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To: Yukilei Sugimura; Riki Hokama; Maui_County Council_mailbox; HFC Committee
Subject: testimony for 10-22-2020 healthy families/communities committee
Attachments: testimony for 10-22-2020_cmtee_mtg_Worthington.docx; G_Livaudais_testimony.docx; IOH_Navigator_Testimony.docx; G_Livaudais_testimony.pdf; testimony for 10-22-2020_cmtee_mtg_Worthington.pdf; IOH_Navigator_Testimony.pdf

Aloha Council Member Hokama and Council Member Sugimura,

Please find attached, in MS Word and PDF, my testimony for today's committee meeting along with testimony from two colleagues who asked me to submit this for them.

Please let me know if you need additional information.

Best regards,
Karen

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October 22, 2020

Maui County Council Healthy Families and Communities Committee

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

Position: Maui County should provide financial and other resources 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 Karen Worthington, and I am a registered voter who lives in Kula, Hawaii 96790. I am writing to you as a private citizen. My work as a children's policy attorney, a Core Partner of Ho'oikaika Partnership, and the coordinator for Islands of Hope-Maui (IOH) informs my testimony. In my work with Ho'oikaika Partnership and IOH, two collaboratives focused on preventing child abuse and neglect, I have seen how this pandemic is affecting front-line providers in Maui County and the families they serve. I also have friends who are impacted because they have lost jobs and are falling behind on paying their basic daily living expenses, and family members who struggle with the reality that every day they are potentially exposed to covid-19 because they work in a health care setting or are a first responder.

Islands of Hope-Maui has seen an increase in people looking for rental assistance. Maui County needs a solution that will help families until they are back at work AND back on their feet financially and emotionally. Delaying and deferring rent or mortgage payments doesn't help—if families can't pay now, they won't be able to pay a lump sum of back rent in the future. The state and county have stepped up with rental assistance for many families. However, the process to access rental assistance and other concrete supports is time-consuming and difficult to navigate and the providers administering the programs are overwhelmed with the high response. Unfortunately, families are not able access assistance, or even to get an answer about whether they qualify for help, in a timely manner.

Parents need a safe, accessible, and affordable plan for their children so that the parents can return to work and be productive at work. Monitoring Department of Education distance learning while trying to work from home is not practical or sustainable. We need more options and creative approaches, especially for elementary-age children. For example, could the county open community centers or large unused county and state spaces (like large spaces at UH Maui College or school and county gymnasiums) and provide wi-fi, help with technology, good air flow, tables and chairs safely spaced apart, bathrooms, hand-washing stations, and adults or teens to supervise the children? This would employ some adults and help many families.

For the September 10 Economic Development and Budget Committee meeting, several individuals who work with families in Maui county submitted testimony. I encourage this committee to review that testimony, as it provides important stories about what our families are facing and individuals' suggestions about how Maui County can best strengthen and support families during this time.

Some of the most pressing needs I see are for the following:

- More childcare slots and funding for those slots
- Help with elementary-school-age children who are participating in distance learning through DOE and need constant supervision and help while parents need to be at work or working from home
- 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
- Flexible funding for nonprofits
- Help for families to identify their needs and find resources to address them.

Regarding the last bullet point about helping families navigate social services systems—during this pandemic, the role of AUW211 as the primary comprehensive resource has been highlighted and heightened. AUW has been working around the clock to improve everything about 211 and they have made vast improvements and continue to do so. I encourage the county to support 211 financially *and in action*. Instead of hosting a separate Maui website, <https://mauinuistrong.net/>, which was not updated during the month of September, Maui County should ensure that every program and service on Maui is instead in 211. And, Maui County should fund 211 specialists who are based at Maui United Way and assigned to help Maui County residents.

If this Committee has not already studied the Household Pulse Survey: Measuring Household Experiences during the Coronavirus Pandemic, I encourage you to do so (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html>). The U.S Census Bureau conducted Phase 1 of this survey from April 23–July 21, 2020. Phase 2 began on August 19, 2020 and is still underway. The purpose of the Pulse Survey is to “quickly and efficiently deploy data collected on how people’s lives have been impacted by the pandemic.” Information is collected on demographics, employment, food security, health, housing, and education.

