

**BUDGET, FINANCE, AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**
Council of the County of Maui

MINUTES

April 1, 2025

Mayor Hannibal Tavares Community Center, Social Hall

CONVENE: 6:03 p.m.

PRESENT: Councilmember Yuki Lei K. Sugimura, Chair
Councilmember Tasha Kama, Vice-Chair
Councilmember Tom Cook, Member
Councilmember Gabe Johnson, Member
Councilmember Alice L. Lee, Member
Councilmember Tamara Paltin, Member
Councilmember Keani N.W. Rawlins-Fernandez, Member (In 6:05 p.m.)
Councilmember Shane M. Sinenci, Member

EXCUSED: Councilmember Nohelani U'u-Hodgins, Member

STAFF: Kasie Apo Takayama, Senior Legislative Analyst
Jennifer Yamashita, Committee Secretary
Lori Ann Tengan, Committee Secretary
Carla Nakata, Legislative Attorney
Eric Abe, Senior Council Services Technician
Benjamin Silva, Communications Specialist

OTHERS: Kari Stockwell, County Real Property Tax Administrator, Department of
Finance

Testifiers

Petar Kovacic
Maitrey Alein
Anthony Ferandelli
Julian Rosberg
Ikaika Wright
Kai Jackson
Justin Dumlao
Daryl Sato
Jasmin Araila
Kenneth Kosaka
Lucas Collins
Nolan Davidson
Cora Davidson
Naiya Sanorjo

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Nevin Wehner
Emilie deJesus
Shari deJesus
Greenlee Evonuk
Allison Wright
Gay Sibonga
Melissa Ramos
Elizabeth Ray
Alan Lloyd
Theresa Thompson
Donna Clayton
Tara Nakahashi
Ethan Romanchak
Jordan Hocker
Georgia Pinsky
Gerry Ross
Brandon Balthazar
Kyle Ellison
Rachel Hau'oli Michiko Ohta
Candace Shaw
Britney Alejo-Fishell

Others (55)

PRESS: *Akakū: Maui Community Television, Inc.*

CHAIR SUGIMURA: . . .*(gavel)*. . . Welcome to the Budget, Finance, Economic Development Committee. It is now 6:03 p.m., and we are so happy to be here. Kula and Upcountry is our first residency district meeting, and we're glad to see all the people who have made time to tell us what you think about our budget. My name is Yuki Lei Sugimura. I'm the Upcountry representative. I'm the Chair of this Committee, and we're so glad to be here. And on...this is Member Kama. I'm going to introduce our fellow Councilmembers. Usually, the district rep introduces everybody. So, Member Kama is the Vice-Chair of this Committee, and she also is from Kahului.

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: Yes. Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: You want to say anything?

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: No.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: No? Okay. And next we have Gabe Johnson; he's our Lāna'i representative, and we're glad that he made the time to be with us. Thank you.

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And on the far end is Member Cook. He's from...he's from South Maui or Kihei. And here we have Chair Lee, the one and only.

COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Hi.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: We have fun with her every day at --

COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Still living.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: She's hilarious. And Member Paltin from South --

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Live and direct.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Live and direct, she's from West Maui. And we have Member Sinenci, who is here from Hāna. So...so, thank you very much. At the far end, we have our OCS Staff and Kasie and Carla Nakata. They work really hard to put these meetings together, so we appreciate them being here. By the end of this meeting, they're going to have notes of everything you say, so, Members, you don't have to take notes from tonight. They'll get it done, and then tomorrow morning at our 9:00 meeting, I'll talk about what you say, so the Members will consider and as well as the public who listens to our meetings that we have online. At the...at the reception area there we have Jennifer Yamashita, Lori Ann Tengan, and I already introduced to you Kasie Apo and Carla Nakata. From the Department of Finance, we have something special here today where we asked somebody from the Department of Finance, which they collect your Real Property Tax.

**ITEM 1: PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET FOR THE
 COUNTY OF MAUI** (BILL 41 (2025), BILL 42 (2025), BILL 43
(2025), BILL 44 (2025), BILL 45 (2025), BILL 46 (2025), and
RESOLUTION 25-83)

CHAIR SUGIMURA: We have been getting a lot of questions about the real property tax assessments, so we just wanted to give them an opportunity maybe to explain what the real property tax assessments...how it...whatever they want to say, and then the Real Property Tax Division can give you...they want all of you that have questions to call them or send them an email. So, at this time...where did she go?

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: Right there.

COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Right there. Kari.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Oh, Kari. Oh, I thought you were sitting at the end of the...okay.

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MS. STOCKWELL: All right. Hello. My name is Kari Stockwell. I'm with the Real Property Assessment Division Administrator [sic]. And I know...hello? Okay. I know that assessments just went out, so it's a very hot topic at the time. If you do have any questions or concerns, I am here and I'll be sitting right there. I have some brochures and can answer any questions for you. Just a quick overview. Assessments are at 100 percent market value. The sales we use are from July 1st, 2023, to June 30th, 2024, to get your 2025 assessments. So, when you do see your assessment on March 15th, we are about nine months behind the market so, you know, we are either playing catch-up or we are behind the market when you do see that notice in the mail. Again if you have any questions, please feel free to email us at rpa@co.maui.hi.us or give us a call at (808) 270-7297. We have a whole team of Staff waiting to assist you and to answer any questions you have available. I'm also here to answer any questions about exemptions. We do have, you know, the homeowner's exemption and the long-term rental exemption. We want to make sure everyone who does qualify for it does have it, so please come and ask any questions. I'll be sitting there the whole meeting, and I'm happy to answer questions all night. Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much, Kari. So, I really appreciate them...Administration coming out because we were again receiving questions and they are the experts. So, joining us also is Keani Rawlins-Fernandez from Moloka'i. Thank you very much for being here and welcome. All right.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: Aloha, everyone.

. . .BEGIN PUBLIC TESTIMONY. . .

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. Aloha. All right. So, what we're going to do is we are...we want to be respectful to children and kūpuna, and so if the Staff would call out the groups that are highlighted, and they would be either younger or the kūpuna group, and we'll take them first. I hope you don't mind, so that they can go home and study or, you know, catch a bus if they have to and get ready for...so please call out the next testifier or the testifier.

MS. NAKATA: Chair, the first person signed up to testify is Petar Kovacic, and I apologize if I'm mispronouncing anyone's name. Petar will be followed by Maitrey Alein.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: So, as they're coming up, please identify by name the name of your organization, and you have three minutes. Oh yay, we know who this is. And explain to us what you want to say about our budget. Three minutes.

MR. KOVACIC: Okay. Well, thank you for taking the time to hear our...our speaking.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: . . .(inaudible). . .

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MR. KOVACIC: Really? Okay. Okay. All right. Okay. Hey, so I'm Petar Kovacic, and I've been teaching at the automotive program at King Kekaulike for 17 years. And just a quick plug, Upcountry kids just get better and better. Our community is growing, and it's a beautiful thing seeing that school mature. And so, we have some students here from our automotive program, and they're going to be speaking a little bit about what's going on up there, and we're just asking for a small sliver of the pie. The Maui Economic Development Board has sponsored us in years past, and we're just asking that that continues. They've given us money for these things that you see here that work on the cars that we fix of our teachers and community members for free. And so, we want to kind of perpetuate that righteousness and continue with that program. So, I'm going to just really just pass it over to the students, and they'll just speak for a moment or two. And it's really just in favor of the Maui Economic Development Board, their grants and their automotive workforce development program. They just give us just a little bit of money each year to help us with our supplies and grow our program.

MS. NAKATA: Chair, the next testifiers is Maitrey Alein, and he'll be followed by Anthony Ferandelli.

MR. ALEIN: Hi. I'm Maitrey. I'm a junior in the auto shop program, and our program has helped to...helped out the community, get their cars fixed. And you know, we go through a lot of tools quickly and stuff breaks, so we always are needing more new tools. Thank you.

MS. NAKATA: Anthony Ferandelli, followed by Julian Rosberg.

MR. FERANDELLI: Hi. I am Anthony, and I go to King Kekaulike High School. I'm not in auto yet, but I will be next year, and I'm really looking forward to, you know, building and working on cars. So, we need...we do need the supplies. Thank you.

MR. ROSBERG: Hello. Hi. My name is Julian, and I go to the King Kekaulike auto shop. And what do we do at our program is we help the community fix their cars and get work done, and we're constantly always using tools, using supplies, and we always need more money for it, so please invest.

MS. NAKATA: Mr. Rosberg will be followed by Ikaika Wright, who will be followed by Kai Jackson.

MR. WRIGHT: Hi. I'm Ikaika Wright. I have been in the auto shop program for about four years, and during that time I've participated in a lot of community projects, including the Lahaina fire repair vehicles. Now of course during my time over the four years, I...in the beginning I didn't really know anything about automotive, but because of the tools and opportunities provided in order to repair these vehicles, I was able to get to where I'm at today, not only with helping my family with their vehicles but also the community as well. In fact just recently for my

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senior project, which is basically a project that all seniors have to do at King Kekaulike in order to pass, I decided to build my very own derby car from our...for my project. That wouldn't have been possible if I haven't joined my freshman year and not had the tools provided to me in order to do so. So, I wanted to at least ask for a small portion from the Maui Economic Development Board in order for us to continue that tradition of students pursuing goals that they would have never imagined unless if they have joined in the first place. As well as help these people over here, these future students, in order for them to do their own projects and even help the community even further, all for the low price of free. So, thank you.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Kai Jackson, to be followed by Justin Dumlao.

MR. JACKSON: Hi. My name is Kai Jackson, and I go to King Kekaulike, and I'm in the auto program. I love this program, and it has provided me a lot of different opportunities. I've got to work in real-life shops and on real-life projects. This program has provided me a lot of opportunities, and without all the tools it wouldn't be possible. I love this program because it has...it has just totally changed me as a human being because all the...all the different projects that I've been able to do and the community that I've been able to help. Thank you.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Justin Dumlao, to be followed by Daryl Sato.

