026
UH MAUI COLLEGE
9 A.M. TO 12 P.M.



Join us for a day full of fun for the whole 'ohana! Enjoy music and entertainment, food, games, crafts and cultural activities while learning about Maui's community resources!

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LEARN ABOUT CONCRETE SUPPORTS & COMMUNITY RESOURCES

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