

# Budget, Finance, and Economic Development Committee (2023-2025) on 2024-05-29 1:30 PM

Meeting Time: 05-29-24 13:30

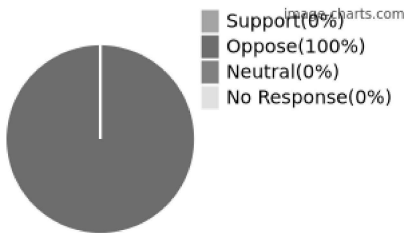
## eComments Report

Meetings	Meeting Time	Agenda Items	Comments	Support	Oppose	Neutral
Budget, Finance, and Economic Development Committee (2023-2025) on 2024-05-29 1:30 PM	05-29-24 13:30	3	1	0	1	0

### Sentiments for All Meetings

The following graphs display sentiments for comments that have location data. Only locations of users who have commented will be shown.

#### Overall Sentiment



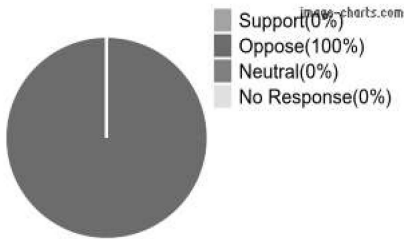
**Budget, Finance, and Economic Development Committee (2023-2025) on 2024-05-29 1:30 PM**  
05-29-24 13:30

Agenda Name	Comments	Support	Oppose	Neutral
BFED-21(23) DEPARTMENT OF POLICE HELICOPTER PROGRAM (BFED-21(23))	1	0	1	0

**Sentiments for All Agenda Items**

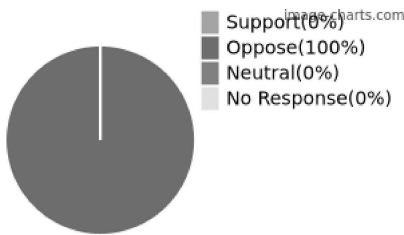
The following graphs display sentiments for comments that have location data. Only locations of users who have commented will be shown.

**Overall Sentiment**



**Agenda Item: eComments for BFED-21(23) DEPARTMENT OF POLICE HELICOPTER PROGRAM (BFED-21(23))**

**Overall Sentiment**



**Guest User**

Location:  
Submitted At: 2:00pm 05-24-24  
May 24, 2024

Chair Yuki Lei Sugimura  
Budget, Finance, and Economic Development Committee  
200 South High Street  
Wailuku, Hawaii

Re: OPPOSE: Department of Police Helicopter Program (BFED-21(23))

Chair Sugimura,

The State of Hawaii Organization of Police Officers (SHOPO) is submitting this written testimony to formally

oppose item BFED-21(23) on the Committee's agenda regarding the Department of Police's proposed helicopter program.

When a police department seeks to make a major change in the services it provides or the way it operates, it should never be taken lightly. There should be robust conversations within the Department, with the Mayor and Council, and with the community. SHOPO and Maui police officers learned about the Chief's desire to create an air unit and purchase a helicopter from a television news reporter, not the Chief. Adding air services to MPD is a significant undertaking that presents substantial financial, legal, and safety risks.

Approval of the proposed equipment purchases for a helicopter, which we do not have to provide a service we do not provide without any discussion with any stakeholder, let alone the County Council, is a clear violation of the principles of transparency and fairness in decision-making. The proposal should be rejected, and the Chief should be given direction that if he wants to create an air unit, he should start over and do this correctly, ensuring a transparent process that the public can follow and trust.

#### **Massive Unbudgeted Costs**

##### **\$6,281,800: Ownership Cost for "Air Unit"**

Given that the Chief is proposing a significant change in department operations, we'd expect a more detailed financial cost analysis than the mini spreadsheet provided for the Committee. While there are no details in the public submittal, our understanding is that the Chief wants to spend over \$800,000 on military-style equipment for a helicopter BEFORE we own a helicopter, let alone before the County considers adding air services to the Police Department at all.

Once the \$800,000 is spent, its money wasted if you do not get the helicopter. Of course, then you have to configure staff, hangar, fuel, the helicopter, and the list goes on from there.

Based on the Chief's mini spreadsheet, the first-year costs for his helicopter program will cost taxpayers \$6,281,000.

