

May 16, 2026

Chair Johnson and Members of the Agriculture, Diversification, Environment and Public Transportation Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the proposed Climate Action and Resiliency Revolving Fund and the broader Climate Action and Resiliency Plan (CARP) framework currently being advanced by Maui County.

I support real resiliency investments that strengthen Maui County's disaster preparedness and critical infrastructure systems. What I do not support is creating another broad permanent funding and governance structure without strict oversight, measurable deliverables, clearly defined priorities, cost controls, and transparent public accountability.

People who actually live here, drive these roads, sit in this traffic, deal with flooding, watch erosion worsen, experience power outages, see infrastructure failures, and live through disasters want immediate, practical, cost-effective action. Not another expanding layer of government planning language, consultants, committees, studies, and administrative systems.

The Lahaina fire, recent Kona low storms, severe flooding, wind damage, erosion, drainage failures, infrastructure breakdowns, and growing strain on public systems have made one thing very clear:

Maui County is years behind where it should already be on real resiliency and infrastructure hardening.

However, the current proposal raises major concerns regarding:

- scope;
- long-term authority;
- governance expansion;
- funding structure;
- accountability;
- and operational reality.

The Climate Action and Resiliency Plan is not a narrow emergency infrastructure plan. It is an extremely broad policy framework that reaches into:

- infrastructure;
- transportation;
- land use;
- zoning;
- development standards;
- environmental regulation;
- building codes;
- permitting;

- shoreline management;
- and long-term county governance.

This proposal is no longer simply about emergency preparedness or disaster hardening. The County is now attempting to:

- institutionalize the CARP framework;
- establish permanent funding streams;
- create long-term administrative authority;
- tie future spending decisions to this framework;
- and potentially embed portions of it into the Maui County Charter itself.

That is a major expansion of long-term governmental authority and financial commitment.

Meanwhile, Maui's real-world vulnerabilities remain obvious to anybody who actually lives here:

- limited evacuation routes;
- isolated communities;
- aging roads and infrastructure;
- drainage failures;
- fragile water systems;
- wildfire exposure;
- wastewater vulnerability;
- utility instability;
- shoreline erosion;
- flood-prone corridors;
- and dependence on imported resources.

Those are the issues residents are worried about every day.

Therefore, if resiliency funding moves forward, it should first be narrowly focused on measurable public safety and infrastructure hardening projects, including:

- emergency water storage and distribution upgrades;
- wildfire fuel reduction and firebreak development;
- drainage, culvert, bridge, and stormwater modernization;
- hardened utilities and emergency communication systems;
- evacuation route improvements;
- emergency shelter capability;
- wastewater protection;
- slope stabilization and flood mitigation;
- and critical infrastructure protection during major disasters and prolonged outages.

The County should clearly explain:

- exactly what projects will be funded first;
- what measurable outcomes are expected;
- how success will be measured;
- what timelines exist;
- and what percentage of funding will go toward physical infrastructure versus administration, consultants, studies, and planning systems.

Right now, the framework is so broad that almost anything can potentially be labeled “resiliency.”

For example:

- could this fund eventually be used for shoreline stabilization projects like the Paia Mantokuji erosion issue?
- could it fund repetitive-loss property buyouts after severe storms?
- could it purchase flood-prone land in places like North Kihei?
- could future development restrictions, managed retreat programs, or hazard-area acquisitions eventually fall under this framework?

These are not unreasonable questions.

Around the country, climate adaptation and resiliency programs are increasingly being used for:

- floodplain acquisitions;
- shoreline retreat planning;
- hazard buyouts;
- wetland restoration;
- infrastructure relocation;
- land acquisition;
- and redevelopment influence.

Some of those actions may eventually make sense in certain locations. But residents deserve to understand the true long-term scope, authority, and financial exposure associated with this framework before permanent funding systems become institutionalized.

**There is also a major contradiction in this proposal.**

**The County openly acknowledges that increasing tourism strains Maui’s infrastructure and resources, yet it simultaneously proposes relying on tourism-generated transient accommodations tax revenue to fund mitigation of those same impacts.**

In simple terms:

tourism creates increasing infrastructure strain,  
 government collects more tourism taxes,  
 government then creates larger resiliency systems to manage the impacts caused by increasing tourism pressure.

That is not a long-term solution. That is a dependency loop.

Maui is geographically limited. Roads cannot expand forever. Water systems cannot expand forever. Wastewater systems cannot expand forever. Shorelines cannot retreat forever. Emergency access cannot expand forever.

