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**Hawaii Wildfire Victims Spared From Testifying After Deal Over $4B Settlement**

Lawyers representing victims of a deadly Hawaii wildfire reached a last-minute deal averting a trial that was scheduled to begin Wednesday over how to split a $4 billion settlement.

The agreement means victims and survivors will not have to testify, reliving in court details of the massive inferno in Lahaina that killed more than 100 people, destroyed thousands of properties and caused an estimated $5.5 billion worth of damage.

Before the trial was scheduled to begin Wednesday morning, lawyers met in private with Judge Peter Cahill, who later announced that a deal had been reached. Lawyers, who reached the deal late Tuesday, are expected to file court documents detailing the agreement in a week.

Some victims had been ready to take the witness stand, while others submitted pre-recorded testimony, describing pain made all the more fresh by the recent destruction in Los Angeles.

“Some folks I’m sure will be disappointed, because in their minds this was their time to share their story,” Jacob Lowenthal, one of the attorneys representing individual plaintiffs, said Wednesday. “Other folks are going to be relieved because they don’t have to go in and testify.”

One of the individual plaintiffs is Kevin Baclig, whose wife, father-in-law, mother-in-law and brother-in-law were among the 102 people known to have died.

Baclig said in a declaration that if called to testify he would describe how for three agonizing days he searched for them — from hotel to hotel, shelter to shelter. “I clung to the fragile hope that maybe they had made it off the island, that they were safe,” he said.

A month and a half went by and the grim reality set in. He went to the Philippines to gather DNA samples from his wife’s close relatives there. The samples matched remains found in the fire. He eventually carried urns holding their remains back to the Philippines.

“The loss has left me in profound, unrelenting pain,” he said. “There are no words to describe the emptiness I feel or the weight I carry every day.”

Hawaii Gov. Josh Green announced the $4 billion settlement — agreed by the state, power utility Hawaiian Electric, large landowners and others — about a year after the deadliest U.S. wildfire in a century devastated Lahaina in 2023. At the time, he touted the speed of the deal to “avoid protracted and painful lawsuits.”

The trial was supposed to determine a percentage split between two groups of plaintiffs, including some who filed individual lawsuits after losing their family members, homes or businesses, and other victims covered by class-action lawsuits, including tourists who canceled trips to Maui because of the blaze.

Only a nominal portion of the settlement should go to tourists whose trips were delayed or canceled, Lowenthal said previously.

“The categories of losses that the class is claiming are just grossly insignificant compared to our losses,” he said.

Attorneys for the class have not responded to an email from The Associated Press seeking comment on the averted trial.

In their trial brief, they challenged the idea that everyone who has a claim worth suing over had already done so. Many people held off hiring attorneys, the brief said, because of the fire’s disruption to life, “distrust in heavy attorney advertising, and a desire to see how the process plays out first.”

Separately, the state Supreme Court is considering whether insurers can sue the defendants for reimbursement for the $2 billion-plus they have paid out in fire claims, or whether their share must come from the $4 billion settlement. Oral arguments in that case are scheduled for Feb. 6.

“That is the last big piece that needs to be decided before the global settlement can move forward,” Lowenthal said.

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