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Newsletter | August 2023

Maui immigrants in great need following the catastrophic fires



Image Source: Deanne Fitzmaurice for NPR. A sign "Lahaina Strong" is on a tunnel as you leave Lāhainā.

The Legal Clinic (TLC) stands in solidarity with our Maui 'ohana impacted by the devastating wildfires in Lāhainā. The recent fires have brought to light the unique challenges immigrants face, especially those who are out-of-status, undocumented,

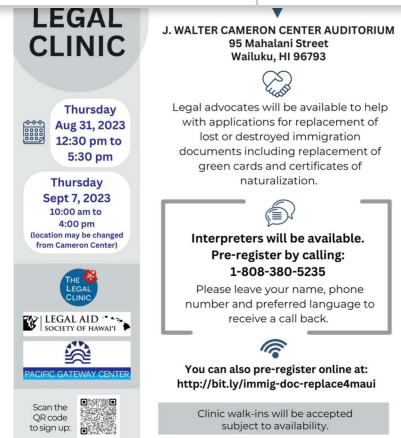
only, fear that receiving resources will negatively impact their immigration status, and distrust of government institutions have made it difficult for individuals to access emergency shelter, food, medical assistance, and other resources. As a result, these individuals have been relying on family and friends, churches, and grassroots nonprofits, rather than receiving government aid that may be available to them. The barriers that many Maui residents face today are all too similar to those that came to light during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the fire disaster, TLC has been joining calls organized by the [Hawai'i Coalition for Immigrant Rights](#) (HCIR) with over 50 local service providers, including on-the-ground responders, to address these concerns and to protect the rights of immigrant and migrant residents. TLC is responding to the requests for legal assistance from our Maui-based colleagues, like immigration attorney and TLC board member [Kevin Block](#) and Michelle Tardiville of the [Maui County Office of Immigrant Services](#). Kevin believes that around 30% of the estimated 4,500 displaced Lahaina residents are immigrants (NBC 2023). The majority of clients he serves in the DACA program are Latinos from Lāhainā, many of them from mixed immigration status families. As a result, well over 1,000 immigrants are left vulnerable and in immediate need of aid. ([Read more about Maui's impacted Latino community here](#)).

The loss of essential documents like passports, proof of citizenship, or green cards adds an extra layer of hardship to the already challenging circumstances of losing homes, transportation, jobs, and loved ones. Many disaster relief programs require applicants to show identification, but non-US citizens can't always get their documents easily replaced. To apply for F.E.M.A. (part of Homeland Security), someone in the household must be a U.S. citizen or a [qualified non-citizen](#) with a social security number. Maui-based nonprofits such as [Roots Reborn Lahaina](#) and [Maui Economic Opportunity](#) have already been working with consulates from around the world to help Maui residents get replacement documents, and the need is great for immigration attorneys like TLC to assist.

TLC is doing its part to help those affected by the fires.

well as ongoing remote legal services from our Honolulu office. Our legal team is coordinating with other immigration legal experts (Kevin Block of [Maui Immigration Law](#), Rebecca Leibowitz of [Legal Aid](#), and Terrina Wong from [Pacific Gateway Center](#)) to assist Maui residents with replacing immigration documents and more. TLC attorney Omar Vaquerano, a native Spanish speaker, will be on Maui on **August 31 and September 7**, and likely more often in the coming months. [Please share this workshop flyer](#) (also available in Spanish, Tagalog, Ilokano, Chuukese, Tongan, and Marshallese).



[View flyer translations](#)

- Staff will also assist clinic attendees in applying for waivers to avoid the costly fees imposed by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which can cost between \$400-800. Some of the applications won't qualify for fee waivers however, so TLC will be exploring alternate ways to help subsidize such costs.
- We are in the process of learning how to best advocate for increased funding, language access, and other resources to support immigrants in our state, especially post-disaster, through meetings with state and national agencies and other immigrant advocacy groups. Stay tuned for what we learn!
- TLC stands ready to support Pacific Gateway Center's new immigrant resource center on Maui. This will initially be established at the J. Walter Cameron Center in Wailuku and will be staffed by [bilingual community navigators](#).

How You Can Help

- Donate to [The Legal Clinic](#), [Roots Reborn](#), and/or [HCIR](#)
- If you speak Spanish, Tagalog, Ilokano, Chuukese, Marshallese, or Tongan and have the flexibility to assist with interpretation or translation during weekdays, complete our [volunteer application form](#) online.
- Volunteer as a receptionist at TLC's Honolulu office (or remotely) at least 3 hours a week during the weekday, for a minimum of 3 months. [Apply here](#).
- Follow our updates on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and support our advocacy efforts as we post them. This might involve writing letters to legislators, helping with fundraising efforts, or serving on a volunteer committee.

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TLC's mission is to ensure justice for low-income immigrants and migrants in Hawai'i through high-quality immigration legal services, education, and advocacy.

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