



American Folklore Society

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March 20, 2020

The Honorable David Y. Ige
Governor, State of Hawaii
Executive Chambers
State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Governor Ige:

The American Folklore Society stands in solidarity with Native Hawaiians and their allies who are peacefully protecting Mauna a Wākea, commonly referred to as Mauna Kea, and Native Hawaiians' access to this place of utmost cultural significance.

For over seven months now, hundreds and on certain days thousands of *kia'i* (protectors) have been gathered since July 15, 2019 at the Access Road to Mauna a Wākea where a *Pu'uhonua*, or place of refuge, has been reestablished in peaceful opposition to the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT). While there are many different interests at stake in the future of Mauna a Wākea, as a professional organization that enacts an "inclusive view of culture and creativity in communities by examining expressive life across boundaries of time and distance," we see the *kia'i* as exercising their right to sovereignty and connection with the land.

Mauna a Wākea is recognized in oral and written tradition as the Sky Father Wākea's and the Earth Mother Papahānaumoku's first born of five mountains. This highest mountain in Hawai'i is a sacred place to many Hawaiians today, a home of deities and hundreds of historic sites, and a place of spiritual and genealogical connection; as such, Mauna a Wākea is the site of recognized cultural resources and for living cultural practices.

On Mauna a Wākea there are already 13 telescopes, several of them now obsolete for scientific purposes. Building a new gigantic structure will not only impact the aquifer that feeds the lands below but will also further despoil a place of cultural and religious value. While legal challenges to the construction of the TMT and jurisdiction over the Mauna Kea conservation district have been ongoing for many years, recent actions undermine Native Hawaiian people's sovereignty as well as their legal rights to peacefully assemble and to engage in religious ceremonies at sacred sites.

The American Folklore Society's Executive Board unequivocally believes in, and affirms the legitimacy of, the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain cultural and political sovereignty. The American Folklore Society recognizes our collective responsibility to respect and advocate for the cultural practices associated with these ancestral lands as a

valued component of our shared human heritage. As a professional society of folklorists, we understand it to be our ethical and professional responsibility to urge leaders to balance developments with cultural sensitivity and respect for sacred spaces.

We stand in solidarity with the protectors of Mauna a Wākea and the Native people of Hawai'i who are protecting their sovereignty and we urge legislative leaders to respect sacred traditions and their environmental platforms through serious consultation with the Mauna Kea protectors.

Respectfully,

The Executive Board of the American Folklore Society

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