

# No stranger to tragedy, Maui Police Chief John Pelletier led response to 2017 Vegas massacre



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Maui Police Chief John Pelletier is no stranger to responding to mass tragedy. Nearly six years before disaster struck in the form of wildfires that ripped through parts of the island and killed at least 99 people, he was on the ground in the aftermath of the deadliest mass shooting in modern U.S. history.

Pelletier was named chief of the the Maui Police Department in 2021 after more than two decades working in Las Vegas. On Oct. 1, 2017, Pelletier was the incident commander covering the Strip when a gunman unleashed a hail of bullets on a country music festival, killing 58 people and injuring hundreds more.

Pelletier over the weekend referenced his experience in Las Vegas while describing the the long, painstaking process of identifying the remains of the dozens of people recovered from the burned area so far, and asked for patience with the process. Officials said they'll start releasing names Tuesday, after families have been notified.

"Give us a little bit of time," Pelletier said at a news conference. "We've got to go make 89 notifications. And coming from a place that had to make 58, I understand the pain this is going to take, and we're not done with 89."

Officials say they expect the death toll to rise significantly over the next several days as crews search the area burned in the wildfires.

"When we find these – you know, our family and our friends – the remains we're finding is through a fire that melted metal. We have to do rapid DNA to identify them," Pelletier said.

Here's what to know about Pelletier:

## 22-year veteran of Las Vegas police

Before moving to Maui, Pelletier was with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department for 22 years, where he rose through the ranks and became captain, the Maui News reported when he was named chief of police.

The third-generation police officer had also been the commander of the Major Violator/Narcotics Bureau since 2020, the outlet reported. He has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Nevada Las Vegas and also earned a certificate from the FBI academy.

He was born in Buffalo, New York, and moved around the country before settling in Las Vegas at the age of 17, according to the Honolulu Civil Beat. He said he had been visiting Hawaii for more than 20 years, the Maui News reported.

With the Las Vegas police, he managed three different area commands, including the Las Vegas Strip.

## Pelletier says experience during massacre prepared him for post

Pelletier told a commission considering him for the Maui chief job that his vast experience in policing a large tourist destination while understanding the local community made him a good fit, the Las Vegas Review Journal reported in 2021.

He also said responding to the 2017 massacre would make him prepared to handle any situation. He described leading the area command that night as his greatest professional achievement to the commission, according to the outlet.

"It took years to build that response. It took years to get that right, but we got that right, and we got our hands around it, and we did something incredible," he said of the police response at the time. "We took the biggest crime scene, second only to 9/11, and we did everything to mitigate that. We brought a community together. We did something really, really great."