MR. DURLAO: Aloha, honorable Maui County Councilmembers. My name is Justin Dumlao. I was born and raised on...on the island of Maui and now working as an electrical engineer at Morikawa and Associates, but the truth is I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for MEDB and the STEMworks Program. What's my relationship with MEDB? My mom has worked at MEDB for 16 years, and she's right here in the room. As a single mom she poured her energy into helping other kids in our community because she wanted to make a difference, she wanted opportunities for kids to succeed. But it's not just because my mom works here; it's because MEDB's purpose is to bring quality opportunities to local kids. They're committed to making sure that students like me have access to real career exposure and resource...and resources. MEDB gave my...gave me my first coding class, and actually it gave me my first real internship. It was the first time I felt like I could really do something special. They introduced me to real professionals, people who believed in me and made me feel like I could belong in a STEM field. They work closely with STEM teachers, and with my high school Baldwin. I remember going to the Hawai'i STEM conference, and honestly I can say that it was way better than my junior prom. The energy, the excitement, the feeling that I mattered, it changed me. These experiences showed me that you don't have to be the smartest person in the room to belong in STEM; you just have to care enough and to be curious to ask questions. MEDB and their network believed in me, and that made all the difference. I went on to graduate from Oregon Institute of Technology, and I am now the first engineer in my...in my family. I work here locally serving our island Maui along with other islands on

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O'ahu, Kaua'i, and the career exposure at such a young age is so essential. MEDB didn't just help me find a career, they made me feel like I was worth something, and trust me, I see the impact firsthand. I help volunteer at their STEMwork...at their STEM family nights here often. Watching kids light up when they discover something new or realize they belong in STEM, that's what all is...that's what all it matters. I'm here today...I'm here today to say thank you and to ask to keep supporting MEDB and their programs. We need to bring kama'aina kids like me home because MEDB didn't just change my career path, they changed my life. Mahalo for listening.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Daryl Sato, to be followed by Kenneth Kosaka.

MR. SATO: Hi. My name is Daryl Sato. I've been a teacher for 30 years, and although this is my...only my second year at Pukalani Elementary, I am able to see the difference that the afterschool STEMworks Program makes. Some of the skills that students acquire through STEMworks are perseverance, problem-solving, teamwork, inclusion, and collaboration, among others, all of which will make them more employable in the future...future global economy. Specifically with our program, MEDB has provided our robotics with resources to update our hardware and equipment. Our school program is able to provide classes for those interested in robotics at an early age. Fourth and fifth grade students may try out for our competitive team, which students spend many hours a week to prepare for competitions. MED...MEDB has opened doors for our program. Because of the time the kids put in and the resource that we have, our students have participated and qualified for competitions on the island, O'ahu, in the mainland and even as far as Japan. Due to rigorous...rigorous program we have been able to maintain, many of our students continue to be successful in robotics and STEM through middle and high school. Thanks to MEDB, one of our former students, high schooler Nevin Wehner, has been able to return as the student intern to mentor elementary students. He is a product of the Pukalani Robotics Program team and continues to show a passion and interest in robotics. Thank you for your time.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. Thank you, Daryl. Hang on. Anybody have any questions for the testifier? Okay. Thank you very much. I will tell you...you can sit down, but --

MR. SATO: Okay.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: -- his mother is my classmate, and he's born same day as me. I've seen him grow up. This is Maui. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: Chair, the next testifier is Lucas Collins, and he'll be followed by Nolan Davidson. Oh apologies, Chair. Kenneth Kosaka, to be followed by Lucas Collins.

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MR. KOSAKA: Hello. My name is...my name is Kenneth. I am a second grader in Pukalani Elementary. I am in STEM. I love STEM because it's exciting and interesting, and it helps me to learn. When I came to Pukalani, I didn't know what to do, but the teachers helped me and look at me now. Without Pukalani and staff, I probably wouldn't be here, so I thank them. So, please support STEM.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Very good. Any questions? Seeing none. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Lucas Collins, to be followed by Nolan Davidson.

MR. COLLINS: Aloha. My name is Lucas Collins, and I am testifying in support of Maui Economic Development Board STEMworks Afterschool Program at Pukalani Elementary School. I have been in Pukalani since kindergarten, and I've been in the STEMworks Afterschool Program for the same amount of time. I have been at Pukalani for six years, which means I'm in fifth grade. In STEMworks I've had fantastic times and memories and have been anticipating my next STEM class. I enjoy STEM so much because it includes most, if not all, of my favorite subjects, which include science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, with history, of course. Hence the acronym STEM. In kindergarten, I worked with Dot, a little blue robot and the coding app for it. This experience at an early age let me...let me learn about coding. In the app, you can choose different missions to learn about different codes. In first grade, I worked with Dash, similar to Dot but has wheels. Dash also has a special coding app, and the code is harder. It introduces move buttons, which allows the robot to move forward and backward. I also enjoy the STEM Summer School Programs. I took the art and entrepreneurship class and learned how to make cool stickers, print bags, and learn about what the true meaning of entrepreneurship is. In my current STEM, e-games, I can play against or with my friends on different and fun gaming platforms. Mahalo and thank you so much for your time. I hope you enjoyed my presentation.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Good job. Any questions? So, we know his...we know his father, too, Rick Collins. Wow, you've grown up.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Nolan Davidson, to be followed by Cora Davidson.

MR. DAVIDSON: Aloha. Aloha. My name is Nolan Davidson, and I'm testifying in support of Maui Economic Development Board's STEMwork...STEMworks Afterschool Program at Pukalani Elementary School. I'm in fifth grade at Pukalani Elementary, and I've been in Pukalani's STEM program since I was in kindergarten. This basically means I've been in the program for six years, and I've loved every second of it. In these programs I can create and use things related to science, technology, engineering, and math. In our e-games program, I play competitive yet fun games against and with my classmates. In our entrepreneurship program, I can make awesome stickers, t-shirts, and bags using the Cricut printing machine. One of my favorite things about STEM is

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getting to build, explore, and figure out how things work. This is usually shown when in e-games we played Minecraft Education for the first time. It was amazing. We got to build, create, and explore the many possible things to do in Minecraft. Right now, I'm working on building a website to help advertise my homemade dog food business called Wild Aloha (*phonetic*), which was almost entirely inspired by STEM. I've been working on branding and all sorts of different kinds of marketing and other necessities that come from selling items I've created using skills from STEM. These are some of the many different things we do in STEM that I love to participate in. I hope that future Pukalani Elementary School students get to experience the benefits of STEM just like I did. Thank you so much for your time.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Well done. Anybody have questions, Members? Seeing none. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Cora Davidson; she'll be followed by Naiya Sanorjo. Sorry if I mispronounced your last name.

MS. DAVIDSON: Aloha. My name is Cora Davidson, and I am testifying in support of Maui Economic Development Board STEMworks Afterschool Program at Pukalani Elementary School. I'm a second grader at Pukalani Elementary School, and I have been doing STEM since kindergarten. Even though I didn't get in this year, I'm still learning new things on my computer. The reason I want to get into STEM this year is because when I was in STEM in first and kindergarten, I was really good at learning how to use and control the robots. Like the time we were in the library controlling the...the blue robots and learning how to make them say different sounds. Or the time we read a book about a lighthouse keeper and the teacher brought in these cubes that all had a special and unique job to do. One of the cubes spun around and another was a light. And one of my favorites was when we went on our computers and made backgrounds. We also made things like cars and ferries move around. That is how I represent STEMworks at Pukalani Elementary School. I wish there was more money for STEM so we...so we could all get in each year. Mahalo for your time.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Well done. Anybody have questions? Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Naiya Sanorjo, to be followed by Nevin Wehner. Thank you.

MR. SANORJO: Aloha. My name is Naiya Sanorjo. I joined the STEM program in 2021, and I joined e-games in 2024. I enjoy e-games because I get to practice my video/technology skills. E-games motivates me to finish my schoolwork so I can go to practices. In my past tournament, I didn't win first, but I placed fourth. It was so fun to play other schools. This April, we have a tournament. I hope you'll get to see it. This would be...I would be so happy if you'll support e-games because I hope future students will get to experience the same fun and joy I did.

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Mahalo, City Councilmembers.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. One moment. Did you say e-games you're playing?
Oh, that's really nice. And what school did you say it's at?

MR. SANORJO: Pukalani Elementary.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Wow, very good. Anybody have any questions? All right.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Nevin Wehner, to be followed by Emilie and Shari DeJesus.

MR. WEHNER: Aloha, everyone. My name is Nevin Wehner, and I am testifying in support of the Maui Economic Development Board's Economic Development Programs. For almost a decade, I've been part of the STEMworks Program and I've had to...I've had the great fortune to be a part of it. I started around first grade being...or doing coding and then robotics and graphic design, and eventually in fourth grade I tried out for the Pukalani Elementary School's Robotics Team VEX IQ...VEX IQ Program. And I...it was a really, really great opportunity for me. I learned how to build, program, and design robots with my teammates, and also learned how to talk about them, how to deal with stress and pressure and competitions, and learned how to just talk to people like I am right now. One of the great opportunities of this program for me was speaking like I am now. This is my third time speaking in front of the Maui Economic...or Maui County Council. So, lots of great opportunities. And also travel as well. I've got to travel all over the state. I've gone to Texas for the world championship, and most recently, have gone to Japan as well. So, I went...I was in robotics from fourth grade and fifth grade at Pukalani Elementary school, then moved to Kalama Intermediate. I did robotics at my time there. And throughout those years of competing, we were able...me and my team were very fortunate to win lots of awards. We won four state championships, lots of other awards at the state level, and also a couple of awards at the world championship and in Japan as well. So, now that I'm in high school, I'm currently a freshman, I've gotten the great fortune, I've had the offer to now be a coach at the Pukalani Elementary School's robotics team. So, it's really come full circle for me, and now I get to see the students just as I used to be from the eyes of the coach. And I've gotten learn a lot from them and I've also just gotten learn about, you know, how to deal with fourth and fifth graders. But it's been a really great opportunity for me. I've had a lot of fun doing it. You got to...got to know a lot of those kids as well. I've got to learn how to teach, manage lots of groups of people, and just learn more about robotics, and fueled my passion for that as well. So, lots of great opportunities for me, and I hope I was able to give off some great opportunities for the students I teach as well. So, thank you guys all for your support and your continued support of MEDB, and I hope that that can continue. Thank you all for being here. Mahalo.

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CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much. Any questions for the testifier? Seeing none. Keep on going. Very good. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifiers are Emilie and Shari DeJesus, to be followed by Greenlee Evonuk.

MS. E. DEJESUS: Aloha, Councilmembers. Thank you for your time and allowing us to share our testimony today. My name is Emilie DeJesus, and I'm a seventh grader at Samuel Enoka Kalama Intermediate School. As a student engaged in the STEM Program, I have found opportunities and a passion for engineering and design. I've also learned cultural importance through my recent trip to Iolani Palace and the Hawaiian Mausoleum, in which I would not have been able to go if it weren't for STEM. Please continue to support them. Thank you.

