

Maui County Council – Government Relations, Ethics, and Transparency Committee (GREAT)

RE: Request for GREAT Review and Improvement of County Transparency Systems, Continuity, and Resident Understanding

Aloha Chair and Members of the GREAT Committee,

My name is Edward Codelia. I submit this written testimony for today's GREAT Committee agenda to respectfully ask the Committee to **review and improve how transparency and public participation function in practice for Maui County residents**, using this agenda and the County's existing systems as real-world examples.

At the outset, I want to be clear and fair: **Maui County generally complies with the Sunshine Law and the County Charter**. Agendas are posted, meetings are noticed, executive sessions are disclosed as required by law, and the public is provided opportunities for oral testimony. This testimony does **not** allege secrecy, misconduct, or legal noncompliance.

However, **legal compliance is not the same as public understanding**, and this agenda highlights where the system breaks down for ordinary residents.

What This Agenda Illustrates

This GREAT agenda involves:

- high-impact legal and financial matters,
- issues spanning multiple years,
- anticipated executive sessions, and
- decisions with real consequences for County liability and public trust.

From an internal governance perspective, the agenda is proper and thorough.

From a **resident perspective**, several problems appear immediately:

- There is **no clear statement that written testimony is accepted**, even though many residents cannot attend or testify live.
- There is **no plain-language explanation** of why these matters are appearing now, years after the underlying events.
- There is **no summary of what has already occurred**, what has changed, and what remains undecided.
- There is **no clear explanation of GREAT's role** in the decision chain—whether this committee's action is advisory, procedural, or effectively determinative.

A resident can read the entire agenda and still reasonably ask:

“How long has this been going on, why is it here now, what happens after today, and where does the public meaningfully fit?”

That uncertainty is not caused by secrecy. It is caused by **fragmentation and lack of continuity**.

The Larger System Problem

This agenda is not unique. It reflects a broader County-wide pattern:

- Many issues take **years or decades** to reach Council committees.
- They may disappear from public view for long periods.
- When they return, residents are given **no historical bridge** to reconnect.
- Institutional memory exists, but **public memory does not**.

Transparency resets at each meeting, even when the issue itself is long-running.

This creates a system where:

- experienced insiders navigate easily,
 - ordinary residents struggle to re-engage, and
 - trust erodes even when all rules are followed.
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Where Maui County Already Does Well

It is important to recognize what already works:

- Agendas and documents are posted.
- Meetings are accessible.
- Executive sessions are properly noticed.
- Departmental information exists.
- Planning, permitting, and budget systems are functional.

The County already has **the data and the records**.

What is missing is **connection, context, and continuity for residents**.

Proven Models That Already Work Elsewhere

What I am requesting is **not theoretical**. Other jurisdictions already do this well.

At the **federal level**, lobbying and campaign finance disclosure is searchable, bill-specific, and usable by the public. Residents and journalists can cross-reference influence without forensic work.

At the **state level**, California (Cal-Access) and Washington (Public Disclosure Commission) provide unified portals where PACs, lobbyists, bills, payments, and positions are searchable in one place. These systems are designed for public understanding, not just compliance.

At the **municipal level**, cities like Los Angeles and Seattle maintain local lobbyist registries tied directly to council agenda items and ordinances, with resident-facing summaries and dashboards.

These systems share three traits Maui County currently lacks:

- unified searchability,
- bill- or item-level clarity, and
- resident-centered design.

None of these jurisdictions ban lobbying or advocacy. They simply make influence and process **legible** to the public .

What I Am Asking GREAT to Do

I am not asking for enforcement, accusations, or immediate ordinances. I am asking GREAT to **review the system itself** and consider modest, practical improvements.

Specifically, I ask the Committee to consider:

1. **Clear, standardized notice of written testimony**
Every agenda should clearly state whether written testimony is accepted and how residents can submit it.
2. **Plain-language context for agenda items**
Brief explanations of:
 - how long an issue has been under consideration,
 - what has already occurred, and
 - why it is before the committee now.
3. **Continuity tools for long-running matters**
When items reappear after long absences, require short public-facing summaries bridging past and present.
4. **Persistent issue tracking**
Significant matters should have stable public pages that follow them across committees, departments, and years.
5. **Clear explanation of committee role and next steps**
Residents should be able to understand whether GREAT's action today is advisory, procedural, or final—and what happens next.

6. Resident-focused transparency outcomes

Transparency should allow residents to understand:

- who is participating,
- in what capacity, and
- at what stage decisions are being made, without requiring specialized knowledge or outside research.

These steps are consistent with best practices already in use elsewhere and can be pursued incrementally without state law changes .

What “Better” Looks Like

From a resident’s point of view, success would mean:

- I know whether written testimony is accepted.
- I understand why an item is here now.
- I can see how long it has been in the system.
- I know what decisions remain and when I can still engage.
- I do not have to reconstruct history across multiple websites and years.

When transparency works this way, residents may still disagree with outcomes—but they no longer feel excluded or confused by the process.

Closing

This testimony began with a concern about how residents understand influence and decision-making. The answer is not to restrict lawful advocacy or criticize compliance, but to **improve how the public record functions for the people it is meant to serve.**

I respectfully ask GREAT to review and improve the County’s transparency system and process, using agendas like today’s as real-world examples, and to consider resident-centered improvements that preserve continuity, clarity, and trust over time.

Mahalo for your time, your service, and your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Edward Codelia
Maui County Resident