

One month after deadly wildfires in Maui, public anger grows over government response

Kevin Martinez, Kimie Saito
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Friday marked the one month anniversary of the deadly Maui wildfires. The full scale extent of the devastation following the wildfires which erupted on August 8 is not being reported to any serious degree by the mainstream media. The confirmed death toll has remained at 115 for the last two weeks despite hundreds of people who remain unaccounted for. The official missing person list stands at 385, dropped from the previous 850 claimed to be missing, with many residents stressing that this is a gross underestimate.

While the fires are now mostly contained and do not pose a threat to any communities, water contamination continues with an unsafe water advisory being issued for some residents in the Lahaina and Upper Kula areas. Entry into the disaster areas is still prohibited in Lahaina and a health advisory remains in effect due to toxic chemicals and carcinogens in the burnt out ruins.

Although the media has essentially stopped reporting on the latest news from Maui, residents are still reeling from an ongoing disaster. A little over a week after President Joe Biden's short obligatory visit to Maui, claiming US government would "be with" the survivors of the fire "for as long as it takes," impacted residents have been largely left to their own devices, many of whom either stay in hotels in the north of the island or are now homeless.

Anger is boiling over the pittance of "help" being offered by the local, state, and federal government. The Biden Administration's insulting offer of \$700 per household and the overall negligent response of the authorities to a disaster that was long predicted continues to cause outrage.

At a Maui City Council Meeting on August 22, third-grade teacher Justin Hughey, who worked in Lahaina, pleaded with the council over allowing predatory private developers to prey on victims, saying, "This is

disaster capitalism... five billion dollars are coming to Maui and sticky fingers are here to take it all and develop everything without any input. Lahaina needs to decide what happens in Lahaina. And it's not just there, it's everywhere."

Residents pointed to the State of Emergency Proclamations issued three weeks prior to the fire with the stated purpose of streamlining development on the island and handing all decision making to an unelected official, Governor Josh Green's housing officer, Nani Medeiros.

The proclamation regarding homelessness is particularly disturbing as it waives numerous regulations for builders. Issued July 18, the proclamation suspends several laws, including historic preservation, environmental review, sunshine and collective bargaining, and replaces them with different rules designed to speed development under conditions where the median cost of a home is \$1.1 million

At an August 24 meeting of the Department of Education in Lahaina, over 600 parents, teachers, and students expressed major opposition to the total lack of communication from the DOE and any assistance to families. Parents were livid over the DOE sending out an email to parents encouraging them to enroll their children at other schools in Maui.

The Superintendent said of the 3,000 students in the Lahaina schools, 1,200 had either registered for the distance learning program, had enrolled at other schools in central or south Maui, or had transferred to the schools on the other islands or the mainland US. This meant that over 1,700 students were still not enrolled amid the devastation.

Malia, a Maui resident, told the WSWs, "Maui is a crime scene. Both Mayor Bissen and Governor Green are responsible for this...and Biden? Him too! Where is the

\$700 per family? That was pathetic. People still don't have that money, once it became clear what a disaster this was, he was an accomplice. He can't say, 'I didn't know.' That money should have been immediately put in everyone's bank account."

Malia also spoke to the massive social inequality on the island saying, "Hawaii is the most expensive place to live in the country. It's in the top 10. \$1,200 (a month) lands you a studio. People need everything because they lost everything. The Rock and Oprah are all millionaires, and are fine living up there. No one up there is coming down here to Lahaina. They're afraid to."

She described the homelessness on the island, saying, "It exploded less than five years ago. Lahaina was the capital of homelessness. There are many disabled people. There were homeless people on Front Street, and now they've had to move elsewhere. They've moved to the parks and endanger other people. The government is supposed to be helping them out, but they're not."

Malia was also skeptical of official casualties lists, saying "What happened to the 183 people that were floating in the water that the Coast Guard picked up? Bodies were being beached up on Lanai, which faces Lahaina. 115 is ridiculous. That number is mostly the elderly. The elderly cannot run. No children? No young adults? People in their 40s?"

She added, "I saw four 40-foot refrigerator trucks transporting people who died. They moved them somewhere. What about them?"



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