

Great Committee

From: samandias.skd@gmail.com
Sent: Wednesday, September 27, 2023 10:01 PM
To: Nohe M. Uu-Hodgins
Cc: Great Committee; Tamara A. Paltin
Subject: RE: Subject: Urgent Request for Investigation and Action Regarding Recent Tragic Events in Lahaina
Attachments: Letter to Representative Ichiyama and Kila - Fire Prevention.pdf; Lahaina Fire Highlights Crucial Role of West Maui Greenway.pdf; County Council Testimony.pdf; Lahainaluna- Evacuation route .pdf

Mahalo Chair Nohe!

This was follow-up to my first testimony I think will be very useful as well. I have written letters. Following and wanted to make sure you all saw them as well.

Gov. Green
Mayor Bissen
Senator Brian Schatz
Rep. Linda Ichiyama Co-Chair House of Reps Wildfire Prevention
Rep. Darius K. Kila Co-Chair House of Reps Wildfire Prevention

Have a nice night!

Mahalo!
Saman

From: Nohe M. Uu-Hodgins <Nohe.Uu-Hodgins@mauicounty.us>
Sent: Wednesday, September 27, 2023 9:19 PM
To: samandias.skd@gmail.com
Cc: Great Committee <Great.Committee@mauicounty.us>; Tamara A. Paltin <Tamara.Paltin@mauicounty.us>
Subject: RE: Subject: Urgent Request for Investigation and Action Regarding Recent Tragic Events in Lahaina

Aloha Saman,

Mahalo for your testimony. I have cc'd the GREAT Committee staff.

Nohe

From: samandias.skd@gmail.com <samandias.skd@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, September 27, 2023 8:52 PM
To: Nohe M. Uu-Hodgins <Nohe.Uu-Hodgins@mauicounty.us>; Tamara A. Paltin <Tamara.Paltin@mauicounty.us>
Subject: Subject: Urgent Request for Investigation and Action Regarding Recent Tragic Events in Lahaina

Date: Sep 27, 2023

County Council Government Relations, Ethics, and Transparency Committee

Committee Chair - Nohelani U'u-Hodgins

Committee Vice-Chair - Tamara Paltin

Subject: Urgent Request for Investigation and Action Regarding Recent Tragic Events in Lahaina

Dear Members of the County Council Government Relations, Ethics, and Transparency Committee,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to express my deep concern and distress over the recent events that have unfolded in Lahaina, particularly the tragic loss of over 100 lives and the displacement of over 7,000 individuals due to a devastating incident. These events have had a profound impact on our community, and we must take immediate steps to ensure that such a catastrophe never occurs again.

The Maui Fire Prevention Bureau plays a critical role in safeguarding our community from fire hazards and promoting public safety. Their core responsibilities include:

1. **Education:** The Fire Prevention Bureau is responsible for developing and implementing programs that increase public awareness of fire safety. This encompasses educating the community about fire risks and preventive measures.
2. **Enforcement:** Code enforcement is a vital function of the bureau, focusing on the enforcement of fire codes and regulations. This includes inspections, investigation of complaints, and ensuring compliance with fire safety standards.
3. **Prevention:** Fire prevention is at the heart of the bureau's mission. They are tasked with abating fire and life-safety hazards before they can cause injury and property damage.

In May 2022, I initiated correspondence with the Fire Prevention Bureau regarding my concerns about fire prevention and safety in our community. I outlined the need for proactive measures, such as press releases and public service announcements, to engage the community in fire prevention efforts. I did so under the assumption that these requests aligned with the bureau's core responsibilities.

However, despite my efforts to bring attention to potential hazards and the importance of prevention, I received responses that indicated a lack of resources and insufficient action. These emails serve as evidence of my attempts to address the issue and the responses received from the Fire Prevention Bureau.

The tragic events that have befallen our community in Lahaina are a stark reminder of the consequences of inaction and inadequate allocation of resources when it comes to fire prevention and safety. The loss of over 100 lives and the displacement of thousands underscore the urgency of ensuring that the bureau fulfills its basic responsibilities.