MS. S. DEJESUS: Aloha. My name is Shari DeJesus, and I'm a parent of two. My son is a King Kekalike high schooler, and my daughter, as she said, is a seventh-grade student at Kalama Intermediate. Both have been fortunate to be able to participate in MEDB STEMworks Programs offered Upcountry. From the dedicated teachers that this program brings in, to the cutting-edge technologies and fun afterschool sessions, and now they added cultural curriculum, I'm immensely grateful for the experiences this program continues to bring to our communities. My daughter Emilie joined the afterschool hula program this year, and I've been so impressed with how much she has learned in such a short period of time. I was fortunate enough to meet up with their halau at the recent STEM conference and cultural day trip on...to O'ahu last week, and after an amazing STEM conference, they were able, as she said, to visit Iolani Palace and the Royal Mausoleum. For me to watch them dance--I don't know why I'm getting nervous, sorry--and pay respects to the ancient kings and queens and ali'i, the whole day just left an indelible memory, and I hope for her as well. So, mahalo Auntie Lalaine and all of you for supporting this program. And it's activities like these that really help the keiki connect with each other and the place that they grew up. My children are at an age where they're really developing their interests and passions, and the STEMworks Program is so valuable in helping them with that process. I'm really excited about the upcoming healthcare career exploration day, and you know, she speaks of engineering and design as possible future paths. These may have stemmed from her early experiences at Pukalani Elementary, the STEM Program at that time, so just mahalo again for supporting them. Please continue your support. Mahalo.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. Any questions for the mom and daughter? None. Thank you. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Greenlee Evonuk, to be followed by Allison Wright.

MS. EVONUK: Aloha. My name is Greenlee Evonuk, and I am testifying in support of the Maui Economic Development Board's programs. I'm currently a high

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schooler; I'm a sophomore at King Kekaulike High School. I'm currently in the STEMworks ag business and technology internships. I joined...I first heard about it from a teacher about the same time last year, and I've been doing them ever since. It's been an amazing opportunity for me. I've been able to explore STEM and different career paths that were available in it. Over the summer, for the summer internship program, I interned at Native Nursery, and during my internship, I learned a lot about the trade of native plants and learned more about the island because I'm actually originally from Boston. And stepping from the mainland to Maui, I didn't really know a lot, but the internship has really opened like a pathway to learn more about the island and the different, unique aspects of it. And then through that internship I actually got a permanent job for that summer at Native Nursery just because it was like a gateway, and I think for a lot of the STEMworks Programs it is...serves like a gateway for different communities, and I think that's why it's such an important opportunity that needs to remain available to students. Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much. Any questions? Next testifier, please.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Allison Wright and she'll be followed by Gay Sibonga.

MS. WRIGHT: Good evening. How are you doing tonight? Two years ago, I came in this room and put a bag of compost on the ground and told you, please help us with composting on Maui. It's a slow process, but it's in the works. Unfortunately the fire took out one of our compost places we were working on building, but they're back, just to let you know. One of those things that . . .(inaudible). . . was very important about that was that bag that I put on the ground, that same brand of compost was the bag that was found at the box store with a coconut rhinoceros beetle in it. So, we appreciate your help with that, and so don't let anybody tell you that MISC is not important. I have colleagues on other islands that tell me that--sorry--that tell me that it's a lost cause here. MISC is working very hard in keeping those pests away from us. So, aside from that, I'm actually also here to talk about landscape commodities and the nursery commodities. So, we have...back in the back you'll be hearing from the floriculture community too, as well as the landscape community. I got somebody from the nursery, and I didn't know that, right before me. It's very important to support us as agriculture. We are agriculture. We might look a lot smaller than a...than a cattle farm. One of the important things we need to look at with that is knowing that we can make a living off of less than 12 acres with those micro grants. If you look in your budget, the micro grants are all for 12 acres and larger. We can actually create farms off of smaller than 12 acres. We're here to support the Maui County Farm Bureau in that...that endeavor, and if you have any questions regarding that, let us know. So, we're here with the Maui County...I'm sorry the Maui Association of Landscape Professionals and also the newest commodity group with the Farm Bureau, which is the Maui Growers and Floriculture Collective. And so, we'll be talking about that more later. Do you have any questions for us so far?

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CHAIR SUGIMURA: I remember your bag --

MS. WRIGHT: Yeah.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: -- of compost. Members, do you have any questions?

MS. WRIGHT: Yeah.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Member Rawlins-Fernandez?

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: Mahalo, Chair. I remember your bag of compost as well.

MS. WRIGHT: My bag of compost came in.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: Very memorable. I...so the micro grants, they are 12 acres and less to qualify. Not...not...12 acres and more.

MS. WRIGHT: So, this year they're actually 12 acres and more. Okay. Okay. They used to be 12 acres and more.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: No, micro grants have...has always been 12 acres or less.

MS. WRIGHT: Okay. Because we were always --

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: Small.

MS. WRIGHT: -- put under the impression that it was actually...we had...we were given information on 12 acres and larger, so that's good to know.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: You can contact MEO for more information.

MS. WRIGHT: We will do that.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: Mahalo.

MS. WRIGHT: Okay.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. Very good.

MS. WRIGHT: Any other questions?

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Any other questions?

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MS. WRIGHT: No?

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. Seeing none. Okay. Thank you.

MS. NAKATA: Chair, the next testifier is Gay Sibonga, and she'll be followed by Melissa Ramos.

MS. SIBONGA: Good evening, Councilmembers. And thank you, Councilmember Rawlins, for coming and working on our Ag grants today. First of all, I just want to thank the Council for all the support that you've given MEO in the past years. Last year, MEO supported and assisted over 30,500 individuals and families, touching more than 55,000 miles...not miles, 55,000 lives. So, this year, we're celebrating our 60th anniversary of helping people and changing lives, and it's through our five departments, our youth service, our transportation, community service, early childhood services, as well as our Business Development Center. So, I just want to continue...ask for your continued support in these uncertain times with our Federal funding, but the support from the County Council is very important to us. Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. Any questions for MEO? Seeing none. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Melissa Ramos, and she'll be followed by Jasmine Araila.

MS. RAMOS: Good evening, Maui County Council. My name is Melissa Ramos. I'm the Vice Principal at Pukalani Elementary School, and I'm here today to seek your continued and increased support of our afterschool STEMworks Program led by the Maui Economic Development Board. Our Pukalani School STEMworks Program is more than just an afterschool activity. It's an investment in the future of our community. In a world driven by science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, our students must have access to hands-on, engaging STEM education. The program provides that access, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a passion for innovation that will serve our students well regardless of their future career paths. My son Makana has actively been a participant of the STEMworks Program since he was six years old. He is striving to be a pilot, and I've seen firsthand the positive impacts that STEMworks Program has provided. I've witnessed his confidence grow as he's worked with his team to design and build their competition robot. His team has worked together to solve complex problems and strategize with students who are older than them. All of these experiences will empower them to become the innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, I urge the County Council to recognize the vital role STEMworks plays in our community and to commit to its continued support. Thank you for your time and consideration.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much. Any questions, Members? All right. Thank you for your leadership, the Vice Principal. Next testifier.

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MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Jasmine Araila, to be followed by Elizabeth Ray.

MS. ARAILA: Thank you. Hello. I'm Jasmine. I'm from MEO Head Start. I am speaking on behalf of one of our parents. So, her baby just got a shot and she's...the injection, so she wasn't able to go in because he was getting a little fussy. So, she sent me her statements. Thank you to Mayor Bissen and County Council for supporting funding for MEO Head Start to extend program hours. Makawao Head Start has had a major impact on myself and my family in the best way. Without Head Start, I don't believe Tyson (*phonetic*) would have gotten the education he needed prior to kindergarten. With the preschool tuition being so expensive, my family would not be able to afford it. When Tyson first began attending to Makawao Head Start, we both instantly connected with the staff and the teachers. Since attending and working alongside with the staff teachers, we've all been able to work together, determine specific needs for Tyson through resources provided from MEO Head Start, and in turn are able to get a help he needs in growing, learning, and preparing for kindergarten. Tyson was found eligible to receive special needs services through Head Start Program to help improve his speech...his speech through speech therapy as well as behavior, which is occupational therapy. And since receiving those services, I have been seeing great...great improvement. Without these wonderful resources, I'm not confident that I would have been able to get him with the help he needed to be successful at school. I am so grateful for loving and caring, attentive, dedicated staff of MEO Head Start all around. I hope to see many other families in the future be able to utilize Head Start Program and the Head Start Program help families like mine. This program means so much to Tyson and I because I know without it, Tyson would not be ready to move on to kindergarten education-wise or emotionally. And for myself, just having a baby six months ago, I really needed help in moving Tyson in the right direction. So, thank you dearly to the County of Maui and...and Mayor. It genuinely means so much to me and my family. We would like to ask for continued funding to support our Makawao Head Start Center and for investing County funds in our most precious resources, our keiki.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much.

MS. ARAILA: Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Any questions? Seeing none. Thank you. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Elizabeth Ray, to be followed by Alan Lloyd.

MS. RAY: Aloha. My name is Elizabeth Ray. As the Council faces Federal budget cuts, I'm asking the Council to please not cut the budget but to increase property taxes on property assessed at one million and above. We have a safety net on this island for those that have moderate income and below. By reducing the current budget for any reason, you are reducing financial assistance and services to our

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local population. We have seen the homeless crisis on Maui even worse since the deadliest fire in the nation hit our island. Services to our kama'āina, locals, workers, keikis, kūpunas, the mentally ill, physically disabled, and homeless population are crucial right now. Just the other day, social media posts, a woman from Lahaina sleeping in her car with her four-year-old girl. She's sleeping at the harbor. She's asking for somewhere safer to sleep in her car. There's a lot of these people right now. Cutting any of these services would be devastating. So, here's four priorities to focus on. Number one, rental...we need funding for rental assistance. So many without rental assistance right now would be homeless. Over half of us on this island. Two, rents. We need a rent stabilization bill because rent's too high right now. The rents skyrocketed right after the fires. That's...that's crazy. A three-bedroom went for 6,000 right after the fires; it's back down to 3,500. Still way higher than before. Number three, the property taxes are very low on Maui. We're asking to increase property taxes for property valued at over one million because most property owners with property valued over \$1 million don't even live here full-time and don't pay Hawai'i income tax, which is very unfair to the locals who live and pay taxes here. So, we're trying to get you to require non-owner-occupied properties to pay higher property taxes, which would make sense. Even create a fourth tier for non-owner-occupied properties valued over 10 million. Tax them at a higher rate than tier three. Again, you don't need to reduce the budget and kill our safety net. Those with higher assessed property can afford to pay more. Mahalo. Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much. Any questions? Seeing none. Thank you. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Alan Lloyd, to be followed by Theresa Thompson.