This figure requires a huge asterisk as the mini-spreadsheet states a cost of \$1,500 per hour when the helicopter is dispatched. However, because no annual cost is tied to that line, we do not know if that figure is included in the \$2,352,000 cell that provides contractor costs, including pilots. So, it's either \$6.28 million for the year-one cost or \$6.28 million plus \$1,500 per flight hour.

The mini spreadsheet does not discuss the ongoing cost of ownership for the helicopter. This is not a simple, one-year commitment on costs. Instead, the helicopter program presents significant ongoing costs for operations. Using the limited amount of information in the mini spreadsheet, \$2,352,000 per year is the cost to operate the program (again, we are unsure about the \$1,500/hour), and taking a look at a 10-year cost for the program, using a conservative cost escalator of 3%, Maui County would need to invest \$20,664,928 just for the operational costs of the Air Unit over the next ten years. If we look further towards 20 years, a lifetime cap for helicopters, that cost would be over \$36,000,000.

Maybe these costs are well worth it, but that should be decided publicly, with a genuine dialogue with all stakeholders. The County should not make a \$20-\$36 million decision with zero input or disclosure.

#### **Police Helicopter Operations Require Significant Policies Put in Place**

A police helicopter unit requires significant policies to protect MPD employees, the public, our partner agencies, and suspects. From the Chief's comments to the news media, it appears that he's contemplating using the helicopter in "hostage" situations, poor visibility and night operations, and higher-risk rescues.

Each topic also requires policies governing when and how the helicopter is. Each area requires the appropriate training module for the employees expected to carry out those policies. Given helicopter operations are vastly different than other MPD operations, it is safe to assume it will take considerable time to develop these policies and training modules.

And given the gravity of some of the policy decisions, MPD should not develop these policies alone. The Chief's

desire to use the helicopter during “hostage” situations leads to the necessity of use-of-force policies as it relates to police helicopter operations. For example, can an officer fire a shot from the helicopter while it’s in the air? These policy questions still complicate the operations of departments that have long had air operations, let alone a department that has never had to deal with these issues.

Developing policies for the operation of a police helicopter is different from setting policies for other departments. Because we are law-enforcement personnel, we have extra responsibilities regarding protecting the constitutional rights of members of the public and the actions we are mandated to take when we see laws being broken or citizens in jeopardy. In a helicopter, we run the risk of violating people’s privacy rights, tripping Fourth Amendment issues during police operations, etc.

Finally, it should be noted that in some jurisdictions, there has been friction between a police department’s air unit and community members. Impacts such as loud noise, late-night operations, bright spotlights used for searching, and megaphone/loudspeaker use and more become potential friction points between the community and the police department. This is why it is entirely inappropriate to delve into creating an air unit without having any community input or interaction.

#### Missing Analysis of Meeting MPD’s Current Needs vs. Expanding New Services

The MPD has a strategic plan to set its strategic path from 2023 to 2028, complete with goals to hold itself accountable. Nowhere in the strategic plan is adding an air unit, and nowhere does it even discuss adding an air unit. What it does discuss is the importance of clear and transparent communications with internal employees and the community. The rushed helicopter program violates those principles.

MPD has significant needs related to replacing its aging fleet of marked and unmarked vehicles. The body armor issued by the MPD is inadequate and must be upgraded. Our police stations need secured parking to protect our fleet vehicles and officers. Currently, anyone can drive into the back parking lots while our officers are at their most vulnerable-- loading up their vehicles to begin their shifts. Further, we’ve yet to see improved respirators for our operations in hazardous areas, and the “Go Bags” recommended in the Maui Fire After Action report have yet to appear as promised.

Most importantly, we are having a staffing crisis that has yet to explore retention-related investments. Yet, there is a rush to commit \$20 to \$36,000,000 without even checking on how such a surge of funds could be used more productively to get more officers out enforcing laws and protecting the community.

#### Conclusion

Again, we ask you to oppose this expenditure. It’s off-budget, has zero buy-in from any stakeholder group, and is not well-planned. A “NO” vote on this expenditure does not mean you have to oppose creating a helicopter program. It’s quite the opposite. If we are going to establish a helicopter program for MPD, do it the right way. Ensure it’s well planned, has a clear financial picture, transparent policies and expectations, and gets input from stakeholders.

Otherwise, this may be the indulgence of one of the greatest impulse buys of all time. We all believe Maui residents deserve better.

Sincerely,

Nicholas “Nick” Krau  
SHOPO – Chapter Chairman  
Maui Chapter Board of Directors