I kindly request that your committee:

1. Initiate a thorough investigation into the circumstances surrounding these events, with a specific focus on the actions (or lack thereof) taken by the Maui Fire Prevention Bureau in response to concerns raised by community members.
2. Evaluate the adequacy of resources allocated to the Fire Prevention Bureau and other relevant agencies responsible for ensuring public safety and fire prevention on Maui.
3. Recommend necessary policy changes, resource allocations, or personnel adjustments to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.
4. Ensure transparency throughout the investigative process and actively engage with affected community members to provide updates and gather additional information.

In addition to my correspondence with the Fire Prevention Bureau, I also escalated my concerns to various offices within the county government, including the Office of Climate Change, Resiliency, and Sustainability, the Mayor's office, and the Mayor's PR communication department. I requested a public announcement to educate the Maui community about fire prevention. Unfortunately, no action was taken in response to these requests.

The loss of over 100 lives and the displacement of thousands in our community are tragedies that should never have happened. We owe it to the victims and their families to thoroughly investigate the circumstances surrounding these events and take swift and effective action to prevent such disasters in the future.

I appreciate your attention to this matter and your commitment to the safety and well-being of our community. I am ready and willing to provide any further information or assistance that may aid in your investigation.

Thank you for your prompt and earnest consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,

West Maui Community leader

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Saman Dias". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Saman" being more prominent than the last name "Dias".

Saman Dias

Sep 18, 2023
Saman Dias
99 Kahana Nui RD
Lahaina, HI 96761

Honorable Linda Ichiyama
State Capitol, Room 422
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Honorable Darius K. Kila
State Capitol, Room 439
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Comprehensive Wildfire Prevention Strategies for Hawaii

Aloha Representative Ichiyama and Representative Kila,

I trust this message finds you well, and I want to express my sincere gratitude for your leadership in co-chairing the committee focused on wildfire prevention. The recent wildfires that swept through the Hawaiian island of Maui, resulting in significant loss of life and property, underscore the urgency of addressing this critical issue.

I commend your efforts to identify the causes of wildfires and recommend legislative actions to mitigate these risks throughout our beautiful state. In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to several wildfire prevention strategies that, when integrated into a comprehensive plan, can substantially enhance our preparedness, and safeguard our communities.

1. **Underground Power Lines:** Urgently consider a mandate to transition power lines underground, a vital step to reduce the risk of wildfires caused by above-ground lines during extreme weather conditions, such as high winds and drought.
2. **Vegetation Management:** Encourage homeowners and landowners to establish defensible spaces around their properties. This includes removing dead vegetation, creating firebreaks, and employing fire-resistant landscaping practices.
3. **Early Warning Systems:** Invest in advanced weather monitoring and alert systems to provide timely information to residents and first responders, allowing for swift action during fire outbreaks.

4. **Community Firebreaks:** Collaborate with local communities to establish firebreaks and buffer zones between residential areas and wildlands, thereby slowing the spread of wildfires.
5. **Regular Inspections:** Enforce routine inspections of power lines, utility poles, and transformers to ensure they are in excellent condition and adhere to stringent maintenance and safety standards.
6. **Fire-Resistant Building Materials:** Promote the use of fire-resistant building materials in high-risk areas and encourage homeowners to retrofit their existing properties with fire-resistant features.
7. **Prescribed Burns:** Explore controlled or prescribed burn programs during low-risk periods to reduce excess vegetation in fire-prone areas, mitigating the availability of fuel for wildfires.
8. **Community Fire Drills:** Organize and support community fire drills and evacuation exercises to ensure residents are well-prepared for wildfire emergencies.
9. **Collaborative Partnerships:** Foster partnerships with local businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations to fund and implement wildfire prevention initiatives. These collaborations could include community clean-up events and educational workshops.
10. **Wildfire-Resistant Infrastructure:** Encourage the development and retrofitting of infrastructure, such as bridges, roads, and culverts, to withstand wildfires and facilitate safe evacuations.
11. **Research and Innovation:** Allocate resources for research and development of innovative wildfire prevention technologies and strategies. This includes remote sensing and firefighting equipment.
12. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch public awareness campaigns to educate residents about wildfire risks and safety measures. These campaigns can emphasize fire bans and restrictions during high-risk periods.

Swift Implementation of Prevention Plans: It is crucial that we do not allow years to pass before implementing a comprehensive wildfire prevention plan. I strongly recommend that the committee encourages county governments to establish prevention plans promptly. To expedite this process, I propose forming a committee that includes experienced community leaders willing to assist. Many community members possess valuable expertise and are eager to contribute.