MR. LLOYD: Hello, County Council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Alan Lloyd. I live in Makawao, and I'm a member of the Maui Tenant and Workers Association. Yes, so like Elizabeth was talking about, we are concerned about potential budget cuts, that the County Council may be cutting their budget or reducing things like Makawao Head Start, like the...the aunties talk about back there. We have a safety net on this island, and the economy has changed in the last five to ten years. We know that prices are higher, food is higher, rent is higher. We need to keep that safety net going and not reduce it. So...okay. Some of the issues we're concerned about is...and we'd like to see included in the budget are increasing rental and food assistance funding and deleting the barriers to rental assistance. So, for example, to qualify for rental assistance, you have to have income less than 80 percent of AMI. So, there may be folks here who have income above 80 percent AMI, but because they pay high rents, they can't get rental assistance. Second, we'd like you to pass rent stabilization. Rents are still gouging tenants. I saw recently \$2,300 for a one-bedroom. We need rent stabilization so people can afford to live here. Third, property taxes are low on Maui. We know that because Maui is an investment portal, let's call it, and there are many expensive homes that don't pay income taxes. So, one of the things

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I...as I was preparing this testimony, I realized that those people have homes valued higher than \$2 million may not call this their primary residence, which means that they don't pay income taxes here. They only pay property taxes where the rest of us have to pay income taxes and property taxes. So, the Tenants Association doesn't see that as fair that those people with homes over \$4 million don't have to pay higher property taxes. One comparison is Maui's property tax rate for \$1 million assessed is \$5,870 annually, and so Maui has income and property tax, so does Oregon have income and property tax. But in Oregon, if you have a \$1 million assessed home, you pay \$8,700 annually. So, we can afford to charge people with homes over \$4 million valued more. Yeah. Oh, yeah. So, to do that, we're asking you create a fourth tier for non-owner-occupied properties valued at \$10 million or above and tax them at a higher rate than the tier three rate. Thank you for your time.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much. Just in time. Any questions for Mr. Alan? Thank you. Next testifier. Oh, does somebody have a question? Go ahead.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Lloyd. Did you...do you know if that's something that we're able to do? I think Member Sinenci put that in his --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Proposal.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- proposal and they told him we cannot do fourth tiers. So, is there an alternative that you would put to having a fourth tier?

MR. LLOYD: So, I'm not sure how the tiers were created originally. So, I'd have to learn more about how the tiers were created, whether they...whether you can combine the tiers and combine two and three and then make three for those properties over \$10 million.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Okay. Yeah, I think, I guess we got to do the math if that would yield more or not because it's progressive, but.

MR. LLOYD: Right.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Okay. Thank you.

MR. LLOYD: Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Any more questions? Seeing none. Thank you.

MR. LLOYD: Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Next testifier.

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MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Theresa Thompson, to be followed by Donna Clayton.

MS. THOMPSON: Aloha. Welcome, Councilmembers. Thank you for doing an evening meeting for us. We appreciate it. Thank you for coming Upcountry. I am Theresa Thompson. I'm the President of Maui Cattlemen's Association, and I'd like to thank you for your support. We get our grant through the Maui County Farm Bureau. With this money, some of it we use to bring in speakers, clinicians, and we pay for the judge, the 4-H judge down at the Maui Ag Fest. And by bringing in clinicians and speakers and having clinics throughout the year, this enables us to make a better product for you, so we can bring better beef, better pork, lamb to your tables, so we can learn to raise better animals. Thank you for supporting agriculture. We appreciate you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. Thank you very much. Any questions for Theresa Thompson? Seeing none. All right. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Donna Clayton. She'll be followed by Tara Nakahashi.

MS. CLAYTON: Hello. Thank you for being here. I'm Donna Clayton. I'm President of the Pukalani Community Association, and I want to just talk about some practical things that Pukalani is concerned about. First, thank you for reconstructing the old Pukalani roads. That road work is ongoing and really greatly appreciated. And so, as the roads are upgraded, it's a big improvement, and we just wanted to...I think the funding's there, but if not, we'd like to continue the funding. And the Pukalani Community Association also appreciates the ongoing work to improve our drought conditions. I know there's work with wells planned and work on reservoir thinking and a lot's going into that, but it's so important. We've...honestly, 43 years I've been here, there's been a drought concern every year. It's just one of the things, and we understand the problems, but appreciate the work that's going on. Our seventh annual Pukalani Christmas Fair and Electric Light Golf Cart Parade is planned this year for Saturday, December 6th, and we greatly appreciate the support from Councilmember Sugimura and the County to help make this event possible. And we invite everybody to come and join us. This was started so that the folks that are in Pukalani would have their own event and be proud of Pukalani because as you can see from earlier testimony, we have unbelievably fabulous kids in Pukalani, and I...I wanted them to really feel very proud to be from Pukalani. Island-wide concerns that we share are help for the mentally ill, affordable housing solutions, funding to control invasive species, and the increasing fireworks and bombs of New Year's and the 4th of July, which I think I hear the most about. Thank you very much for your time.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much, Donna. Any questions? Seeing none. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Tara Nakahashi, to be followed by Ethan Romanchak.

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MS. NAKAHASHI: Hi. Good evening, everyone. My name is Tara Nakahashi. I'm the Co-Owner of Kahului Florist and Fernhouse Maui. Additionally, I serve as the President of the Maui Growers and Floriculture Collective, which was established as a commodity group under the Maui County Farm Bureau in 2024. I'm here today to provide testimony regarding our current budget requests to the Maui County Farm Bureau. Although you may not be familiar with us yet, we're still in the planning and execution phase of launching our collective. I'm pleased to share that we will soon be ready to welcome members and begin our mission. Our mission is straightforward. We are a group of dedicated growers, florists, lei makers, and distributors committed to enhancing the floriculture industry in Maui County through leadership, education, and excellence. We have numerous exciting plans and goals aimed at improving the marketability and sales of Maui-grown flowers and foliage. Additionally, we aim to provide greater transparency and education to other Maui farmers interested in cultivating flowers as a sustainable resource for their businesses. Many of you may be familiar with Kahului Florist and the services we have offered to the Maui County since 1962, which is amazing. However, what you might not know is the volume of flowers imported to our island daily. The importation of florals and greens is an unavoidable aspect in the floriculture industry here on Maui. Our business strives to partner with local vendors and suppliers to source more locally grown flowers and foliage, a challenge the previous owner faced due to difficulty in accessing Maui-grown product. Historically, Maui has been home to a diverse range of flowers that were provided to the local community, which was a remarkable highlight. A vendor recently mentioned that he once supplied Maui Chart House with hundreds of gardenia blooms for Mother's Day but is now unable to do so due to the instability and local partnerships. In recent years, flower production has surged again, yet many florists remain disconnected from our Maui growers, limiting their purchasing options. Establishing connections with off-island partners to market Maui-grown products would be significantly beneficial to our local flower farmers. The collective aims to serve as a bridge to that gap. As we observed a downturn in tourism here on Maui, many in the floriculture community have felt a direct impact. A significant portion of our floral designs and fresh flowers are provided for weddings and events, primarily driven by tourism. The collective was created to aid local vendors in better marketing themselves, reducing reliance on tourism income, and fostering deeper connections with our local community. Our current budget request for Fiscal Year 2026 is 14,500, positioning our collective within the non-food agricultural section. We sincerely appreciate your time and consideration of our proposal. Furthermore, I want to express my full support of Maui County Farm Bureau and their overall budget for Fiscal Year 2026.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much. And nice to meet you, the new --

MS. NAKAHASHI: Thank you.

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CHAIR SUGIMURA: -- owner of Kahului Florist.

MS. NAKAHASHI: Yes.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: I grew up with buying lots of flowers and leis and all kinds of stuff from Kahului Florist. So --

MS. NAKAHASHI: Yeah, well I've been in --

CHAIR SUGIMURA: -- I'm showing my age.

MS. NAKAHASHI: -- this industry 20 years, so I'm hoping we can keep it going.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Oh, very good. Very good. Ms. Paltin?

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: A couple clarification questions. Thank you for your testimony and what work you're doing. The...you said that you were getting your grant through the Maui County Farm Bureau, but when I seen the itemize in the budget, it just...it doesn't allot it to anyone. There's an amount just --

MS. NAKAHASHI: Right.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- for flower growers.

MS. NAKAHASHI: Yeah. So, we're under...it's part of like the 80,000 that's, like, the non-food agriculture. That's where we fall under.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: And...and you got that secured already or --

MS. NAKAHASHI: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- it's a line item?

MS. NAKAHASHI: So, the Farm Bureau did approve us for our budget this year, which is awesome because we're going to be taking on new members this year.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: The budget for July...starting July 1st?

MS. NAKAHASHI: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Okay.

MS. NAKAHASHI: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: And then I was wondering in the local floriculture industry, does that also include locally sourced lei?

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MS. NAKAHASHI: Yes. I'm wearing a locally made lei with a 100 percent Maui-grown product today.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Okay.

MS. NAKAHASHI: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: And then how do you get that word...because so much times the County itself buys the purple orchid lei. So, how do you get your word out that you get, because I...I get one and I...I always get from this lady of Ha'awina Farms.

MS. NAKAHASHI: Yeah. So, the County does purchase from us. We do supply lei, but like you said, a lot of times you guys are asking us for the orchid lei, which isn't grown on Maui. It's not made on Maui. It's imported from Thailand. It's still a beautiful product, but this right here is what we call our modern single lei. It's a little bit interesting, a little bit unique. We do provide it in the store. It's available every single week. It's also available on our website too, so you can just call us at Kahului Florist. We also have another one of our members in the audience, Brit from Haku Maui. She provides beautiful, locally-sourced leis in her store as well. So, that's two options right there, two resources. Also shopping, if you're just running in Foodland or anything, anything that has the Made in Hawaii sticker on it, you're going to know that that's a locally sourced product, even if it's not from Maui.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Thank you. Maybe the Department of Ag should put that on their website, like where you can get locally sourced.

MS. NAKAHASHI: That would be awesome. Like --

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Good idea.

MS. NAKAHASHI: -- any exposure for the floriculture community. I feel like even if we're in the agriculture environment, we're not really recognized as part of agriculture, but we're here and we do grow stuff on Maui.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. Members, Maui County Farm Bureau is one of my priorities. So, Warren Watanabe is here in the audience. I think he's asked the --

MS. NAKAHASHI: Yes.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: -- commodities to come and testify.

MS. NAKAHASHI: Yes. Yes. Yeah.

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CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much.

MS. NAKAHASHI: Thank you so much. Have a good evening.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Ethan Romanchak, to be followed by Jordan Hocker.

MR. ROMANCHAK: Hi. My name is Ethan Romanchak, and I wanted to thank all you guys for coming up in the evening. It really helps us be able to be here and also come Upcountry. I'm here to testify as a resident of Upcountry, also a business owner of Native Nursery, and also a Farm Bureau member and board member. So, three things about Farm Bureau that I've learned is just like invaluable. You think of like we're tied to the larger Farm Bureau, and so you go to any like Ag, County, or State and I mean Farm Bureau is like the heart of the thing, and it's been a legacy on Maui for generations. They help people with legislation that, like, leg. is hard, right, to figure out and move through. So, they help with that. They help with the commodity groups that have been mentioned, livestock, the veggie farmers with like the Kula facility, MALP, Allison (*phonetic*), and now the floriculture, and they represent big Ag but also down to just small farmers. So, the membership is really diverse. So, I'm here to support. I know it's a tight budget, but Ag, as we all know, like we can't let it go. Maui used to employ Ag. Most people on Maui were employed by Ag not that long ago, and I know looking backwards is one thing, but Maui County Farm Bureau does so much. Ag in the Classroom and Ag Fest. You know the County fair used to be like half Ag and half rides, and so with the County Fair transitioning, Ag in the Classroom, which I think you guys know about, and Ag Fest, they're like amazing events that Charlene and Warren and partners and get big bang for the buck for what they pull off with their budget. So...and then real quick, I guess two for one, STEM. Yeah we host STEM interns. I got into Ag myself with an internship, so quick plug for STEM. It's administered so professionally. So, like not from the student side but from us hosting interns, it's like flawless and valuable. So, two for one.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. Any questions for Mr. Romanchak? I bought a plant from you and it's still alive. Thank you.

