

Policy Report: Systemic Failures and Urgent Needs in Senior Care on Maui and Moloka‘i

In Response to the Executive Office on Aging Presentation – July 18, 2025

Prepared for: Maui County Council, WASSP Committee, Hawai‘i State Department of Health, and State Legislators

I. Executive Summary

The **Executive Office on Aging (EOA)** claims its mission is to “*optimize the health, safety, and independence of Hawai‘i’s older adults*” while ensuring “*independence, dignity, respect, and freedom from abuse and exploitation.*”

Yet the reality for **Maui** and **Moloka‘i** kupuna is the opposite:

- **Outdated, underfunded facilities**, including Hale Makua Wailuku (built in **1966**)
- **No comprehensive senior medical center** on Maui, and **no skilled nursing facility at all on Moloka‘i**
- **Nutritionally inadequate meals** in foster homes—sometimes fast food like McDonald’s
- **Staff shortages, low Medicaid reimbursement, and poor oversight**
- **No disaster evacuation or emergency medical plan for seniors**

The most polarizing truth:

“Politicians mandate condo owners to raise fees for safety, yet they let our kupuna live out their final years in crumbling buildings, foster care facilities serving McDonald’s, all while funneling millions to their friends’ non-profits.”

This report demands a **realignment of State and County funding priorities**—away from politically connected non-profits and toward **direct care facilities and programs that actually serve kupuna.**

II. Misallocation of Funds

Despite statutory obligations under **HRS §349** and the **Older Americans Act**, the State and County continue to prioritize **non-profit contracts with vague outcomes** over critical elder care infrastructure. Kupuna—who built our communities—are left in aging, medically inadequate facilities while public dollars are diverted to programs that serve political interests more than seniors.

III. Infrastructure Crisis

1. Hale Makua Wailuku: A 1966 Relic

- At nearly **60 years old**, Hale Makua operates in a building older than most of its caregivers.
- Politicians justify **mandatory condo maintenance fee hikes** for buildings half this age, citing safety—yet refuse to provide **maintenance funding for a medical facility caring for fragile seniors**.
- **Roselani Place** is newer but struggles financially and cannot expand to meet demand.

2. No Comprehensive Senior Medical Facility

- Maui lacks a **centralized care campus** for skilled nursing, dementia care, rehab, hospice, and long-term transitional housing.
- Molokaʻi has **no senior medical or skilled nursing facilities**, forcing kupuna to leave their island and families.

IV. Nutrition Failures and Exploitation

Licensed foster homes and some small care facilities:

- **Serve fast food or processed frozen meals** as regular nutrition.
- **Refuse to provide special diets**, even when medically required, citing cost.
- Expand capacity “**to collect more Medicaid funds**” rather than improving care.

Real-Life Example: A diabetic kupuna was repeatedly served sugary, fried foods against medical advice. When family protested, the operator said, *“This is what we serve. If you don’t like it, move her.”*

This reflects a **profit-driven culture with little oversight**—made worse because **oversight agencies are underfunded while political allies’ non-profits receive generous grants**.

V. Workforce Shortages

- **Low Medicaid reimbursements** do not cover Maui’s high cost of living.
- Caregiver and CNA shortages cause burnout, turnover, and declining quality of care.
- The State funds **workshops and non-profit initiatives** instead of **directly investing in training, wages, and staff housing**.

VI. Social Isolation and Mental Decline

Despite the EOA's stated priority to combat social isolation:

- Many seniors are **confined to their rooms for most of the day**.
- **Adult Day Care programs are full**, and transportation is unreliable.

Proper funding could address this, but again, **political favorites are prioritized over programs that directly impact kupuna**.

VII. No Emergency or Disaster Protocols

The **Lāhainā fire** exposed the lack of any plan to:

- Evacuate seniors in nursing or foster care homes.
- Provide backup oxygen, medications, or power during disasters.

Kupuna remain one major disaster away from another humanitarian crisis.

VIII. Policy Recommendations

✓ 1. Redirect Funding to Direct Care Facilities

- **Stop funneling millions to politically connected non-profits** with minimal measurable outcomes.
- Dedicate **annual State and County appropriations** for maintenance, equipment, and staff support at **Hale Makua, Roselani, and foster care facilities**.

✓ 2. Build a Maui Senior Health & Wellness Center

- A fully state-funded medical campus integrating:
 - Skilled nursing, rehab, and hospice
 - Memory care and adult day health
 - On-site medical clinics, dietary and recreation services

✓ 3. Mandate Nutrition Standards

- Require **medically appropriate diets, registered dietitian oversight, and surprise audits.**
- Ban fast food as a regular meal standard in licensed care facilities.

✓ 4. Increase Medicaid Reimbursement Rates

- Adjust for **Maui's cost of living and specialized diet needs.**

✓ 5. Workforce Development

- Fund **CNA and geriatric care training** at UH Maui.
- Provide **housing incentives and tuition forgiveness** for medical staff.

✓ 6. Strengthen Oversight & Abuse Prevention

- Expand **Adult Protective Services staffing** and require **transparent complaint reporting.**

✓ 7. Disaster Preparedness

- Mandate **annual evacuation drills, emergency supplies, and backup power** for all senior facilities.

IX. Conclusion

Hawai'i's kupuna are being neglected in plain sight. While politicians reward their allies with lucrative non-profit contracts, seniors are:

- **Living in buildings from 1966 with failing infrastructure**
- **Eating nutritionally inadequate meals, sometimes fast food**
- **Enduring social isolation, caregiver shortages, and poor medical oversight**

If condo owners are required to raise fees for safety, **kupuna deserve no less than full State and County investment in safe, modern, and dignified care.**

Redirect the funds. Invest in kupuna. Anything less is a moral failure.

Edward Codelia, Maui Resident