The Household Pulse Survey during the pandemic is an excellent complement to the Hawai’i Financial Health Pulse Survey that was conducted in June–July 2019. The results of that survey, *pre-pandemic*, showed that 69% of adults in Hawai’i were struggling with their financial health **in 2019**. (https://s3.amazonaws.com/cfsi-innovation-files-2018/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/03230029/Hawaii_Financial_Health_Pulse.pdf).

Another snapshot of how families are doing came from a July 2020 survey of parents with children under age 18 that was organized by Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance and Hawai'i Children's Action Network. Here are some Maui-specific responses:

- 48% of Maui County respondents reported they did not have enough devices for their children for distance learning. Number of responses= 123.
- 25% of Maui County respondents reported they had either been furloughed, laid off, or are working reduced hours. N= 144.
- 57% said there were quite or extremely concerned with ability to pay for extra childcare or afterschool programs if there is distance learning. N= 125.

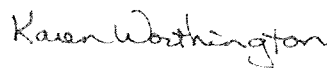
How concerned are you about being able to pay for extra childcare or afterschool programs if there is a form of distance learning this fall?										
	Not at all concerned		Slightly concerned		Somewhat concerned		Quite concerned		Extremely concerned	
Maui County	26	20.63%	12	9.52%	15	11.90%	23	18.25%	49	38.89%

It is also important for us to recognize that Hawai'i's nonprofit community is on the edge of a financial cliff. Once our human services providers fall off that cliff, there will be no one to serve our county's most needy families. Nonprofits 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. Furthermore, expecting Maui County's families to subsist on "charity" from churches, nonprofits, businesses, and good Samaritans is neither appropriate nor sustainable. Hawai'i needs to spend its CARES Act money to support families and support the organizations that support families.

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 for your attention to my testimony. If you would like additional information related to this testimony, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Best regards,



Karen Worthington

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Oct. 21, 2020

Position: Maui County should provide financial and other resources 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,

I'm writing to encourage creative investment of federal COVID-19 relief funds to help reset our economic engine while also building resiliency in our community.

My perspective is informed by my career as a physician and healthcare administrator in population health and health technology.

My hope is that the committee will fund ideas such as these:

1. Free education at UH Maui for anyone and everyone interested in learning new skills or pursuing degrees to
 - expand jobs for those with skill or knowledge to share
 - unleash entrepreneurship and creativity of a new group of people
 - create a sense of pride, hope and optimism
2. "Daily" antigen testing with rapid antigen, lateral flow strips to
 - allow schools and businesses to safely resume daily, in person operations
3. A corps of community health workers (CHWs) who represent and are an active part of Maui's cultural make-up to
 - identify and help solve challenges with social determinants of health and preventive health
 - build community/neighborhood resilience with clear public health messaging tailored to the micro-cultural norms
 - teach and deliver psychological first aid given the rise of behavioral health issues
 - do contact tracing
4. schools to acknowledge and expand their role in community resilience to
 - provide meals, and teach healthy eating and food preparation
 - expand child care resources and hours
 - offer evening events and education (emphasizing local interests, heritage)
5. programs that reward and encourage neighborhood relationships and create shared identity to

- provide recognition and funding of "do-gooders" to organize neighborhood activities and support services
- gather information describing local status and needs
- 6. agriculture and husbandry for local sustainability (and for export where feasible) to
 - make buying local affordable and the best option
- 7. technology infrastructure to support students and remote workers
 - broadband and devices for all (perhaps using means testing)

I appreciate the work you all do on behalf of all of us and thank you for taking the time to consider these suggestions.

Sincerely,
Gerard Livaudais, MD, MPH

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October 22, 2020

Maui County Council Healthy Families and Communities Committee
Testimony submitted via email to: hfc.committee@mauicounty.us

Position: Maui County should provide financial and other resources to support families and children suffering from negative social and economic impacts of Coronavirus

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

I am the Islands of Hope Resource Navigator for Maui County. Islands of Hope is a collaboration with Child Welfare Services, Casey Family Programs, and Ho`oikaika Partnership. Islands of Hope was created after a two-year study on the community's needs conducted by Casey Family Programs and Child Welfare Services. Ho`oikaika Partnership, a coalition of agencies, was brought into this important planning process because of its existing structure and dedication to reducing child abuse and neglect while promoting protective factors.