MR. ROMANCHAK: Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Yeah. Any...okay. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Jordan Hocker, who will be followed by Georgia Pinsky.

MS. HOCKER: I am not as tall as Ethan obviously. Aloha, Councilmembers. Thank you so much for coming Upcountry for this budget hearing. My name is Jordan Hocker, and today I'm testifying on behalf of the Kula Community Association as our Board President. We come up with budget priorities every year for you, and this year is no different except in that we took our budget

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priorities to a community meeting and we had our KCA members rank them. So, I'm going to give you our priorities in order of that. Our first is water supply. We need dependable water provided to Upcountry, and so I do want to say that thank you, Councilmember Sugimura, for preparing these Upcountry highlights. The capital improvements on the bottom for water pretty much address all of our issues. Kamole Weir, transmission upgrades, as well as reliable capacity. The one place I don't see is that we're requesting that there are staged water tanks Upcountry to address one, when we have shortage, but also when our system loses pressure due to fire. And so, that's the thing I would add to please include money for capital improvements for that as well. You know our board is pretty knowledgeable on where those tanks could be placed and how they could be tied into the water system. And for our second priority is wildfire preparedness. First two lines, services for repairs and maintenance to radio systems. We are in support of that as well as the Kula Fire Station bay apparatus. What I don't see is what we're asking the County to do is prioritize mitigation in terms of reducing fire fuels both on private property and then publicly-owned property. I love Pukalani and how it's showing out, but the grasses on either side of the highway going up make me quite nervous. We're heading into dry season and we're concerned that we are not prepared enough for fire season, which is kauwela, right? That's the summer is our new fire season. Additionally, our third budget priority is invasive species control. We're a bit concerned that there really isn't much mention. What MISC has been able to do in invasive species prevention and control as well as eradication has been a miracle considering how underfunded their budget is. I would love to see MISC be able to expand, pay their people a living wage to be able to stay here because what little they are able to do packs a huge punch. Additionally, we need ongoing support for our axis deer problem. Not only do they threaten our farmers by eating their food that they're trying to grow for us, they also cause erosion, and right now what we can't afford to lose in Kula is our soil and so post fires, and erosion due to axis deer, we're really asking that that is reflected in your budget. Our fourth priority is children's safety on sidewalks. So, we have an issue both on Haleakala Waldorf School as well as the connection for Kula...Kula School as well. There are...there's not a full through sidewalk, and so at certain points we're asking you to walk on the side of the road or cross in a situation that's not very safe.

MS. NAKATA: Three minutes.

MS. HOCKER: Can I just wrap up, please?

CHAIR SUGIMURA: 30 seconds, can you wrap up?

MS. HOCKER: Okay. Yes. And then so our fifth budget priority is a Kula Recycling Center. Please establish a site Upcountry both for appliances, and then additionally, we would love a composting facility that's operational up here. Our sixth budget priority is road improvements. We do see some capital improvements here, but we would like the County to identify areas that are

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problem areas. And then seven is if you could include the Von Tempsky Community Center in...in this budget line for Parks and Recreation for Waikoloa [phonetic] Gym. We would...the community is asking for Wi-Fi as well as a set of steps that go up to the stage that you provide, because right now --

MS. NAKATA: Three-and-a-half minutes.

MS. HOCKER: -- we have...we have people whose knees would really like some steps. So, I'll end there. Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. So, you can submit your testimony in writing. I know...

MS. HOCKER: I have it for you here. I didn't make nine copies. I'm sorry, you guys. I've only got four. Okay.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Okay. No questions.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: . . .(inaudible). . .

MS. HOCKER: Okay.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. You'll submit it, right?

MS. HOCKER: Yes.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. You'll submit it. Thank you, Chivo.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Georgia Pinsky, to be followed by Gerry Ross.

MS. PINSKY: Aloha. Aloha. Thank you for being here this evening. I'm here to talk about food access. Food...food is what brings us together, and food access is what divides us. One in three...one in four keiki in Hawai'i have stress and anxiety in their homes because they don't know where their food is coming from or mom doesn't, and that causes stress between mom and dad or just mom internally. We can do better. I'm just here tonight to ask you to fund all agencies, projects, programs that are focused on food access. My...I attended the food systems conference in Kapolei, O'ahu, last December. I spent the whole first day making sure that we were clear about the depth and severity of hunger in Hawai'i. I didn't sleep that night. They spent the second day exploring solutions, and we were privileged to hear from a group of Polynesian voyagers who came from Hawai'i Island, and they said that their captain had posed to them, can we provision a canoe to Tahiti from our backyards? They said it took them three

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months to answer the question, yes, and three years to prepare, and they have learned to freeze-dry kalua pork, freeze-dry ulu...ulu stew, just add water. It took their canoe from over 2,000 pounds of food to provision for 30 days for 15 people to less than 700 pounds of food. Because of that weight reduction, they were able to carry more water and more passengers with less stress. They were able to navigate smoother because the canoe was riding higher in the water. It occurred to me that those of us who work in agriculture, you know, I work in agriculture, we're not just in it to support the farmers; we're in it because of the food security, we're in it because food access matters. That is the end-all be-all. Yeah, we want farmers to thrive and survive, but why? Because that's what feeds our community. So, the space between the abundance of rotting bananas and avocados and papayas, you name it, and food security is food preservation, is more infrastructure, more commercial kitchens, more moms with the skill set to dehydrate, to freeze-dry, to preserve, to ferment, and to replace those imported, colonialist-inspired packaged foods. It improves health. It decreases costs. We know that these kinds of challenges are exacerbated in our more rural and indigenous communities, and so it becomes even more heightened. And so, whatever is on your budget in the world of food access and food programming, please fund that. Thank you. My son would like to say aloha. Now you're going to be shy? Okay. This is Sheldon Lewis (*phonetic*). We come tonight from Kaupō, Maui. Mahalo.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Nice...nice to see you both. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Gerry Ross, who will be followed by Brandon Balthazar. Excuse me.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: So, how many testifiers? I'm wondering if we should take a break. You can speak, Gerry. I'm just asking Staff.

MR. ROSS: Okay. Aloha, Councilors. I'm trying something new. Glasses. I'm getting older. I couldn't get my presentation to print out, so I'm using a phone. Anyway, thanks so much for coming out. It's really great that you come out to hear what we have to say. My name is Gerry Ross, and with my wife Janet and her family, we've been growing food here on Maui for the Maui community for 46 years, doing business as Kupa'a Farms. We grow tropical fruit, vegetables, coffee, cacao, and vanilla. I'm a past board member of the Maui County Farm Bureau. I'm a founding member and past president of the Maui Coffee Association, and I've been a mentor for the Farm Apprentice and Mentoring Program since day one. I think that's 200 graduates from that program. Maui County...Maui Coffee Association receives funding through the County via Maui County Farm Bureau as part of their grant from MEO. We, the Maui Coffee Association, has used these funds for educational outreach, to get our farmers in touch with other aspects of the State's industry in coffee, and to run the really popular Seed to Cup event every year at Maui Tropical Plantation, which this last year drew in 2,500 people, both people that lived here, locals, as well as tourists. Maui coffee is excellent

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quality. We strive to maintain that. It generally runs neck-to-neck, and then sometimes even higher than that, to Kona coffee, which people are much more familiar with. So, it's a really good quality product, but like all Hawaiian coffee, we're hitting some existential threats, I would say, with new pests and new diseases that have shown up in the last five to ten years. So, these are not problems that can be solved by the individual farmer. We need help from the larger coffee community, which includes CTAHR, which has been super helpful. The recent cuts by the Trump Administration have impacted us through a loss of research staff at Hilo, at the USDA, and so it's critical that State and municipal...municipal governments do what they can to backfill these vacuums. CTAHR has been really instrumental in developing approaches to managing the coffee berry borer and developing rust-resistant cultivars for coffee. So, there's actually hope on the horizon. We were...we were swamped in despair in about 2021. The MEO farmer microgrants are one way to help local farmers, and as a past recipient of one of these, during the inaugural year of these grants, we were just thrilled when these came out. We were able to build a covered nursery for our plant starts, repair the roof on our large screened-in greenhouse, and pay for half of our new on-farm vehicle. I cannot stress enough that the strained dynamic that we see as our communities strive for food security and sustainability in the lack...in the face of a lack of funding from the Federal Government.

MS. NAKATA: Three minutes.

MR. ROSS: The most recent example being the loss of funds for food banks and the farmers they support. Anything the Council can do to keep funds flowing that allows the agricultural community to feed our island people is essential. We appreciate past support and will work to make sure future funds are well used. Thank you. Mahalo.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. Hang on, Gerry. There's a question from Member Johnson.

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you, Gerry, for your testimony. I want to clarify, you said you had some pests specific to the coffee. Is it the coffee borer beetle? Because we have it on Lānaʻi. Is it over here as well?

MR. ROSS: It's everywhere. It's throughout the entire State.

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: Okay. So, in addition to the coffee borer beetle, can you give me some examples of some other pests that are affecting your...your crop?

MR. ROSS: There's coffee leaf rust, which is a --

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: The rust.

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MR. ROSS: -- fungal disease that showed up about two years ago. There's no cure for that. You have to use rust-resistant cultivars. And every country in the world that is a coffee-producing country, take for example Colombia. The GDP of Colombia is strongly hinged on coffee. They poured a lot of money into developing rust-resistant cultivars. Coffee in Hawai'i is not a significant part of the national GDP. So, we're actually getting left in the dust --

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: Okay.

MR. ROSS: -- in that way.

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: Just one last question. Do deer eat coffee?

MR. ROSS: It depends who you talk to. They haven't come to eat our coffee --

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: Okay.

MR. ROSS: -- even though they've been there. But my neighbor up the street had all of his 200 young coffee trees just chewed down to nothing.

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: Okay. All right. Thanks for that, Gerry.

MR. ROSS: Yeah.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Wow.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Brandon Balthazar, to be followed by Kyle Ellison.

MR. BALTHAZAR: Trying to make me too damn tall. Okay. Everybody knows me, Brandon Balthazar.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Wait, one second. There's music coming. Maybe as an introduction to you.

