PERSONAL TESTIMONY IN STRONG OPPOSITION TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TMT ON MAUNAKEA

TO BE HEARD BY THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Maya L. Kawaiulanaokeawaiki Saffery. I submit this testimony in strong opposition to the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on Maunakea as a Kanaka (Native Hawaiian) educator and cultural practitioner who is genealogically tied to Mauna a Wākea (Maunakea) and all the many kūpuna (ancestors) who continue to reside there. My deep commitment to aloha ʻāina (the practice of loving and protecting the land) motivates me to add my voice to the collection of voices you hear today calling for a permanent halt to any further development on our sacred mauna (mountain).

As a tenured faculty member and former and current student at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa (UH Mānoa), I take the university’s commitment to “promote a Hawaiian place of learning” (Achieving Our Destiny, 2011-2015 UHM Strategic Plan, p. 6) very seriously. It is my kuleana (responsibility, obligation) as a Kanaka working at the university to not only contribute to the realization of a Hawaiian place of learning on my campus through my own professional and scholarly work, but also to hold the institution and its leaders accountable when they engage in actions that fall short or, in this case, conflict entirely with this strategic goal.

While a “Hawaiian place of learning” can be understood in many ways, I know for sure that they cannot exist without Hawaiians and should in fact be shaped and stewarded by Hawaiians. In addition, Hawaiian places of learning facilitate the revival of our land- and water-based practices; they recognize these practices as spiritual, cultural, and scientific all at the same time; they encourage development of new knowledge inspired by and grounded in ancestral knowledge; and they help to raise the consciousness of our community about our past and present so that we can work towards a future where justice prevails, Kānaka flourish, and our Native voices and knowledges matter.

On the contrary, Hawaiian places of learning do not ignore the shared genealogy of Kānaka and our ʻāina; they do not erase the presence and voices of our people and our allies; they do not restrict access to or contribute to the desecration of our sacred places and fragile ecosystems in the name of innovation; they do not disregard our fight to protect our fragile ecosystems as the actions of an uneducated people stuck in the past; they do not advocate for the pursuit of knowledge no matter what the cost; and they do not appropriate Hawaiian words and values in order to distract attention away from projects motivated by greed and power that will serve to negatively impact Hawaiians and Hawaiʻi as a whole.

With these perspectives in mind, there should be no question that the construction of the TMT on Maunakea is in direct conflict with UH’s commitment to promoting a Hawaiian...
place of learning as well as all the other relevant legal, environmental, and moral standards and regulations. But for those of you who are still not convinced, I challenge you to make the journey to Maunakea yourself, engage with the protectors of the mauna face to face, and see with your own eyes the land and water that will be impacted by a structure 18 stories high, 2 stories deep, and 5 acres across. After allowing yourself to be touched by the mana of that place and the aloha of its protectors, then ask yourself, can I still in good conscience support the TMT? I do not know how you could still say yes.

Naʻu nō me ka ʻoiaʻiʻo,

Na Maya L. Kawaiłanaokeawaiki Saffery