Enforcement and Maintenance: Ensure the rigorous enforcement of regulations related to the removal and maintenance of dead grass and trees by county, state, and private landowners. Additionally, address the issue of junk cars, equipment, and appliances stored around homes and county parks, which pose fire hazards.

Community Education: Develop an educational campaign to inform community members of their responsibilities in preventing wildfires. Organizations such as [Ready for Wildfire and Hawaii Wildfire Management](#) Organization offer valuable resources and ideas for fire prevention that can be implemented.

Emergency Evacuation Routes: In West Maui, where evacuation routes are limited, consider the implementation of the [West Maui Greenway](#) as an alternative evacuation path. After a decade of effort, a [federally funded master plan for the West Maui Greenway](#) was completed in October 2022. However,


there is a pressing need to prioritize this project and secure county support to move it forward. The lack of resources and staffing should not be barriers to progress. We have resources, including knowledgeable and dedicated community members willing to volunteer their expertise.

Incorporating these comprehensive wildfire prevention strategies into our legislative efforts will demonstrate our commitment to proactively protecting Hawaii's communities. We have a unique opportunity to work collaboratively and marshal the collective wisdom and resources of our state to safeguard our residents and environment.

I am hopeful that your committee will consider these suggestions as part of your deliberations. Additionally, I am willing to offer my support and expertise in any way possible to contribute to the success of these critical initiatives. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you require further information or assistance.

Mahalo nui loa for your dedication to the safety and well-being of our beautiful state. I look forward to the positive impact your committee's work will undoubtedly have on Hawaii's wildfire prevention efforts.

With utmost respect and gratitude,



Saman Dias

West Maui Resident

Community Leader: Chair West Maui Greenway / Maui Bicycling League



Chair Maui Bicycling League

808-209-2542

maui@hbl.org

cc-

Angus McKelvey - Senator, State of Hawaii Legislature

Tamara Paltin – West Maui County Council / Chair of the Disaster, Resilience, International Affairs, and Planning Committee

Troy Hashimoto - Representative, State of Hawaii Legislature, MPO Policy Board Chair

Sep 22nd, 2023

Subject: Urgent Action Needed: Lahaina Fire Highlights Crucial Role of West Maui Greenway

Dear Senator Brian Schatz,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to bring your attention to a recent article published in Civil Beat [[Harrowing Eyewitness Accounts Cast Doubt On Official Lahaina Fire Narrative - Honolulu Civil Beat](#)], which discusses the harrowing experiences of Lahaina residents during the catastrophic Lahaina fire. The article sheds light on the use of the Cane Haul Rd as an escape route during the fire, a route that is central to the proposed [West Maui Greenway](#) (WMG).

The [West Maui Greenway](#), a legacy project that the [Maui Bicycling League](#) (MBL) has passionately advocated for over the past decade, [represents a critical initiative for Maui's safety, sustainability, and connectivity](#). The recent events in Lahaina underscore the urgency of advancing this project and implementing the [comprehensive master plan](#) that was completed in September 2022.

Here are key points that I believe are essential for consideration:

1. Emergency Evacuation Route: The Lahaina fire demonstrated that the Cane Haul Rd, which is integral to the WMG, can serve as a vital emergency evacuation route. It is essential that we expedite the development of the WMG to ensure that Maui residents have safe and efficient escape routes in times of crisis.

2. Underground Utilities: [Your response highlighting the need to rebuild power line infrastructure underground in West Maui](#) perfectly aligns with the goals of the WMG project. The WMG can serve as a valuable resource and conduit for implementing underground utilities, ensuring the safety and resilience of our infrastructure. By developing the WMG, we not only create a dedicated emergency evacuation route and promote sustainable transportation methods but also establish the foundation for underground infrastructure that enhances safety, mitigates fire risks, and contributes to Hawaii's sustainability objectives.

3. Climate Change Mitigation: The WMG contributes significantly to climate change mitigation by promoting sustainable transportation methods such as biking and walking. It aligns with Hawaii's goals for reducing carbon emissions and achieving energy independence.

4. Community Benefits: Beyond safety and sustainability, the WMG offers numerous benefits to the Maui community, including improved transportation options, enhanced recreational opportunities, and economic development potential.

