Dear Members of the Board of Regents,

I would like to voice my support for the Thirty Meter Telescope on Maunakea.

My name is Chris Stark, and I am writing this on my own behalf. I attended Hawaii public schools on Hawaii Island from first grade through graduation. Subsequently, I attended the University of Hawaii at Manoa for both my Bachelor's and Master's degrees. I have had the good fortune of being able to work in the technology industry in Hawaii for my entire professional career.

While growing up in North Kohala, I always found it a thrill to drive into Kawaihae or Waimea on a clear day and be able to excitedly point out the observatories gleaming in the sun atop Maunakea -- it was especially thrilling when there was snow up there, too. I wasn't particularly aware of what the observatories were back then, but nevertheless, they were as much a landmark as the white harbor in Kawaihae, the pines planted in the shape of a "P" on Pu'u Hoku'ula in Waimea, or the distant little lump on the base of Hualalai that I would proudly inform everyone was called Pu'u Wa'awa'a. No one I knew felt any different; these things were a part of our island home.

After working in my chosen profession for a number of years on Oahu, I actively sought out a position within the astronomy community. I was fortunate to find a job as an IT Engineer for Gemini Observatory. What has impressed me from the very beginning has been the profound respect that my colleagues have for not only the Hawaiian culture, but also for the majestic mountain itself. While we certainly understand and respect the deeply sacred nature of Maunakea, how can a distinction be made that any part of this place we call home is any less sacred? Our best bet is to treat the whole of our home with a deep respect, and that's what we do.

Since we all seem to agree that this mountain is deeply sacred, what appears to be in contention as of late, is the definition of the word "desecration". I don't think there will ever be universal agreement as to what constitutes desecration, as the word truly only derives meaning through the lens of each individual's perspective. In cases like these, there will always be a person or a group whose opinions and beliefs will be insulted by the outcome. There is no avoiding this as long as individuals have unique points of view.

I believe the best measure to use in judging this complex and contentious issue is to look at the intentions of the TMT. Is their intention to desecrate the mountain? If you look at the arduous process by which TMT has engaged the community and met with demand after demand, I'd say it's clear that they are intending to do just the opposite. There is no pleasing everyone, and feelings will be hurt -- and perhaps even outraged. However, the long term outcomes of having TMT as one of our colleagues and neighbors -- beyond the cutting edge science that will take place -- is that our community and our children will be enriched with opportunities that on Hawaii Island especially we are in such desperate need.

Having grown up here, I have immeasurable respect for the culture. While I know there is no way to please everyone, I do know that the individual commitments made by those of us in the astronomy community are a promise to be respectful and humble stewards of Maunakea. I have read a wealth of information about TMT's plans, and they are nothing short of respectful, accommodating, and inspiring.

I also understand that one of the unfortunate side effects of democracy is the tendency toward minority opinions being silenced or overlooked. Please consider carefully all sides of this issue, and continue forward with a path that ultimately will benefit Hawaii in the long term. Personally, I believe this path forward involves the Thirty Meter Telescope.
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Chris Stark
Information Systems Engineer
Gemini Observatory