At some point, Maui County must honestly discuss carrying capacity, infrastructure limits, and what level of growth these islands can realistically sustain long-term.

The County should also explain why it is necessary to permanently dedicate 20% of transient accommodations tax revenue before first demonstrating successful implementation through:

- existing carryover funds;
- current budget appropriations;
- federal grants;
- FEMA mitigation programs;
- and targeted hard infrastructure projects.

If resiliency is truly an urgent infrastructure issue, then the County should first prove it can successfully execute measurable physical improvements before permanently institutionalizing another protected funding system.

There are also serious concerns regarding efforts to potentially embed this framework into the Maui County Charter through Resolution 26-87.

The Charter is the County's constitutional governing document. It should not be used to lock broad and evolving policy frameworks into permanent governmental structure before long-term effectiveness, oversight safeguards, measurable benchmarks, and operational success have been demonstrated.

Once embedded into the Charter:

- future councils may have limited flexibility;
- future interpretations of "climate action" and "resiliency" may expand substantially;
- and future taxpayers may inherit permanent funding obligations regardless of changing economic conditions.

Residents deserve precise legal definitions and narrowly tailored language before any Charter-level institutionalization occurs.

There is also a larger operational reality that must be addressed honestly.

The Climate Action and Resiliency Plan is extraordinarily ambitious. It attempts to address:

- climate adaptation;
- infrastructure modernization;

- transportation transformation;
- land-use policy;
- wastewater adaptation;
- shoreline management;
- emergency preparedness;
- environmental restoration;
- and long-term emissions reduction simultaneously.

Yet Maui County government already struggles maintaining portions of its existing infrastructure systems and basic operational responsibilities.

The County does not possess unlimited:

- money;
- staffing;
- engineering capacity;
- procurement efficiency;
- technical workforce depth;
- implementation capability;
- or long-term administrative continuity.

Many of Maui's largest vulnerabilities also extend beyond direct county control, including:

- fuel dependency;
- imported food dependency;
- utility grid structure;
- state transportation systems;
- harbor systems;
- telecommunications;
- healthcare capacity;
- insurance instability;
- and federal disaster coordination.

Ambition alone does not create resiliency.

In government, ambition without operational discipline often produces the opposite:

- endless planning layers;
- expanding bureaucracy;
- overlapping studies;
- consultant dependency;
- delayed implementation;
- fragmented accountability;
- and worsening infrastructure hidden beneath increasingly sophisticated political language.

That is what many residents are worried about.

Maui County does not need another broad aspirational framework that slowly expands while critical infrastructure vulnerabilities remain unresolved.

The County needs prioritization.

A true resiliency strategy should begin by identifying:

- what infrastructure failures create the greatest life-safety risk;
- what systems fail first during disaster;
- what communities become isolated;
- what roads become impassable;
- what utilities lose redundancy;
- and what investments materially reduce catastrophic risk over the next 5 to 15 years.

That is operational resilience.

Most importantly, the County must distinguish between:

- practical infrastructure resilience;
- and
- broad long-term climate governance expansion.

Maui's immediate needs are operational:

- hardened infrastructure;
- survivable emergency systems;
- reliable evacuation capability;
- resilient water systems;
- utility redundancy;
- wildfire mitigation;
- drainage modernization;
- flood protection;
- and infrastructure continuity during catastrophic events.

Those priorities should come before expanding administrative structures, broad planning systems, consulting ecosystems, or open-ended resiliency governance frameworks.

If this fund moves forward, the Committee should insist upon:

- annual independent financial and performance audits;
- strict procurement transparency and public reporting;
- conflict-of-interest disclosures for contractors, nonprofits, consultants, and recipients;
- limitations on administrative and consulting overhead;
- measurable infrastructure benchmarks and timelines;

- and publicly accessible reporting demonstrating actual physical resiliency improvements achieved with taxpayer funds.

Long-term resiliency planning must also recognize that Maui County is geographically fragmented. West Maui, East Maui, Upcountry, South Maui, Moloka‘i, and Lāna‘i all face different infrastructure vulnerabilities, evacuation limitations, utility dependencies, and disaster risks. Any permanent resiliency governance structure should ensure balanced regional representation and transparent geographic allocation of resources so that funding does not simply concentrate within politically dominant districts or administrative priorities.

People living through these conditions every day are not asking for more slogans, more studies, or more permanent government expansion.

They are asking for clear, transparent, honest, cost-effective, and immediate action that materially improves Maui’s ability to survive and recover from real-world disasters.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Edward Codelia  
Maui Resident