The end result, the creation of Islands of Hope, was designed to be a one-stop-shop for families to access resources specifically related to reducing the number of children placed in foster care while promoting parental resilience.

The COVID-19 pandemic has evolved my position in many ways; one of the most important (and at times frustrating) is being intentionally community-focused and intimately knowing the needs of the community--what problems/programs exist, how to access services, but also the barriers so many families are experiencing. It is critical I understand the systems on a basic level so I can easily navigate anyone through applications and intake processes. It was clear pre-COVID that housing was a challenge for many, and those hurdles to safe, affordable housing have only been compounded since the pandemic.

In early September, I was contacted by a Family Support Worker who needed assistance with a client who was denied rental assistance because she could not demonstrate sustainability because both she and her husband had lost their employment due to COVID-19 and no longer had any source of income. This prompted me to reach out to one of the agencies who historically provided a rental relief program. I did not receive a response. I then contacted one of the leads for Maui United Way and was informed that additional CARES act money had been allocated to housing/rental assistance. The process, to my knowledge, was designed to be scaled up and easier to access. It would also remove the income requirements and streamline the application process. I wondered why the Family Support Worker's client could not access this support.

I began to wonder if this struggle to find assistance was an isolated case or if others in the community were experiencing similar barriers. I wanted to know who else was experiencing confusion around the application process but, more importantly, to capture the **true** stories of what was happening in our community.

On September 4th, I created a google form and shared it on the Islands of Hope Facebook page. I have since received 13 unique and powerful responses that paint a broader picture of how extensive and devastating this need is in our community. All these stories were collected anonymously, but nothing conveys a person's experience like their own words, so I'd like to share some of the stories I received.

- I'm unable to pay my rent and put food on the table for my kids and get the essentials they need.
- Employer went out of business didn't work long enough to get unemployment not enough on paychecks.
- Prior to Covid. Me and husband separated, me and my babies, and me out of a home. I've been homeless since.
- It has not been easy. I have 2 young adult sons who were also affected by COVID and was not able to file unemployment. My husband is the only one working full time and my UI is how we pay bills/ rent and put food on the table.
- House renting from is now for sale need to move out now! Can't get any help from any rental because I didn't stop working just lost hours due to mall closing early.
- I was working at Maui memorial hospital as a housekeeper due to the COVID my family didn't feel safe around me and so I had to sacrifice my job for my family sake.
- hard and stressful
- Spouse is a small business owner. The business was shut down due to COVID I have remained employed but as a household we have lost my husband's full income and my supplementary income I made doing bookkeeping for the small business. I make enough to cover rent. So we are left with nothing to pay credit cards, phone, internet, or purchase any household items, including diapers and clothes for our three children. We have SNAP and the school age children are getting grab and go meals but what was once more than enough monthly is now not enough.
- We are left in a position with few options, leave the island and try to make it work short term with family on the mainland, leaving our jobs and friends and pulling the kids out of school. Or stay and continue to flounder and stop paying rent and hope for the best. These are not good options.
- Recently got laid off and just started receiving unemployment
- I lost my job for covid and I had ovarian cancer stage 3, only my husband working right now, and my mortgage is \$2,500 a month.
- Lower hours of work
- I was worried at first but MEO and FLC came through.
- We are struggling w/ 1 person income for a family of 4. Our EBT ended right before Covid & it's taking long for an answer work only 20-less than 30 hours a week & the family place we are staying at the land is being sold. Applied for HUD got approved & at the time no one was renting out to HUD so reapplied this year & didn't get on the list.

