

Healthy Families and Communities Committee
Thursday, February 28, 2019
Presentation on Opportunity Zones and Healthy Communities (HFC-13(6))
Testimony of Jennifer Maydan

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide some words in support of the efforts of the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Coalition and Blue Zone Project to promote healthy communities. My name is Jennifer Maydan and I'm a planner with the County's Long Range Planning Division and Chair of the HEAL Coalition for Maui, Molokai and Lanai.

In today's presentations you will hear about the efforts of HEAL and Blue Zones to advocate for healthy communities through collaboration with County departments (including Planning, Public Works, Transportation, and Parks), State agencies, public health professionals, and community advocacy groups, just to name a few. This collaborative work has been going on for years, making notable improvements in our communities and having a positive impact on individual and public health.

But I want to stress to you, Chair and Committee Members, that we are in a public health crisis. I'm not talking about the health care insurance situation in this country being discussed in Washington D.C. I'm talking about something that we as local Maui County residents, planners, engineers, and policy makers have the power to change.

My 10 year old son is part of the first generation of children in America that are predicted to live shorter lives than their parents. You might think, how is this possible given our advances in modern medicine and science? You can think of this health crisis as an urban design crisis, a crisis of inactivity that leads to preventable chronic disease, born of our landscape, our built environment, the communities we build. Where you live (whether it's a walkable and bikeable community or not) is more of a predictor of your health than your genes or your diet. And this is something completely within our control as County government.

So I'm speaking to you as members of this Committee, members of the Multi Modal Transportation Committee, Members of the Budget Committee, and Members of the Maui County Council, and imploring you to take this information seriously. When items come before your committees for improved sidewalks, bike lanes, bus routes, roundabouts, new parks and trails, and other projects that promote active living and social wellbeing in our communities, these are not just "feel good projects", these are necessities. They are the infrastructure for building healthy communities, for keiki, kupuna, and everyone in between. We owe it to our kids and grandkids to build healthy and safe communities and not sentence them to a life of preventable chronic disease. And there's a bonus - this is really a win-win situation. Building healthy communities also makes sense environmentally and economically. There is no reason not to do this.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify and I hope you enjoy and learn from the great presentations you are about to hear today.