Aloha Chair Moore, Members of the Board of Regents and President Lassner,

My name is Momi Kamahele and I present this testimony as a teacher. I am Associate Professor at Leeward Community College and I have taught Hawaiian Studies in the UH system for over 20 years. Most importantly, I am a Kumu Hula with deep roots and strong ties to the Native Hawaiian cultural traditions of my ancestors having been a cultural practitioner continuously for over five decades.

Months ago testimony was provided to the Board of Regents to create a new BOR Standing Committee for Native Hawaiian Affairs (the Committee) and a new UH System Office of the Vice President for Native Hawaiian Affairs (the Office). Both the Committee and the Office would ensure strong structural support for the University’s commitment to Native Hawaiians and to become a Model Indigenous-Serving Institution that would be responsible for coordinating and implementing things Hawaiian.

I ask you to imagine a world in which such a Committee and Office already existed and in place right now. Could this present controversy over the Thirty Meter Telescope have been avoided with the existence of an Office? I think so. Or at least the different views on the telescope between the University and the Native Hawaiian community would have been expressed earlier, years earlier with clearer lines of communication between the two parties.

I am not saying that the existence of the Committee and the Office would prevent future conflicts or disagreements. Rather I am saying the Office would be working with the Native Hawaiian community and its various organizations including Pūko’a so a two-way conversation is always maintained with integrity and respect.

As a professor and Kumu Hula, I have a kuleana to teach my students critical thinking and apply that practice to the world in which they live. One way I accomplish this is to teach that ‘Āina is more than land, more than property, more than location. It is our beloved kupuna. Mauna Kea does not just represent our kupuna it is our ancestor, our grandparent, our parent.
Placing the Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea, on our beloved kupuna, is an act of desecration to our kupuna, our ‘Āina and our cultural beliefs. We are Mauna Kea because we are of the ‘Āina.

Thus, I strongly support all University of Hawai‘i students and colleagues along with Native Hawaiians from all walks of life in their expression of discontent over the construction of a Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea. I also support the cultural expression of Kapu Aloha being implemented and practiced at Mauna Kea.

I ask that the Board of Regents stop the construction of the TMT. This will signal to all the island communities that the commitment of the University of Hawai‘i to be a Model Indigenous-Serving Institution is serious and not just talk. Creating the BOR Committee and the Office would demonstrate the University's willingness to hear the views of the Hawaiian community and willingness to work together as we go into the future. Once again, you are in a unique position to make this possible.

Mr. Chair, thank you for your commitment to higher education and your leadership in the face of these challenging political and economic times. My mahalo nui loa extends to you also, Board members. Thank you.

Ke Aloha Pumehana,

Momi Kamahele

Momi Kamahele
Kumu Hula, Wai‘anae
Associate Professor, Hawaiian Studies
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