Aloha. I am sending this email with an attachment that represents my testimony for the BOR meeting scheduled for Maui on September 26. I plan to testify but I may be late. In the event that I do not physically testify, please accept this attachment as my testimony for the record.

Please email me if there are any questions.

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"If the learner believes that institutional education is all that there is to learning, then their growth as a whole person will be stunted upon completion of the institutional credential." - Nicole R. Harper.

"Until the philosophy which holds one race superior than another, is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned,... until there no longer first class and second class citizens of any nation, until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance that the color of his eyes,... until that day the dream of lasting peace, world citizenship, rule of international morality, will remain in but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never attained.” - Robert Nester Marley

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Testimony Before the University of Hawai‘i Board of Regents
Objecting to President Lassner and the Board of Regents Failure to
Meaningfully and Formally Address Institutional Racism at the University of Hawai‘i

September 26, 2019

I am Kekailoa Perry, Associate Professor at the Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies in the Hawai‘iniūiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge at the University of Hawai‘i Mānoa. My testimony today will address the BOR and President’s failure to affirmatively, meaningfully and formally address institutional racism at the University of Hawai‘i via items IV and VIIB of your agenda.

President Lassner and members of the University of Hawai‘i Board of Regents (“BOR”): as the leaders of this university, you are failing miserably in every attempt to extinguish the fire caused by anti-Hawaiian and anti-local statements made by several senior, tenured white male professors at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Most responsible and conscious university leaders would expedite a serious and meaningful investigation while simultaneously outlining and implementing ways they intend to protect their campus community from the harm caused by racialized slurs and racial forms of discrimination. Your collective inaction and hollow responses thus far, shows a lack of consciously responsible leadership.

You were all notified on September 5 that several senior tenured white male professors made racialized slurs and racially discriminatory comments on emails and in public forums. Emails and recorded comments were presented to the UH leadership but no immediate and determinative action was taken. Instead, you all waited for two weeks before uttering a single word. In fact, the UH administration was completely silent until a courageous faculty member publicly blew the whistle on the UH leadership’s silence and non-action.

As I understand, you consulted with senior administrators, advisory groups, UH legal counsel and even the state attorney general’s office to craft the UH administration’s answer to the serious concerns raised. Disappointingly, the President’s statement made a shameful pivot away from the core issue of institutional racism, racialized discrimination, and anti-Hawaiian and anti-local hate speech and used the UH bully pulpit to create false equivalencies between perpetrators of racialized discrimination and the communities they target. The statement was outrageously ignorant and reinforced the marginalization of faculty, staff and students of color who feel that the campus is increasingly unsafe due to an entrenched form of institutional racism.

Today, the BOR will be approving the Mānoa Long-Range Development Plan. The LRDP is guided by the Mānoa Campus Framework for the Future (September 2019) (“Framework”). The Framework specifically states that it “embodies UH Mānoa’s core values – kuleana, hānai, ho’omalu and mālama – which reflect beliefs and aspirations to become a Hawaiian place of learning.” The Framework also claims that actions taken by the university administration will bring the campus under the “care and protection” of the administration and “provide spaces that are physically, mentally and emotionally safe on a daily basis and in times of need.” See, Framework at 6, 7.
Yet, when a serious attack on the safety of Hawaiian faculty and students through racialized slurs and discriminatory behavior arise, you all take no meaningful and determinative steps to ensure that the targeted individuals and ethnic groups will be protected. How can this BOR approve an LRDP and pledge to follow its primary framework of physical, emotional and mental safety while simultaneously ignoring the documented security concerns of faculty and students today? No reasonable and responsible leader should ever accept such a hypocritical and duplicitous approach to a serious issue like racial discrimination. But, that is exactly what you have done.

President Lassner and members of the BOR, your advisors and consultants are doing you a disservice by steering you toward a path of failure for which you are becoming very adept. Your actions grossly and foolishly underestimate our lāhui’s powerful fidelity to kapu aloha and pono. Remember, this is not a passing tide that you can recover from and resume the status quo. This is a “mighty wave” of trust and pono that will consume us all. You need to ask yourselves: am I prepared to drown? Do I know how to swim the currents of truth, justice and kapu aloha? There are so many faculty and students trying to teach you how to swim but, so far, no one is listening.

There is still time for you to act in a respectful manner that will serve all of our community. To start, I implore you to openly condemn the racial discrimination that is described above, to acknowledge your institutional complicity and responsibility, and to take meaningful steps to address the systemic racism corrupting our institution.

E Ola ka lāhui kūʻokoʻa mana piha.