MR. BALTHAZAR: Yeah. I mean, I brought my band.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Theme song.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: It's your theme song. Oh, there. Oh, it's from outside. Okay. Go ahead, Brandon.

MR. BALTHAZAR: Okay. I'm here because, you know, to testify in...in behalf of the Maui County Farm Bureau. I'm a board member of the Maui County Farm Bureau. I'm also on the board of the Kula Community Association, which I echo Jordan's deal. And, wait, I got to follow everybody. I'm amazed with these people with these phones now. Anyway, these kids wanted to say, I mean, pretty...that

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kid left though. The one that said that...what he was testifying in behalf of?
STEM?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: STEM.

MR. BALTHAZAR: I tell you what, if STEM is better than his junior prom, he never go to mine. I tell you what, I better...get one age limit in going to STEM. I like go to that stuff. That must be one hell of a deal. Anyways, Farm Bureau, we represent all the commodity groups. I'm on the board representing livestock, which a lot of that money that come through our side also get funds for the 4-H, yeah. So, that's the reason why they solicited me to come here. But then, when I'm hearing different testimony for different things, I started thinking, I went after the former mayor for four years because I personally witnessed one really close accident and one that almost the guy hit me. I go to mass every morning, Maha Road, and I'm coming out in the morning and the kids that going to school. I tried to get speed bumps on the damn road because it's a 20 mile an hour deal, and these guys coming because they coming towards Pukalani. They hitting 30, 40. There was this one little girl, and I saw the car was past the post office and she was going to come across the road. So, I was coming out. No . . .*(inaudible)*. . . before she came, and she was three-fourths of the way and the guy was like almost on her. I pulled out, he screeched his brakes, went around me. If I wasn't going to...I'd follow him to hell and go take care of his problem. But I tell you what, it's not if, because a lot of kids cross that road, and we have like I think four or five crosswalks on Makawao Avenue and by the post office, which is not that much because they never pick up speed yet from the...from the deal, but once you stay hit by the...by the...I mean, excuse me, by the old post office, I'm thinking, Jesus, but the regular post office by there and then by Maha Road and then the one that they cross to go to the park coming out of...where the hell you live?

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Makawao Ranch...

MR. BALTHAZAR: No, Makawao Ranch Acres. I mean, it's going to happen again. We had one crossing guard at one time get hit, and Mike Molina was on the Council and he pushed for that crosswalk, I think, the one by Kalama School. So, anyway, the other thing was you guys --

MS. NAKATA: Three minutes.

MR. BALTHAZAR: -- mentioned about the deer. Just keep in mind, and Yuki has been on, you know, on the forefront charge of this whole thing, and it's great that funding comes through our County to help, you know, with fencing and stuff like that, but just keep in mind we get a lot of small farms and small ranches, and they get left behind a lot, you know, in funding. So, to me, that's crucial.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Questions?

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COUNCILMEMBER COOK: She was first.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. Member Paltin, Member Cook, Member Johnson.

MR. BALTHAZAR: It's like one bunch of priests and . . .*(inaudible)*. . . doing confession over here. Okay.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Thank you for your testimony, Mr. Balthazar. I just wanted to clarify what...what was the road where you needed the speed bumps?

MR. BALTHAZAR: Makawao Avenue. You know, right from the intersection in Makawao where you have like Komoda Store, all that. Okay. That crosswalk is no problem. You have one crossing guard there every morning, and everybody got to stop, so like one four-way stop, but once they pass the library, which is one short distance, not too big of a deal, but from the library on to the post office, which there's a crosswalk there, and then right at the front of Maha Road where Miyake Concrete is, and the one that goes to the park, and in between that is by Makawao Ranch Acres. Now, all the kids from Ranch Acres got to cross the road to go to King K...I mean, to Kalama, or they come back this way and they cross by Maha Road to go down to the school. So...and I mean, any of you, if you get the time in the morning, it's a 20-mile-an-hour zone, and you see how fast those cars coming. I mean...

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: So, three...you're talking about --

MR. BALTHAZAR: Yes, yes. One...

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- three speed bumps and one crosswalk.

MR. BALTHAZAR: No, no, all of them have crosswalks, sweetheart. They all have crosswalks, but I'm talking about the raised crosswalks so you can slow these birds down. The one by the post office is one, the next one is Maha Road is two, by...by the park is three, and then the last one is the one...I mean, not by the park, right before the park is by Makawao Ranch Acres, and then the park. So, you get four crosswalks there with a 20-mile-an-hour speed limit, and these....these buggers are...they honking through there.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: So, Maha Road --

MR. BALTHAZAR: Maha Road, across the --

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- post office...

MR. BALTHAZAR: -- across the post office is the second.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Post office --

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MR. BALTHAZAR: And then --

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- park --

MR. BALTHAZAR: -- across --

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- and then Makawao Ranch Acres.

MR. BALTHAZAR: -- from...from Makawao Ranch Acres, there's one, and then the park.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Okay. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Eddie Tam.

MR. BALTHAZAR: Makawao park, Eddie Tam.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Got it.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. Member Cook?

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Thank you...thank you, Mr. Balthazar. A couple questions, just following up on the speed bumps. So, have you...have...there's...have you or anybody talked to Public Works about this?

MR. BALTHAZAR: I did in the past. What's her name? Andaya --

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Yeah.

MR. BALTHAZAR: -- and she told me...she was really good, and she was the director at the time, and she said, you know what, before the end of the year, our plans is to resurface Makawao Avenue. So, we'll do it at that time. That's four years ago.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: How's the condition of Makawao Avenue now? If they...if they did it now, would it be okay?

MR. BALTHAZAR: Makawao Avenue is...is really not full of potholes or anything.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Okay.

MR. BALTHAZAR: It's...it's...it's fine. But when I see one speed bump in Kanaio, in Kanaio, and we no more one in Makawao Town.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: So, let me ask you, when you say speed bumps, you want like a speed table at the crosswalk?

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MR. BALTHAZAR: Speed table at the crosswalk, yeah.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: You want flashing lights or no need?

MR. BALTHAZAR: You know, whatever going to slow those birds down, but I think the flashing lights do work, but when the kids crossing because --

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Yeah.

MR. BALTHAZAR: -- especially when they coming from the post office, get one pretty good distance, right? So, they're not really watching or they texting or something. I mean, the little kid that almost got hit was maybe this big. And I'm thinking, Jiminy Christmas, you know. But, like I said, we had Mister...the kind, what the hell his name, got hit by . . . *(inaudible)*. . . so Mike Molina put that crosswalk there.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: So...okay. Good. We're going to make note of that.

MR. BALTHAZAR: Talking about four.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: We're going to talk to Public Works and see what we can make happen with that. As far as the Farm Bureau, they're fencing for smaller size ranches. Could you clarify to me what size? Like 200 acre, 50 acres and up, or what?

MR. BALTHAZAR: Well, you get a lot of small ranchers; when I say small, they run from probably...you know, anything going help. In other words, if they get some funding to buy the material, they going to put up the fence. Anything going help. Right now, with these damn tariffs and all this bullshit, early...early this year, we bought regular, standard hog wire. 358 bucks at Dells. It's 4.99. So, you know, the cost factor, but you asking for sizes, you're talking about anywhere from 50 to 1,000 acres. You know, you get a lot of..when I say medium to small ranches, like Thompson Ranch, you know, you're talking over 1,000 acres.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: So, six-foot or eight-foot fence? Briefly.

MR. BALTHAZAR: Six. Six. Six.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Six is fine?

MR. BALTHAZAR: Eight is for gorillas and monkeys.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Okay. And then, what's your thought? My thought was basically fencing grants, cost shared, but having it done with a fencing contractor so that it actually gets done.

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MR. BALTHAZAR: No, I think the fencing contractor, Tom, is a bad thing because your fencing contractor is going to just escalate the money that could have gone to the...to the rancher. If you one rancher, at least for two or three years, and you don't know how to put up one damn fence, you shouldn't be ranching. That's like saying you one carrot farmer and you're planting onions, you know.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: I got it. I got it.

MR. BALTHAZAR: So, my point is, save that money. I'd rather you take that money and tell the guy, says look, in our budget, like Yuki said, okay, maybe they had a whole shit ton of money. And they said, in our budget, okay, we're going to give maybe even \$400. You go buy a couple rolls wire. Versus...and it should be prorated versus the size. You get a ranch with 10,000 acres, mine is 7,000, all the way down to the guys with the 200 acres. You know, they need help too. So, prorate them. I mean, anything is better than saying, hey, we'd help everybody.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: What other things on Farm Bureau would help ranchers, except for...besides fencing?

MR. BALTHAZAR: Farm Bureau, right now, is...is representing all the commodity groups. We had a hell of a time getting landscapers in before. Now, they're in. Flower growers, you know, they're all farmers. They...they're all growing something. Food is important, I agree. And...and one of the things that I was surprised Gerry never touched on was composting. You know, that has been Gabe's pet peeve. You know, that got to go.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Thank you very much, sir.

MR. BALTHAZAR: Shoot.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Oh, Gabe.

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: No problem. I didn't have a question.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Oh, you didn't have one question.

MR. BALTHAZAR: Yeah, he just wanted to say hi.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. Thank you. We're going to call you --

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: I have a question.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: -- Brandon. Next testifier.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: I have a question.

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CHAIR SUGIMURA: Oh, sorry.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: Just a quick one.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Member Rawlins-Fernandez has a question for you, Brandon. Come back.

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: . . .*(inaudible)*. . .

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: I have a clarifying question about your prom, real quick.

MR. BALTHAZAR: My prom?

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: No, no.

MR. BALTHAZAR: You wasn't there.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: So, the fencing, just quick, is it to keep animals in or to keep animals out?

MR. BALTHAZAR: Out. Out. We can keep animals in.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: Okay.

MR. BALTHAZAR: When I first started ranching 54 years ago, one regular four-foot fence was more than adequate. In fact, at that time, everything was barbed wire. And then, because of, you know, some...we went into the hog wire. One four feet not going to keep them. Six feet will keep them. You get some deer, if you really push them, they might, they might. But 99 percent of the deer will try to go through. They're not going over. And...and we finding that six-foot fence work, you know. Of course, State, they want to go eight-foot fence, I guess, because they get a lot of money. But...but it doesn't make any sense, really.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: Okay. Maybe the Molokai deer jump more high.

MR. BALTHAZAR: The Molokai deer...

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: I don't know, I'm just kidding.

MR. BALTHAZAR: I was going to answer that, but I better not.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: You can tell me after.

MR. BALTHAZAR: Well, I mean, you know, Molokai is the deer meat, you know what I

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mean? It's the different deer. But yeah, those ones, they jump pretty high.

COUNCILMEMBER RAWLINS-FERNANDEZ: Mahalo, Mr. Balthazar.

MR. BALTHAZAR: Okay.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. Thank you. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Kyle Ellison. He'll be followed by Rachel Hau'oli Michiko Ohta.