5. Opportunity for Transformation: The aftermath of the Lahaina fire, coupled with the availability of disaster and mitigation federal funding opportunities, presents a unique moment in time. It's an opportunity that may not come again in our lifetime, and we must seize it. Instead of viewing this as a challenge rooted in a "lack of resources," let us collectively change our perspective. We can channel our efforts into resourcefulness, seeking innovative solutions and partnerships that will transform the tragedy of the Lahaina fire into a catalyst for positive change. By proactively utilizing available funding and harnessing the determination of our community, we can ensure that such a devastating situation never occurs again and that the West Maui Greenway becomes a symbol of resilience, safety, and sustainability.

I kindly request your assistance in using this critical moment to expedite the development and implementation of the West Maui Greenway. Your influence and leadership can help make this legacy project a reality, benefiting the people of Maui and contributing to our state's broader sustainability goals.

I have taken the liberty of cc'ing the following individuals who have a vested interest in this project and its potential benefits:

Governor Josh Green

Mayor Maui County Richard Bissen

Chair Policy Board Maui MPO Troy Hashimoto Representative, State of Hawaii Legislature

Director Department of Transportation Edwin Sniffen

Senator Angus McKelvey

Council Member Tamar Paltin

Rep. Linda Ichiyama Co-Chair House of Reps Wildfire Prevention

Rep. Darius K. Kila Co-Chair House of Reps Wildfire Prevention

By working collaboratively, we can ensure that the West Maui Greenway becomes a cornerstone of Maui's resilience, sustainability, and connectivity. I would be grateful for any support, guidance, or advocacy you can provide to expedite this vital project.

Mahalo Nui Loa for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your positive response.

Warm regards,



Saman Dias



Saman Dias

Chair Maui Bicycling League

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Sep 27, 2023

Honorable County Council Chair and Council Members,

I am Saman Dias, and today I stand before you to share my condolences and join in mourning for the devastating losses our community has suffered. While I personally did not lose my home or life, I feel a profound sense of grief as I believe we have lost a part of our family and community.

In May 2022, I felt a sense of urgency and began reaching out to various authorities, including the Maui Fire Prevention Bureau, Climate Resilience Department, Mayor's office, and the Emergency Management department. My plea was clear - we needed community education, enforcement, and prevention measures to address the looming threat of wildfires.

Unfortunately, my efforts were met with responses indicating a lack of resources to address these concerns. Despite my persistence, I reached the Mayor's office only to encounter the same refrain - a shortage of resources. My final message to them was a plea: "I am praying we have no fires, and that you will be ready if the fire starts. That time will come. We should be well prepared for that if we are not prepared to do simple prevention."

Tragically, 15 months later, we find ourselves in the aftermath of a devastating fire that has claimed the Lahaina community, with over 1,800 homes lost and more than 100 lives taken. My message today is clear: our government officials have failed us.

The excuse of a lack of resources from the county is no longer acceptable. I urge our government to shift its perspective from "lack of resources" to "how can we collaborate, how can we work together to serve our community." I'd like to highlight several key points:

1. **Fire Prevention Plan:** We urgently need a comprehensive fire prevention plan, and the community is willing to assist in its execution.
2. **Emergency Evacuation Route:** The recent article in Civil Beat reveals the importance of the Cane Haul Rd as an escape route during the fire, emphasizing the need to expedite the development of the West Maui Greenway (WMG). This route is vital for the safety of our residents.
3. **Underground Utilities:** The call for underground power line infrastructure in West Maui aligns perfectly with the goals of the WMG project. It can serve as an avenue to implement underground utilities, enhancing safety and infrastructure resilience.
4. **Climate Change Mitigation:** The WMG promotes sustainable transportation methods and aligns with Hawaii's goals for reducing carbon emissions and achieving energy independence.
5. **Community Benefits:** Beyond safety, the WMG offers improved transportation, recreation, and economic development opportunities.
6. **Opportunity for Transformation:** Let us change our perspective and channel our efforts into resourcefulness, seeking innovative solutions and partnerships. We can transform the tragedy of the Lahaina fire into a catalyst for positive change.

