



Hawai'i Psychological Association

For a Healthy Hawai'i

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The protection of Mauna Kea as a means to improve Kānaka Maoli health

The mission of the Hawai'i Psychological Association (HPA) is to enhance the quality of life for the people of Hawai'i by encouraging, integrating, applying, and communicating the contributions of Psychology in all its branches. As a professional organization comprised of scientists and advocates of social justice, we stand in support of Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians) who are standing as *kia'i* (protectors) of Mauna Kea against the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on this sacred site.

While this issue is new to many, the truth of the matter is that there has been over 50 years of documented mismanagement and broken promises with regard to telescopes being built on Mauna Kea. Kānaka Maoli have been actively working to protect the mauna (mountain) and its sacred sites from desecration since the 1960's when the first telescope was built without a permit. Cultural protection and revitalization of historical and sacred places are important social and cultural determinants of health for Kānaka Maoli. They are as important to health as access to safe and well-resourced neighborhoods, excellent education, healthy food options, physical activity opportunities, and quality health care.

The illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893 by a group of business men and the U.S. government has been documented as such and acknowledged by President Bill Clinton and the Apology Act of 1993. At the time of the overthrow, Queen Lili'uokalani spoke these words, "Now to avoid any collision of armed forces, and perhaps the loss of life, I do this under protest and impelled by said force yield my authority until such time as the Government of the United States shall, upon facts being presented to it, undo the action of its representatives and reinstate me in the authority which I claim as the Constitutional Sovereign of the Hawaiian Islands", an act of Kapu Aloha (peaceful stand). In 1959, as stipulated in Section 5(f) of the Admission Act, 1.4 million acres of land was gifted back to the Hawaiian Nation for "the betterment of the conditions of native Hawaiians." Mauna Kea is part of these protected lands that were given in reparation for past aggressions. However, once again, the devastating impacts of colonialism are found at the intersection of Business versus Culture, not Science versus Culture, as they would have people believe. The argument of Business versus Culture is one that Indigenous peoples have been on the losing side of for far too long. HPA is standing in opposition to this oppression and in support of Kānaka Maoli to finally have the justice they deserve. Construction of the TMT on Mauna Kea will have a devastating effect on Kānaka Maoli health, not to mention ecological health with regard to the permanent damage to the winds, climate, and water aquifers of the area.

The effects of cultural trauma have been well documented with regard to higher rates of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes and behavioral health issues, such as depression and substance use. The continued colonization, dispossession, and displacement of Kānaka Maoli will only further this trauma and its adverse effects. The Social Justice Report (2008) demonstrated that the “impacts of trauma are even more pronounced when the trauma has been deliberately inflicted rather than a result of natural circumstances...deliberately inflicted trauma creates victimization as well as all the associated emotional, psychological, cultural, and spiritual harm. Deliberately inflicted trauma is much harder to recover from as it undermines the cohesion and strengths of individuals and communities.” The arrest of 34 kūpuna deliberately inflicted trauma that underscored the power of government to circumvent their own laws and policies.

As history has demonstrated, social justice issues can never be decided by majority rules because minority rights would never advance. This has been the case with slavery, women’s voting rights, and same sex marriage. The opinion of the larger community is not relevant. HPA is advocating for Kānaka Maoli to identify the practices and places they deem sacred. The way in which they have organized and maintained Kapu Aloha is inspiring and has already changed the course of Kānaka Maoli self-determination as well as the power they hold within the Hawai‘i political scene.

As psychologists committed to serving the needs of our patients and the larger community, it is our responsibility to acknowledge the cultural trauma and the effects on the Kānaka Maoli community. Failure to do so would only reinforce the disparities experienced and continue the cycle of trauma. HPA stands with the 2,500 kia‘i occupying the Pu‘uhonua o Pu‘uhuluhulu and the kia‘i across the state in advocating for justice for Kānaka Maoli.

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