



January 5, 2024

The Honorable Josh Green, M.D.  
Governor  
State of Hawai'i  
415 South Beretania St.  
Honolulu, HI 96813

The Honorable Deanne Criswell  
Administrator  
Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20472

Gail J. McGovern  
Executive Director  
American Red Cross  
431 18th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20006

To Governor Green, Administrator Criswell, and Ms. McGovern:

On behalf of the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) and the NLIHC-led Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC), I urge the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the American Red Cross (ARC), and the State of Hawai'i to immediately cease the eviction of individuals who were experiencing homelessness in and around the area impacted by the 2023 Maui wildfires from transitional, non-congregate, shelter and designate them eligible for disaster case management services.

The DHRC includes more than 900 local, state, and national organizations, including many organizations working directly with disaster-impacted communities and with first-hand experience recovering after disasters. Together, we work to ensure that federal disaster recovery efforts reach all impacted households, including those with the lowest incomes.

NLIHC and the DHRC have been notified by partners working on Maui that 87 individuals received notice that they would be evicted from their hotel rooms on January 4, 2024. These individuals, who were experiencing homelessness in and around the area impacted by the 2023 wildfires, have also been informed that they will not be eligible for case management services or other governmental assistance based on their status as unhoused. We join our local partners in urging these evictions be stopped.

This situation is the latest in ongoing moves by recovery authorities to evict those experiencing homelessness from disaster-related transitional shelter on Maui, making it even more difficult for them to access assistance to recover and successfully exit homelessness. These 87 individuals had been spared from previous evictions due to their status as living with minor children, living with disabilities, or their immigration status. While the eviction of any disaster survivor from their transitional shelter based on their status as previously unhoused is unacceptable, these survivors face even greater barriers to accessing assistance from non-governmental sources.

Disasters like wildfires disproportionately impact the lowest-income survivors. At the same time, these survivors are least likely to receive the assistance that they need to fully recover, especially considering the current capacity of Maui's sheltering systems. One of the top priorities after a disaster must be ensuring all displaced survivors have a safe, accessible, and affordable place to live while they recover. Denying this right based on a survivor's previous status as unhoused or residing in shelters goes against the core principles of your agencies and government.

Given the number of resources, non-congregate shelters, professional expertise, and funding currently available on Maui, these evictions and denials of service are unconscionable and must be immediately remedied. FEMA, ARC, and the State of Hawai'i must work together to provide the 87 individuals facing eviction and other individuals that were experiencing homelessness in and around the area impacted by the 2023 wildfires access to non-congregate shelter and disaster case management services the same as any impacted renter and homeowner. We also ask that you make public your plan to provide services, shelter, and assistance to disaster survivors that were experiencing homelessness prior to the fire until safe, accessible, housing is made available to them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane Yentel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Diane Yentel  
President and CEO  
National Low Income Housing Coalition

CC:

Major General Kenneth Hara, Director, Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency  
James DS. Barros, Administrator, Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency  
Mayor Richard T. Bissen, Jr., County of Maui, Hawai'i