

Resolution

No. 23-215

URGING GOVERNOR GREEN TO POSTPONE THE REOPENING OF TOURISTS TO WEST MAUI ON OCTOBER 8

WHEREAS, on August 8, Lahaina faced an unprecedented and devastating wildfire that left a trail of destruction in its wake, affecting the lives and homes of thousands of residents; and

WHEREAS, this catastrophic event resulted in the displacement of a significant portion of our community, with many residents losing their homes and possessions, leaving them in a state of profound uncertainty and distress; and

WHEREAS, the recovery process following such a traumatic event requires time, compassion, and a supportive environment that allows residents to heal, rebuild, and regain a sense of normalcy; and

WHEREAS, the reopening of West Maui for tourism on October 8, 2023, as currently announced by Governor Green, poses a significant challenge to the emotional well-being and readiness of our community members, particularly those directly affected by the wildfires; and

WHEREAS, the Maui County Council's Government Relations, Ethics and Transparency committee received over 10 hours of testimony on September 27 in Ka'anapali, hearing directly from Lahaina residents and community members at-large; and

WHEREAS, the voices of the residents, who have endured immeasurable hardship and loss, echo a profound need for empathy, understanding, and a recovery period that allows them to heal, regain stability, and ultimately share aloha from a place of strength and resilience; and

WHEREAS, the essence of Hawai'i's reputation lies in the 'ōlelo no'eau aloha aku, aloha mai, and asking individuals who have not had the opportunity to grieve, return to their properties, or ensure stable childcare and schooling for their children to extend aloha under such circumstances could inadvertently jeopardize the welcoming reputation upon which our tourism industry heavily relies; and

WHEREAS, in a Star Advertiser article published on Pleasant Holidays President and CEO Jack Richards stated, “Most people on vacation want to be out celebrating opening and without criticism. Its going to be important to make visitors feel welcome and to reopen enough West Maui businesses, especially luau, so that visitors have enough to do’; and

WHEREAS, residents described multiple incidents underscoring the tensions that can arise between tourists and local residents when outsiders, unaware of the systemic stressors and challenges faced by a marginalized population, encounter an environment fraught with emotional strain; and

WHEREAS, the tension between tourists and locals has already begun to surface, raising concerns that these incidents may escalate without careful consideration, further straining the delicate balance between tourism and our local community; and

WHEREAS, the precedent set in United States v. Alo-Kaonohi reminds us that we must be particularly mindful to work harder to ensure our community is supported by its government.

BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the County of Maui:

1. That it hereby urges the Governor to delay the reopening of West Maui to tourism on October 8; and
2. That it urges the Governor to adopt the proposal from the community that ties benchmarks measuring community stability to the each phase of opening to tourism; and
2. That certified copies of this Resolution be transmitted to the Honorable Josh Green, M.D., Governor, State of Hawai‘i; the Honorable Sylvia Luke, Lieutenant Governor, State of Hawai‘i; Dawn Chang, Chairperson, State of Hawai‘i; Ronald Kouchi, Senate President, State of Hawai‘i, Scott Saiki, Speaker of the House, State of Hawai‘i; and the Honorable Richard T. Bissen, Jr., Mayor, County of Maui.

INTRODUCED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Keani N.W. Rawlins-Fernandez', written in a cursive style.

KEANI N.W. RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