

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 28, 2023

The Honorable Ur M. Jaddou
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20529

Dear Director Jaddou:

We write regarding the recovery efforts needed to address the unique issues facing the Maui immigrant community in the wake of the Lahaina wildfires. Your agency's work is critical in the response to this disaster, and we ask you to continue and expand your efforts.

As you know, Lahaina had a large foreign-born population. When the wildfires destroyed their homes and possessions, in many cases, it also destroyed their legal documents. Many members of our immigrant communities now lack the main identification showing they are legally in the United States, and replacing the paperwork is expensive and time-consuming. Survivors of the wildfire need assistance in alleviating any additional challenges they might face, and this encompasses tasks such as replacing immigration documents.

Your agency has recognized this additional burden and has taken steps to alleviate it. We appreciate U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) sending staff and mobile biometrics equipment to Maui to help survivors replace their immigration documents. Your staff's presence at the disaster recovery center, resource fairs, and other events is welcome outreach to a vulnerable population. We ask you to continue your commitment to the recovery process.

As recovery efforts unfold, we request that, at a minimum, you take the following actions in your response for individuals impacted by wildfire:

- Mobile biometrics equipment and staff should remain in Maui for as long as possible to eliminate the need for survivors to travel to Oahu to complete their document replacement procedures.
- USCIS headquarters should issue guidance that fee waiver requests will be looked at favorably. Since numerous survivors might lack alternative evidence due to its destruction in the wildfire, USCIS should also accept self-attestations for fee waiver requests.

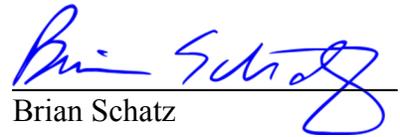
- Similar to past USCIS efforts to issue fee exemptions to specific vulnerable populations, bold ideas like blanket fee exemptions and streamlined processes should be pursued, even on a temporary basis.
- USCIS should expand fee waivers to additional documentation, such as paperwork related to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).
- Any “no-show” immigration appointments should be automatically rescheduled in acknowledgment that many people are unable to attend their appointments.
- USCIS should announce policy flexibilities and automatic extensions of relevant deadlines for applicants affected by the wildfire.
- Guidance should be provided to indicate alternative venues for receiving official paperwork or correspondence, particularly in cases where individuals may not have access to their mail.
- Due to the substantial Limited English Proficiency population within the Lahaina community, public-facing information should be translated into the major languages spoken by the community, including Ilocano, Tagalog, Spanish, Chuukese, and Tongan. USCIS should also take proactive measures to make its Contact Center and services easily accessible to these populations by actively informing these individuals about any available interpretation services.
- While the USCIS Policy Manual currently notes “emergencies and urgent humanitarian reasons” as one of the criteria for expediting requests, USCIS should maximize processes to expedite replacing any documents destroyed by the wildfire.
- Considering that survivors have been displaced to the neighbor islands or the mainland, USCIS should extend their services and outreach to all survivors no matter where they currently reside.

As Maui recovers and rebuilds, the full force of the federal government is needed. We ask that your agency continue working constructively to maximize assistance to impacted individuals. Please stay in close contact with our offices as issues arise so we can continue to work together on this incredibly important issue.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress

Ed Case

Ed Case
Member of Congress