

**Testimony for Planning and Sustainable Land Use Committee  
Meeting of November 3, 2021**

Aloha, Committee members.

My name is Sarah Hofstadter. I am a full-time, permanent resident of Kihei and a steering team member of the HALE Hawai'i community group. I am writing to express my strong support for **both** the proposed visitor accommodations moratorium (PSLU-28) **and** the proposed phase-out of transient accommodations in apartment districts (PSLU-34).

It is no secret that Maui County residents, especially on the island of Maui, are increasingly voicing strenuous objections to the uncontrolled growth of tourism. One down side of our excessive economic reliance on tourism was evident during the height of the pandemic, when so many residents were financially devastated. As long as our economy is so tightly tied to tourism, any major disruption to the global economy in the future will have the same effect.

And now that visitors are back, the contrast between current conditions and the relative peace and quiet we enjoyed when we were "closed" has thrown into sharp relief the other down sides of overtourism: traffic, overcrowding, food shortages, overuse of our natural resources, abuse of wildlife, and an excessive number of expensive rescue operations attributable to poor judgment and disregard of warnings by visitors.

Enough is enough. Maui residents are getting fed up with the double standard that allows crowds of visitors to degrade our quality of life, while resident-oriented recreational facilities and gatherings are still subject to closures and limitations. We are facing severe drought conditions; farmers are fighting over water rights and Upcountry residents are letting their gardens die to conserve water, yet our resort areas are green and lush. We have a looming problem with adequate sewage processing facilities, and other aspects of our island infrastructure are seriously in need of repair; visitors add to these problems, but do nothing to help solve them. We are in desperate need of affordable housing, yet we continue to commit an excess share of our construction resources to visitor accommodations and luxury second homes for rich mainlanders.

The Maui Island Plan, which was adopted in 2012 and is supposed to have the force and effect of law, specifies in section 4.2.3.a that we are to "Promote a desirable island population by striving to not exceed an island-wide visitor population of roughly 33 percent of the resident population." That provision has NEVER been enforced. Now is the time to start. Let's not wait until a cherished kupuna in East Maui dies unnecessarily because visitor traffic on the road to Hana made it impossible for an ambulance to get through in time.

Of course, neither Maui County nor the State of Hawai'i has the legal authority to directly control the number of visitors who come here. **Thus, the ONLY legal tool we have to regulate tourist numbers is our ability to limit the accommodations available to them.** If visitors cannot book lodgings, they will not come, and reducing visitor demand is the only way we have to influence the number of incoming flights. **We already have MORE than enough hotel rooms and vacation condos to house the number of visitors Maui's infrastructure can properly handle, and MORE than enough to house a number of visitors equal to 33% of our resident population.** Building yet more capacity would only add to our existing problems.

The opposition to the proposed moratorium has been groundless and deceptive. Why do the hotels need to expand, when they are not operating at full capacity now? Not only that, but also, as noted in the Planning Department report on the moratorium, even more visitor accommodations are already set to open before the proposed moratorium could take effect. If the visitor lodging industry really needs more revenue, they can raise rates instead. As for construction workers, if they need jobs, they can get them from building affordable housing for residents, including their own ohanas and friends, instead of additional/expanded visitor accommodations. Construction union opposition to the moratorium bills is very short-sighted and narrow-minded, and does not reflect a commitment to the long-term well-being of the workers and their community.

As for the proposed phase-out of transient accommodations in apartment districts, it is a necessary complement to the moratorium. We do not want the moratorium on new visitor accommodations in hotel districts to result in more visitors occupying dwelling units that could be providing residents with long-term housing. That would defeat the purpose of the moratorium.

In addition, returning units that are currently being used as transient rentals to the long-term rental housing market will help ease Maui's current critical shortage of affordable housing. This Committee's primary goal should be providing affordable housing for residents, not protecting the property values of real estate investors and absentee vacation home owners. The financial self-interest of people wealthy enough to invest in real estate that they do not personally occupy should not take precedence over the interest of our local working families in having a primary residence they can afford.

Finally, buildings in apartment districts are intended to house **residents**, not visitors. Working families living in multi-unit buildings should not have to put up with a constantly changing population of visitors who have no ties to the community, and no incentive to ensure that their behavior does not negatively impact their neighbors.

The tourism pause necessitated by the pandemic gave us the perspective to see that we **MUST** diversify our economy, both to insulate it against future emergencies and to preserve residents' quality of life, as well as Maui's infrastructure and ecosystems. Let's not waste the present opportunity to build on that insight with actual policy changes. Let's not succumb to the pressure for tourism growth, when what we need is better tourism management. **Let's not build any more of what we have too much of already.** Instead, let's focus Maui's workforce and investment resources on the things we really **NEED** and **DON'T** have: affordable housing, updated infrastructure, more local food production, and a better future for our keiki, with good-paying jobs that enable them to stay on island.

Mahalo nui for your attention. - Sarah Hofstadter, Kihei resident and HALE Hawai'i Steering Team member