I strongly believe these individual stories are reflective of the larger need for a majority of Maui residents. In 2019, I was an intern in the Emergency Housing Assistance Program at a local agency. Some days we had over 50 calls from people desperately seeking help so they could remain housed. Many of these individuals were proactive by seeking to preserve housing before they fell behind on payments and therefore prevent a crisis. They found they were not even eligible to apply as the expectation was you already had to have an eviction notice of some kind from the landlord before you were eligible. There seems to be little logic in the process of putting stable housing, especially for families with young children, in jeopardy. How does someone anticipate an emergency?

I have also noticed, in my various interactions with mothers, increased levels of stress and anxiety related to the need to homeschool, maintain or obtain access to reliable wifi service, uncertainty about keeping food in the house, being able to pay utilities, fears about catching the virus at work and bringing it home, and the most frightening, compounding mental health issues that go undisclosed for fear of child welfare involvement. Some of these women have support from various home visiting programs, but the expectation that a paraprofessional who is likely experiencing similar challenges is now tasked with being a therapist, child development expert, resource navigator, housing expert, lawyer, administrative specialist, nurse, teacher, social worker, and on top of that deliver their curriculum to model fidelity is absurd and frankly dangerous.

I leave you with one of the most powerful stories to further demonstrate our system is failing. This individual was referred to me from an inpatient recovery program for mothers. The beauty of this particular program is mothers live at the facility with their children. I was permitted to share this story, though I have changed the family's names for confidentiality.

Saturday, October 10th, I responded to a message from Jolene. She was a recent graduate from the inpatient program and was referred for navigation services from her caseworker. Her family was desperate for answers and help as every avenue they were guided down ended with no concrete answers and dwindling hope. Jolene was incarcerated mid-February, leaving her partner, Jim, to care for their 3 children and work full time. As any single parent would, Jim did what he could for his children but had minimal support from family, then COVID.

He was not able to return to work because there were no options for childcare. He contacted his place of employment to let them know he was struggling and had little support but reassured them that he would return to work once he sorted everything out. He did not hear back right away but assumed this was due to the shutdown. As the state opened up, he called again to remind his employer he was dedicated to the company, and when needed, he was ready to return. Business closed. When Jolene was released, she re-entered into a community she barely recognized, but she stepped up as a resilient woman. She completed her inpatient recovery program and continues to meet with her treatment specialists regularly.

To get the family's life back on track, we walked through some of her challenges and options. Here is just one example of some of the challenges and barriers this family faced in their efforts to overcome adversity and work toward stability and sustainability.

- Jim was denied unemployment and was not given a clear understanding as to why. He was not able to reach anyone in the Unemployment office.
- Jim then applied for PUA but did not qualify because he checked the box "no" when asked if he had to turn down work. He had to turn down work because he had no child care options.
- No programs open for school-age children.
- No openings at Head Start for their 4-year-old.
- The family was not eligible for rental assistance because job loss was deemed "not COVID related."
- Distance learning with their older children.
- Both Jolene and Jim are admittedly not savvy with computers and do not feel confident in their ability to support their children's education.

- When Jolene was released, they tried to apply for PUA again since Jim was now eligible to accept work. They could not access their online portal, subsequently being locked out of the account and unable to contact anyone at the unemployment after numerous calls and even dropping off a letter at the office.
- Waited over three weeks before hearing back from WIC and another two for an appointment to start benefits. (Mother is prenatal).
- Applied for benefits through Catholic Charities Rental Assistance Program, have not heard anything in response.

So they wait while I try to find answers.

1. What is the plan for at-risk families as we inch closer to the eviction moratorium's expiration, and is this something that will be extended to protect our most vulnerable?
2. If there is no extension, are there plans in place to preserve existing housing for up to 30 days, so families have time to secure new housing?
3. Are there any plans for additional funds to be allocated to programs that can assist with deposits if the expectation is families must move when they are living on little to no income?

Housing, specifically affordable, safe, supportive housing, is a basic need for all people. We run the risk of disastrous public health consequences for our community if we ignore reality as providers and leaders. We sit in a position where some may assume that everything will snap back to normal because tourism is back open. It was not normal before the pandemic.

Tourists visit Maui for Aloha not to relish in the plight of the local community.

Mahalo, for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Jessica Pazos