MR. ELLISON: Hi. Thank you. Thank you, everyone, for being here tonight. I'm sorry the kids left, because I wanted to...there we go. That was awesome the kids are here. So, if you watch this later, good job. I just want to come here tonight to continue elevating the conversation that we've been having towards just take...the need to take proactive measures towards fire fuel reduction, green waste management, and the hazard mitigation that threatens our infrastructure and our community and ultimately lives up here. Last December, I testified at the ADEPT Committee in front of the same group, many of the same group, about the threat of what would happen in Hapapa Gulch with all the eucalyptus trees that were currently in Hapapa Gulch. And if we got a big Kona storm, what would happen? It would take out the waterline. Oh, guess what happened January the very next month. That's exactly what happened, and it took out our waterline. These are the situations where I don't like saying I'm right. I don't like being right in these types of situations. A situation I really don't want to be right, and I've said it before, is with the amount of fuel that's currently surrounding Kula. Kula is currently poised to be Hawaii's next big preventable mega fire. And all the ingredients are there. And so, I'm continuing to come up here to have this conversation to say that we really need to take this seriously and we need to prioritize the removal of our fire fuels, proactive measures towards our green waste management. And the sweet, bitter irony is that the solution to many of the problems that we have Upcountry is found in the problem itself. The wood, you know, the black wattle and the eucalyptus that are sucking the water out of the ground and contributing to our drought conditions and providing the fuel for the fire can be turned into a different material, into wood chips that can be used for agriculture, that can be used for nutrients, that can be used for resources that are needed here. It can suppress wattle regrowth. It can aid in soil retention. It can help with the soil runoff going down to North Kihei. All of the...many of the problems we're experiencing can be found with resources already here on the mountain if we just have the funding and facilities to take one resource and transition it into another form. So, you guys know that I...you probably...you didn't see my face here at many meetings before the fire. I didn't used to do this stuff. The only reason I'm up here doing this is because standing here in Kula that day, watching what I thought was the whole town burning down and then miraculously coming back the next day and realizing that it hadn't, I feel like I saw what could happen, and I feel responsibility to my community to get up here

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and do everything that I can to make sure that it doesn't happen. And so, that's why I'm here. That's why I'm testifying this evening. And I know that we've been having this conversation, but I just want to come here tonight to prioritize the importance of it and say thank you for the consideration. So...

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you, Kyle.

MR. ELLISON: Yeah. Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Any questions? Okay. You want to go first? Member Paltin, then Member Cook.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: I just was wondering, and the deadline just passed yesterday, but have you been following the CDBG-DR conversation? Because I think 213 million of the 1.6 billion is earmarked for hazard mitigation. The action plan comment period just ended yesterday, but did you submit comment on turning the black wattle and eucalyptus into reducing the fuel load? Because there's \$213 million --

MR. ELLISON: Yeah.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- that needs to be spent on mitigation.

MR. ELLISON: Unfortunately, I didn't meet the deadline for that, for the CDBG-DR. I have submitted a white paper for consideration in the County budget for next year, but for the CDBG-DR, no, not specifically for that.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: And maybe more conversation with the Office of Recovery because they're the ones kind of interacting with HUD on how the DR funds specifically would be planned for. So, because Kula had a fire, I think some of the money is for that too. And that's kind of, I think, a separate pot than this budget process. So, it...it might be helpful to --

MR. ELLISON: Yeah.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- interact directly with the recovery administrator, John Smith --

MR. ELLISON: Yeah.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- or Department of Management.

MR. ELLISON: It's been on my list. Thank you. So, it's a long list. Yeah.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Thank you. Thank you very much for all you've been doing. I like --

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MR. ELLISON: Of course.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: -- seeing you continue to come and continue to work. I have two questions. One, is the money better if it's like available ongoing, because you're contracting some of the equipment out, and you have access to it, you can kind of keep doing it? Or is it better to get...do you have the organization where you would want a chunk of money that you guys would be utilizing? And have you had any grants yet?

MR. ELLISON: Yeah. So, both, I suppose; you know, ongoing is always helpful because our operations are ongoing. Just prior to this meeting, I was sitting there trying to write a three-year forecast for a Forest Service grant. We're trying to look out three years and, you know, we're able...was able to do that as well using our metrics and current estimates. So, we have received some grants potentially through County of Maui, the Green Grants division, potentially. Thank you, Councilmember Sugimura, for helping set that up. And we have had some other...we had a Rotary Foundation grant, we had some private grants that have come through. And so, yeah, I mean, we...we do have funding right now, but we continue to be like one nostril above water of, you know, one month, two month out, but that doesn't stop us. We still just keep working. So, we...we just calculated that we have...since...since the fire, we have chipped a little over 1,550 cubic yards of wood, which is the equivalent of about 850,000 pounds of wood. And all that wood's been just gathered off the ground. I forgot to say something. Look at what's happening in North Carolina right now with the big fires that are going on over there. I don't know if you've seen the largest wildfires in the country are currently happening in North Carolina in the mountains that was hit by Hurricane Helene. And they've never had fires like that there. And one of the reasons why the fires were out of control is because there's so much fuel on the ground from the hurricane. And they're having trouble with access. They're having trouble with clogged riverbeds. They're having just dead trees laying all around the community. And everyone's going, we've never seen a fire like this, but that's because they've never had as much fuel on the ground. So, we currently still have all the fuel on the ground from the hurricane-strength winds that we have. And considering we're coming into a fire season or a dry season, it's the exact same prescription of what is happening elsewhere with all this fuel that's around. So, we've chipped nearly a million pounds of wood privately funded and we're not stopping. So, I appreciate the consideration. Yeah.

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: Kyle, thank you so much for all your work you do. And thank you for coming to ADEPT and presenting because it sounds very similar to what you said before. One of my questions is it's kind of coming up and I'm...I'm hearing this from a lot of different people is workforce. You might be able to get the grant, but are you...how is it with you on getting people to actually work? Because we hear that left, right, and center.

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MR. ELLISON: Yeah. Workers are helpful. Yeah. We currently have a staff of myself and three other part-time people, a robust pipeline of volunteers. And we do contract some labor, but yeah, that at the end of the day is very important. Having workforce is super important. So, I don't know...you know, I serve as executive director and I probably spend 40 hours a week out in the field in gulches and chainsaws and dirt, and then go home and do all the office work because we don't have the staff to be doing that. So, yeah, workforce is very helpful.

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: You know, we have people that might be able to help. Like MEDB was just talking –

MR. ELLISON: Yeah.

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: -- you know, all those kids came and the interns that came out of the person who interned at Native Nursery. Maybe there's a pipeline for you after you get these grants.

MR. ELLISON: Oh, totally. It's...I mean, I've got...yeah, tomorrow I've got a group of 15 high school students from Seattle. The day after that, I've got a group of 23 from Georgia.

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: Great.

MR. ELLISON: Yeah. We...we have about 21 service days lined up for April right now, so.

COUNCILMEMBER JOHNSON: You know, I'm impressed with you thinking outside the box, trying to figure out this problem. So, thanks for your hard work. Thank you, Chair.

MR. ELLISON: Well, thank you. Yeah. And as Jordan from KCA said that, you know, I do appreciate the Upcountry priorities that are put down there, but I do notice that fire fuel reduction and hazard mitigation towards our infrastructure and everything is not listed on there. So, I'd like to include that.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. Any more questions? Seeing none. Next testifier. Nice seeing you, Kyle.

MR. ELLISON: Okay. Appreciate. Thank you.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Rachel...Rachel Hau'oli Michiko Ohta, to be followed by Candace Shan [sic].

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Members, would you like to take a break or how many?

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UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: . . .*(inaudible)*. . .

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Oh, it's the last three. Okay. Thank you.

MS. OHTA: Hello, Council. My name is Rachel Hau'oli Michiko Ohta. I was born and raised in Maui. I have a proposal to the Council to establish Sister City International with the City of Siena, Italy. I have already spoken with the president and CEO of Sister Cities International. She has backed this. As well as a 7 for 70 initiative that's going on right now, is going to be providing funding for this. I also spoke with Carlo Capua. He is the acting board of director, head of the board of directors for Sister Cities International, and he wholeheartedly has supported this. I personally made the contacts just because I know that this can go through. It's something that with the right funding and the right resources available, which I know that I can bring for both Maui and Italy, it can be...it can be done. And this is...I know that Maui County, the budget, it's...it really highlights affordable housing, cultural arts, nonprofit funding, preservation of cultures, traditions, economic development, social healthcare services, water resources. This is something that Siena for 500 years, that have...they have established things that really work, and I think that they could be a really, really...they could be a really good access to resources. And in addition, they...as far as cultural preservation, I think that they can really give insight to what could be done here. My daughter and I...she was born in Siena. I studied there. I got a scholarship from Kamehameha Schools, went to Italy, met her father, and she was born there, and I think that she has a lot to...to be able to benefit from actually going and making the...the established connections. We were both appointed the co-chairs of the DAR, State Historical Preservation, which is a really, really big...it's really, really something that is a great honor, as well as I personally am on the...the Haleakalā Chapter, the actual committee for the budget, which I also co-chair, and I think that both organizations, as far as just the chapter locally, as well as the DAR as far as nationally, can bring so many different resources as far as financially, especially because I'm going to be pretty much in charge of . . .*(timer sounds)*. . . trying to get these resources out. So, I really feel...real quickly.

MS. NAKATA: Three minutes.

MS. OHTA: Sorry. Last thing is what I need from the Council. Basically, I think this is what is...involves you guys. Sorry about that. It says, once the letter has been received by the prospective sister city, a line of each other's . . .*(inaudible)*. . . identify program, exchange opportunities, discussing local involvement, and developing a work plan that establishes short and long-term goals for the partnership. I think this period is also a great opportunity to implement a program to test the waters. The program could include a youth exchange, municipal professional best practice, and other knowledge-sharing exchange.

MS. NAKATA: Three-and-a-half minutes.

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MS. OHTA: Among other opportunities, many communities have delegations during the correspondence and planning stages, whether it be the city manager, councilmembers, and other business professionals or volunteers. I think that you would all love the place, and I really appreciate the time . . . *(inaudible)*. . .

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you for your...thank you for your testimony.

MS. OHTA: Thank you very much.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: So, what you're talking about is a sister city relationship.

MS. OHTA: Yes.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: And it is a relationship that gets established from the Mayor –

MS. OHTA: Yes.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: -- and then it comes to us as a Council.

MS. OHTA: Yes.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: So, she's going to ask you the question.

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: No, you can ask since you're already on a roll.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Did you talk to the Mayor? That's who you need to talk to.

MS. OHTA: You know what? I actually went to his office, and it was something that just procedurally...I got an email saying that there was going to be this budget hearing, and I just wanted to present it because it was something that --

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Oh.

MS. OHTA: -- I got one shot. I've been planning this for the last two decades when I first went there --

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay.

