



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Labor and Public Employment
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by

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HB 1537 – RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF MAUNA KEA MANAGEMENT

Chair Johanson, Vice Chair Eli, and members of the committee:

On behalf of the Office Mauna Kea Management (OMKM), thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 1537. OMKM strongly supports this bill. The establishment of positions and corresponding funding are critical to the ongoing and long term management of UH's managed lands on Maunakea.

For the past 18 and half years, OMKM has implemented and executed numerous studies and programs to protect Maunakea's cultural, natural and scientific resources as well as to protect the health and safety of those visiting UH's managed lands on Maunakea. At the time the Office was established in 2000, very little was known about the resources the Office was tasked to protect, prompting the need to first identify and establish baseline references for long-term monitoring of the status of the resources, and conduct studies to better understand the dynamics of the resources.

OMKM, guided by the 2009 Board of Land and Natural Resources approved Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP), has been developing programs called for in the CMP and implementing steps beyond identification and studies of the resources. For example, long-term monitoring of the condition of the resources, including historic properties (archaeological sites), biological and physical resources, invasive species and visitor impacts, require resource staffing and data managers to map and catalogue for retrieval information for use in resource management program development. The CMP also has a number of compliance elements, in particular compliance with DLNR permits for all the facilities, and other projects approved by DLNR, and monitoring and reporting requirements.

Over the past 10 years, the number of visitors to the upper elevations of the Maunakea has increased significantly. These are mainly tourists who are unaware of the cultural and environmental significance of Maunakea. Many are not aware of the health

hazards associated with traveling to nearly 14,000 feet above sea level and the potential to come down with altitude sickness, a life threatening condition. Nor are they aware of the hazards of driving on a steep, unimproved road and the potential harm they can inflict on themselves or others. Finally, they are unaware that emergency response is 30 to 40 minutes or longer, if they are on the summit, and that emergency vehicles are unable to travel quickly as they do on paved roads. Once on the paved road it is about another 45 minutes to reach a medical facility.

Clearly, education and outreach programs are necessary to raise awareness to help protect the resources, and inform the uninitiated about Maunakea. Social media has created communication challenges and requires immediate responses to curtail and correct misinformation that is broadcast to the world as well as to disseminate vital information to the public. Expansion of communication, education and outreach programs with the local community and visitors are an important aspect of OMKM's stewardship responsibilities.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.