Additional points I'd like to emphasize:

- **Safety of our Children:** Schools should practice fire evacuation with children, and we need fire evacuation plans with alternative routes. Idea attached - Lahainaluna- Evacuation route from Hawaii Bike Plan 2003
- **Partnership with Red Cross:** Conduct ongoing surveys to better understand the needs of our people and provide support through collaboration with county and state agencies.
- **Employment and Job Training:** Proactively consider retraining programs and job placement to support those affected by disasters.
- **Lack of Resources and Funding:** The constant excuse of resource scarcity is not acceptable. We should encourage collaboration with the community, including volunteers with professional expertise. There are many grant opportunities that are available. We can help. County has declined.

In conclusion, it is crucial that we do not allow years to pass before implementing a comprehensive wildfire prevention plan. I propose forming a committee that includes experienced community leaders to expedite this process. We must enforce regulations regarding dead grass, trees, and address fire hazards posed by items such as junk cars and equipment. Furthermore, a community education campaign is essential, and we can draw upon the resources of organizations like Ready for Wildfire and Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization. Lastly, we should prioritize the West Maui Greenway as an alternative evacuation path, leveraging the resources and expertise within our community.

Thank you for your attention and let us work together to ensure that such a devastating situation never occurs again and that our community becomes a model of resilience, safety, and sustainability.

West Maui Community Leader and Chair of Maui Bicycling League



Mahalo Nui Loa!

Saman Dias

Chair Maui Bicycling League

808-209-2542

maui@hbl.org

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p.s attachments

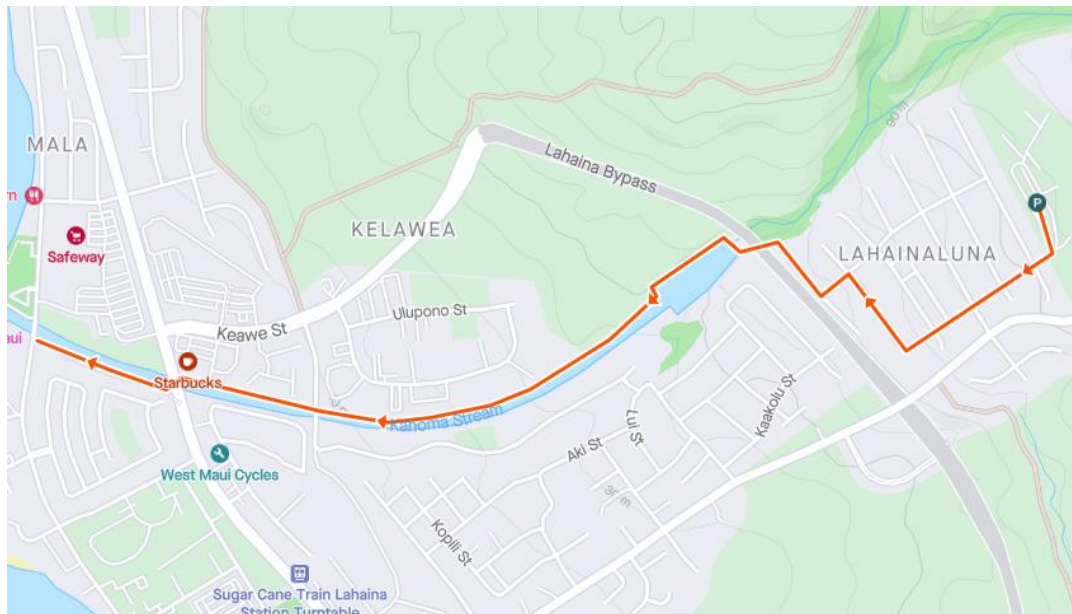
letter to Brian Senator Brian Schatz / Gov. Green / Mayor Bissen

Lahainaluna- Evacuation route from Hawaii Bike Plan 2003

Emails sent re: fire prevention. And Letter to Governor

Comprehensive Wildfire Prevention Strategies for Hawaii – letter to Representative Ichiyama and Representative Kila.

Lahainaluna- Evacuation route from Hawaii Bike Plan 2003



- a. 71 Lahainaluna Road (priority II)
 - i. Honoapiilani Hwy-Kahoma Stream Path
- b. 72 Kahoma Stream Path (priority II)
 - i. Nohea Kai Dr-Lahainaluna HS

Items listed and priority levels are from Hawaii Bicycle Plan 2003 “Island of Maui Proposed Bicycle Facilities”.