

## HFC Committee

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**From:** Katie Folio <calikate@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 20, 2020 10:09 AM  
**To:** HFC Committee  
**Subject:** Maui County should think outside the box to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, prioritize the health of our residents and education for our children, and help meet basic needs to support families and children suffering from negative social and econom...  
**Attachments:** Folio testimony for CARES act funding.pdf  
**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

Please find my testimony for Thursday's meeting attached. Mahalo nui loa!  
Katie

Katie Folio 26 - Kai Nana Pl, Kula - Calikate@gmail.com  
October 20, 2020

### **Maui County Healthy Families and Communities Committee**

Testimony submitted via email to: hfc.committee@mauicounty.us

**Position:** Maui County should think outside the box to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, prioritize the health of our residents and education for our children, and help meet basic needs to support families and children suffering from negative social and economic impacts of Coronavirus

Dear Committee Chair Riki Hokama, Vice Chair Yuki Lei Sugimura, and Committee Members:

My name is Katie Folio and I am a registered voter who lives in Kula, Hawaii 96790. I am writing to you as a private citizen informed by my work in public health with a statewide nonprofit organization, and as a parent of two young children. In my own community and my work, I have seen first-hand the devastating effects of this pandemic in Maui County and on the health of our people.

Our own family has had to struggle with decisions about child care and school in order to continue to work, and we are not alone. Many families do not have the option to work from home or learn from home. Many families are struggling to figure out how to pay their next rent check or mortgage payment. Many don't know where their next meal will come from. These stressors and uncertainties often lead to mental health challenges, increased substance abuse, and overall decline in health and wellness. We need to prioritize ensuring the basic needs of all families are met to alleviate the stress caused by these uncertainties.

Families across our state and county have had valid reservations about our public education systems and the lack of safeguards for our teachers, keiki, and kupua. I have observed a resistance to thinking outside the box when it comes to our economy and our way of doing things. For example, **moving businesses, schools, and other activities outdoors** as much as possible, where science has shown transmission is far less likely, would not only help our economy, our business owners, our parents and students, but also provide a safer space for much needed social interaction and physical fitness.

I know that Hawai'i must spend about \$320 million in federal funds by December 30, 2020. I want Maui County to request and use some of that money to support families. Some of the most pressing needs I see are:

- **Prioritize the opening of schools safely and getting our children back to in-person learning FIRST.** Considerations for opening to tourism should have come after this step, not before.
- **Shift to utilizing outdoor spaces** and our built environment to promote the health and economy of our community. Build infrastructure and/or reimagine current built environment, and support permit or policy changes to allow for students/schools/childcare and businesses (retail, restaurants, gyms, etc.) to engage in activities outside where covid-19 transmission is much lower than in enclosed/indoor spaces.

- **Access to healthy food** – we need to ensure all of our families have food on their tables and that the foods they are eating are helping to keep them strong and healthy
- **Affordable, accessible, SAFE childcare**
- **Stable, affordable housing** without facing a big bill of past rent or past mortgage payments due when the emergency protections and housing assistance funds end
- Cash in families' pockets so they can pay for their families' basic needs
- Nonprofits serving families are facing cuts in their state contracts and are being asked to serve more families in new ways with fewer resources—this is unsustainable—nonprofits need financial help

### **Smoke-free multiunit housing**

As I am informed by my work in public health, I see a need to protect our residents in multiunit housing complexes across the county from secondhand smoke exposure. With more people working and learning from home, secondhand smoke exposure is more severe and more concerning for many of our residents who are trying to stay healthy and protect themselves and their families from COVID-19 and associated complications. Sixty-five percent of air is shared in multiunit housing, and ventilation is not an effective solution. In fact, ventilation systems can distribute secondhand smoke throughout a building, so where smoke-free policies are not in place for individual complexes the nonsmoking majority of residents suffer.

Lung health has never been more important - secondhand smoke exposure is a significant risk factor for many underlying health conditions linked to more severe COVID-19 disease, including heart disease, diminished lung function, and associated risk of respiratory illnesses. It is also known to weaken the immune system and make lungs more susceptible to viral infections like COVID-19. Experts say secondhand smoke from cigarettes as well as e-cigarettes can transmit the novel coronavirus farther than usual. The virus can attach to particles and can travel three, four, or five times farther than they would by simply being in the air. Teens and young adults who have used e-cigarettes were five times more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 than non-users, and those who used both e-cigarettes and conventional cigarettes in the previous 30 days were almost seven times more likely to be diagnosed with the disease. While the relationship between COVID-19 and secondhand smoke exposure is still being studied, the likelihood of transmission increases with behaviors that increase risk of transferring respiratory droplets, such as smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke.

The process for a complex to adopt smoke-free policies can be very difficult, and sometimes impossible, so I urge you to please consider an ordinance for Maui County that would protect all multiunit housing residents, visitors, and staff from secondhand smoke exposure. Public and affordable housing is already smoke-free for these very reasons, and 63 local governments in the U.S. have enacted similar legislation. A Maui County smoke-free multiunit housing ordinance would be a no cost solution that would help protect all of our multiunit housing residents from secondhand smoke.

Please continue to hold public meetings on this topic and make all documents related to these issues accessible to the public.

Thank you for your service to the County and your attention to my testimony.

Sincerely,

Katie Folio - Kula, Hawai'i