



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Public Safety, Government Operations,
And Military Affairs
Tuesday, February 21, 2012 at 2:45 p.m.

by
Virginia S. Hinshaw, Chancellor
and
Richard J. Wainscoat
Astronomer, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
Chair, Light Pollution Working Group, International Astronomical Union

SB 2402 SD1 Relating to Light Pollution

Chair Espero, and members of the Committee. My name is Richard Wainscoat and I am here today to submit this testimony on behalf of the University of Hawai'i. The University of Hawai'i strongly supports this bill that is an important first step in reducing light pollution in Hawai'i.

Mauna Kea on the island of Hawai'i, and Haleakalā on the island of Maui, are two of the best astronomy sites in the world. Dark night skies are essential for these observatories to continue to operate. However, increasing urban lighting is threatening the dark night skies over these observatories. Light pollution extends well beyond county boundaries; lights from O'ahu have a major and growing impact on Haleakalā, and also affect Mauna Kea. Statewide legislation is needed to protect the observatories.

Astronomy in Hawai'i has a major economic impact. The present economic impact of astronomy is estimated to be \$150 to \$200 million per year.

The primary focus of this bill is proper shielding of outdoor lighting. Full shielding of lights is one of the most important techniques for protecting astronomical observatories from light pollution. Light emitted from poorly shielded fixtures at small angles above the horizontal travels enormous distances through the atmosphere, and is a major contributor to light pollution — it increases sky glow at remote locations, making it difficult or impossible to see faint objects. Fully shielded light fixtures emit no light above the horizontal, and therefore have much less impact on remote locations.

Full shielding also reduces glare, which is a very important safety factor, particularly for older drivers, and greatly reduces the impact of nighttime lighting on species that are affected by light at night, including endangered birds and turtles. Poorly designed and improperly shielded lights continue to be installed by government agencies, and a quick inventory of nighttime lighting shows that some of the most poorly shielded lighting is county and state lighting.

The present wording of SB 2402 SD1 affects only lighting by the state and state agencies. Careful use of all nighttime lighting in the State of Hawai'i — not just state lighting — including proper shielding, is required to protect the observatories.