LETTER OF OPPOSITION

April 15, 2015

To: The UH Board of Regents

Re: Opposition to the Construction of the TMT on Mauna Kea

Aloha mai kākou,

My name is Lokelani Brandt and I am a kanaka maoli female born in Kailua, O’ahu and raised in Hilo since the age of six. I graduated from Hawai‘i Community College with my A.A. in 2008 and in 2012 I graduated with my B.A. in Anthropology from UH Hilo. I am currently a candidate for the M.A. in Heritage Management. Since the Spring of 2013, I have been serving as a Lecturer at Hawai‘i Community College under the Hawai‘i Life Styles Program, where I teach Hawaiian Studies and Hawaiian Language.

You are all well aware of the opposition facing this endeavor, as evident in the flood of local and national news, various social media sites, radio and many other mediums. The Hawai‘i Island community has opposed this project since it’s inception for various reasons. I will express my perspective in this matter. During the 1970’s and 1980’s a series of studies were put forth describing the socio-economic, socio-cultural and health status of the Native Hawaiians. One such study that emerged in 1986 was the Ka‘ū: University of Hawai‘i Hawaiian Studies Task Force Report. In that report, it stated that:

“Hommond’s report describes the current status of Hawaiian in education and society in general. He suggests that the lack of higher education among Hawaiian adults is associated with low socioeconomic status.”

With the many studies that supported these findings, the University of Hawai‘i committed to the study and perpetuation of Hawaiian culture and language. These commitments are evident in every one of the ten campuses’ Institutional Learning Outcomes. According to the Institutional Learning Outcomes of UHM², ILO#3 states:

3. Value—Personal and Social Responsibility
   Students demonstrate excellence, integrity, and engagement through:
   3a. Continuous learning and personal growth
   3b. Respect for people and cultures, in particular Hawaiian culture
   3c. Stewardship of the natural environment
   3d. Civic participation in their communities

The Ka‘ū study laid the foundation for today’s Hawai‘i Papa O Ke Ao initiative, which strives to make the University of Hawai‘i and its ten campuses model indigenous-serving institutions¹. For years, Native Hawaiians have been grossly underrepresented in the UH System. Hawai‘i Papa O Ke Ao along with many others, have been working tirelessly to close this gap, and bring the Native Hawaiian community our of substandard socio-economic, and health statuses.

The University of Hawai‘i has become the platform where many of our Native Hawaiians seek research and technical skills, degrees, cultural competency, community engagement and much more. It has taken several decades to gain the trust of the Native Hawaiian community to engage and take part in the UH System. However, UH has become a birthplace of many great cultural practitioners, and cultural leaders.

With that said, the construction of the TMT has and will further jeopardize years of trust building between the UH system and the Native Hawaiian Community. This idea of trust is not only about our Native Hawaiian students, but our Native Hawaiian administrators, staff and faculty as well. How can we continue to teach and honor our ILO’s, which speak directly to respect of the natural environment, and Hawaiian culture, when the UH is backing a project that proposes to cause more destruction to one of our sacred mountains and continue to disregard the voices of the Hawaiian people? If we continue to allow destruction of our mountaintops, these places will become unrecognizable landscape. Is this a part of the UH mission?

How is it that "consultation" can occur and yet, "consultation” never included hosting formal discussions with the various Hawaiian studies departments that are housed within the UH system? If the UH proceeds with this project, it has missed a huge opportunity to collaborate with and unite our communities. Thus far, this project has created huge divides among our Hawai’i communities. Is this a part of the UH mission?

As Kanaka Maoli, the native people of this land, we know that it was the stars the guided our ancestors to these very islands. We too value understanding our divine origins and cosmos, but not at the expense of destroying our natural environment. My ancestors created elaborate myths and cosmological chants that details how we arrived here in Hawai’i. Our most sacred plant, the kalo, is said to have been born from a cosmological union between Ho’ohōkūlani and Wākea. These are the things that we teach our students here at Hawai’i Community College. At Hawai’i Community College, we value cultural diversity and the natural landscape of Hawai’i and it is evident on our campus.

I will not allow the "quest for knowledge" to justify the destruction of our mountaintop. As Kanaka Maoli, we have suffered enough social, economical and political injustices. If the UH proceeds with this project, it will only add to the trauma. I ask you to please reconsider this project. There are too many things at stake that even billions of dollars cannot buy! Please respect our mountains and all things Hawai’i.

mahalo,

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