MS. OHTA: -- and I think that it's...it's meant to be. It's kind of something that it's my passion project, so.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. So, be in touch with us.

MS. OHTA: Absolutely. And I'll --

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CHAIR SUGIMURA: And after you do talk to the Mayor, that's...I think that's your first step.

MS. OHTA: Yeah.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: And...and then if he agrees, and...and --

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: We get the money.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: -- he'll...he'll...he'll send us a resolution. So, that's the process.

MS. OHTA: Perfect.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay.

MS. OHTA: And I can get that done, expedite, as well as I've contacted the Mayor's Office in Siena, the sindicato, Fabio...Nicoletta Fabio. And that is another thing, just getting the people in correspondence communication. So, I know I can get that done.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. Thank you.

MS. OHTA: Thank you very much.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much. Next...next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: The next testifier is Candace Shan [sic]. She'll be followed by Britney Alejo-Fishell.

MS. SHAW: Aloha. I wasn't even going to testify, so this is going to be completely off the cuff. I apologize for not providing an entire dissertation to you through email per normal behavior from me. I'm here to talk about two main issues, housing and food. Really concerned about housing and what's going to happen, not if. What is going to happen with the Trump Administration cutting our funding from the Federal Government, shuttering resources from HUD, the U.S. Interagency on Houseless Alliance, including our emergency housing vouchers, which is budgeted for \$3 million. Right now is...it's already unfunded. And I listened to one of the hearings this week. There was a discussion about giving homeowners some money back from the carryover funds. I think we really should be looking at potentially filling some of these Federal budget gaps that are going to come. I also want to talk about our RAP, our rental assistance programs. So, the money there often is allocated in July to multiple agencies, four or six of them. The funds have a tendency to run out by September, which means we're missing about eight or nine months' worth of funding for people, honestly. In some of the housing advocacy work that I do right now, I'm dealing with people who are both behind on their car and on their rent, ready to get evicted and lose their second

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place they can sleep in. And so, we're having to have counseling discussions with them on whether or not they...they try to negotiate with a landlord and pay their rent, or whether we try to get them back up enough where they're not going to have their car repossessed, so hopefully they have a roof over their head to sleep in. That's the reality of what's happening right now. I don't know if your Housing Director has met with Freddie and Fannie and FHA and USDA. Mortgage delinquencies are on a rise, biggest they've been since 2011. We are not an exception in that. I encourage your Housing Director to reach out to them and find out specifically what's going on in Lahaina, because they're not only now having to pay rent, they're also potentially losing their property. And that is a really, really big concern for me. We sort of have like the Trump Administration running this gambit on people to fund the billionaires. One of them who lives here in one of those \$10 million houses. . . .(timer sounds). . . He has a \$600 --

MS. NAKATA: Three minutes.

MS. SHAW: -- million wedding in one day. He's not here. It's a vacant house. 600 million on a wedding. And our people are sleeping in streets with no food, no housing.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: 30 seconds, you can wrap it up.

MS. SHAW: It doesn't work for me. I ask you to take a close look at those cuts and really figure out how you're going to reallocate \$350 million in subsidies from the Federal Government. Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you. Any questions? Seeing none. Next testifier.

MS. NAKATA: Chair, the last person who has signed up to testify tonight is Britney Alejo-Fishell.

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Aloha kākou. My name is Britney, and I'm the owner of Haku Maui. We're a local lei shop here in Makawao Town, my hometown. Our family-run business. We've been there for going on eight years now. I'm also the Vice President of the Maui Growers and Floriculture Collective, which is a commodity group under the Maui County Farm Bureau. I'm here to represent the lei and floral and grower industry. As a lei maker, a small business owner, and a member of the MGFC, we're here in support of Maui Farm Bureau funding requests, and the agricultural microgrants as operations, infrastructure, and education are key to our success within the Ag sector and economy here. I am in support of the fiscal budget for Maui County Farm Bureau for 2026. I originally wrote this testimony with flowers solely in mind because it's literally my whole life, but after hearing that testimony, I really do understand. I know that food is a really big part of the agriculture industry, but flowers, especially something as lei, when we're talking about culture, is highly overlooked. Farming here for flowers, it's impossible. It's really hard to find. You want to order lei.

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You want to make this a very special moment for somebody in your life or within our culture. A lot of times, people are importing these flowers from Thailand. It's ridiculous. The thought that we would rather risk importing pests and these bugs here rather than supporting a local grower here to provide infrastructure for the land to help our economy and all of these things, it's...it's crazy. The other thing I want to talk about is how we're always talking about drought and things like this that happen here, overflow that goes into the ocean. This all stems back into farming and taking care of the land. There are things that we can prevent by...by doing this and sourcing our funds into this. We're very grateful for the Maui County Farm Bureau to take on this commodity group and support us and bringing this hui together of flower farmers to show our impact. It really is much larger than we think, but we do need a lot more help. Let's see here. We tend to be overlooked, and I just really think it's important that within the ag center...Ag sector, not only food, but flowers are seen as well. So, thank you for your time.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much. So, before she asks you a question, is this...are you where Tamara gets all her beautiful leis? Right? Haku?

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: No, I get mine from Ha'awina Farms.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Oh, that would be no.

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: We support Ha'awina, too, though.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Oh, okay.

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: I just was saying, like you know, I don't want to...I mean I do want to ban those purple orchid leis, but I don't want to, like, formally ban them. But I think that's part of the thing. Like if...if we can...if there's a way to say like just say no to those purple orchid leis, and...lei, and then maybe, you know, all of us get lei all the time from events and stuff like that. So, maybe if you guys have cards, because when I order lei from Ha'awina Farm, everybody's all like, oh where did you get --

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- that lei? You know like --

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Yeah.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- it smells good. And...and I'm like...I'm not sure I want to share my source because...

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: It's hard to find probably somebody to take on --

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COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: Yeah.

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: -- that amount because of this.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: But maybe like when you guys come, give us your card and we can order local. Because to me, every time I see a purple orchid lei, it's just a missed opportunity, you know. And...and what is Hawai'i? Purple orchid lei from Thailand. Like I mean, I'm not going to turn down a lei, but it's just sad every time --

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: I will.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- for me, that they do the purple orchid one. But yeah, I'm full support --

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER PALTIN: -- of locally-made lei.

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Thank you for addressing that. It's a very...it's a huge issue and it...it really comes down to education. A lot of people just really have no idea. And maybe when they look at the history of things, that used to be something that was available here. But over time, our culture became commercialization. How can we reach as many people as possible without even sourcing something that is Hawai'i from Hawai'i? It just doesn't make sense. And now we're in this state right here, in this time where lei is really growing as an industry and I believe needs to be acknowledged. But the only way we can continue to grow is if there are more opportunities to grow lei flowers here. There are so many lei makers that are here that are making lei. They want to grow their business. They're supporting our Hawaiian culture. They see a future for this in themselves and for their family. They're carrying on a legacy. But sourcing is a huge, huge problem. This is why it's probably hard to share your source sometimes too because the...the ability to take on these large orders is very hard. It's almost like we all need to come together and say, okay, you do this many, you do this many, something, some kind of hui like that. But it really affects, even for us being in business this long, the ability to grow even further, because we cannot source these flowers.

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: So, you mentioned that you were part of the, let me see, Hawai'i Farm Bureau?

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: So, I'm a part of the Maui Growers --

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: Maui...okay. So --

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MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: -- and Floriculture Collective. Yeah.

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: -- so, you have a line-item budget with them?

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Yes.

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: How much is that for?

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: So, that's under Tara here, and she has that information. I'm so sorry. I don't have it off the top of my head.

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: 14,500. Is that right?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 14,5 is our initial grant, yes.

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: Oh, okay. Is that enough?

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: I mean...

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: . . .*(inaudible)*. . .

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Yes. I...we would like more. Okay.

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: Okay. That's fine. I don't want to put you on the spot.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: . . .*(inaudible)*. . . to be recognized . . .*(inaudible)*. . .

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: Okay. Okay.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay.

VICE-CHAIR KAMA: Thank you. Thank you.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: So...

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: And a true grant, not a reimbursement grant. Okay. Okay. Mahalo.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Oh, one moment. Member Cook has a question for you.

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Okay.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Thank you. So, the purple, is that the Vanda lei...Vanda flowers, the purple orchid, or is it something different?

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: It's a dendrobium orchid. It's purple and white. It's kind of

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become associated as the lei of Hawai'i. When people get off the plane, they're expecting that lei. And the company that does work there, not to throw anybody under the bus, but that is what...what is offered.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Didn't we...didn't they used to be able to buy them here?

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Long ago. And that's the history that we're talking about, but things changed over time. Farms closed over time and now they're not available.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: So, are they really cheap? So, that --

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: They're very cheap.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: -- it would be hard to grow and compete?

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: So, yes, we've had...we've had opportunities to compete with, like in for example, luau. Everyone who attends receives a lei. To compete with that in the thousands is nearly impossible right now --

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: But I mean if Maui...

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: -- because we need to source these flowers.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: But if you grew...if you grew a lot of them --

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Yes.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: -- is there an industry that basically could grow those plants here to satisfy the demand?

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Yes. Absolutely.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Okay.

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Absolutely.

COUNCILMEMBER COOK: Thank you.

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Yes.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Thank you very much.

MS. ALEJO-FISHELL: Okay. Mahalo.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: All right. So, do we have any more testifiers? Is that the last testifier?

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MS. NAKATA: Chair, no one else has signed up to testify.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Can you call for last testimony?

MS. NAKATA: If there is anyone else who would like to testify, please come to the microphone.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Okay. Thank you very much everybody for being here. We appreciate it at this time. We're going to close public testimony and this public hearing is now we're going to say good night. I...

. . . CLOSE PUBLIC TESTIMONY . . .

COUNCILMEMBER LEE: Adjourn.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: Wait, wait, wait. No, I'm not going to adjourn yet. I wanted to let you know that the students that testified with King Kekaulike automotive, Petar was the teacher there. So, I texted him. And just for your information, because one of the Members asked me, he gets MEDB grant, and they get about \$1,500 and you...you saw the merits of what they did. So, Members, that's for your information. Yeah. With the King Kekaulike automotive.

COUNCILMEMBERS VOICED NO OBJECTIONS. (excused: NUH)

ACTION: DEFER pending further discussion.

CHAIR SUGIMURA: So, Members, if there's no further questions, this meeting is now adjourned. . . .(gavel). . .

ADJOURN: 7:55 p.m.

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Transcribed by: Daniel Schoenbeck

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CERTIFICATION

I, Daniel Schoenbeck, hereby certify that pages 1 through 46 of the foregoing represents, to the best of my ability, a true and correct transcript of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not in any way concerned with the cause.

DATED the 5th day of April 2025, in Wailuku, Hawai'i



Daniel Schoenbeck