**Written Direct Testimony of Dr. Maile Taualii**

I, Maile Taualii, holding a doctorate in Health Services, with expertise in public health informatics, epidemiology, genetics and Indigenous health, submit this testimony as a leading expert in health for Native Hawaiians.

The research of myself and my colleagues demonstrate three key findings: 1) desecrating sacred spaces impacts cultural identity and health, 2) participation in traditional practices are protective factors against distress, and 3) health disparities of Native Hawaiians cannot be explained by standard determinants of health (e.g. poverty or low education) and that causes, such as forced assimilation are causal factors in poor health outcomes. I will explain briefly these three findings.

**Desecrating sacred spaces impacts cultural identity and health**

The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic, or social condition. Disruption from the fundamental right of health in the form of desecration of Mauna Kea and the right to practice without persecution is the public health issue deleteriously impacting the health of Native Hawaiians and others who value traditional and customary practices. By being constricted from doing cultural practices and following their way of life, people suffer mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Health is affected by “…cultural factors including racism, along with various Indigenous-specific factors, such as loss of language and connection to the land, environmental deprivation, and spiritual, emotional, and mental disconnectedness” (King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009).

When desecration occurs, the people are impacted and are not able to follow their beliefs. This in turns affects their cultural identity, and causes the link between the sacred space and the people to become disrupted. When this link is strained or broken, health is affected. By not being able to fulfill stewardship/covenant it breaks or harms that connection/relationship.

Our research shows these following health impacts of sacred site desecration:

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| **Health Impacts of Desecration** | | |
| **Spiritual** | **Mental/Emotional** | **Physical** |
| **Spiritual Pain** | **Emotional Illness & Mental Stability** | **Stress** |
| **Chipping Away at Our Essence** | **Emotional Harm** | **High Blood Pressure** |
| **Harder to Connect to That Mana or That Spiritual Power** | **Mental Strain** | **Diabetes** |
| **Cannot Link to Ancestors/Elements in Spiritual Realm = Not Healthy** | **Depression** | **Obesity** |
| **Harm Forever** | **Teen Suicide** | **Heart Disease** |
| **Spiritually Lost** | **Drug Use** | **Physical Pain** |
| **No Spiritual Mental Connection= Health Consequences** | **Historical Trauma/Historical Grief** | **Drinking** |
| **Spiritually & Emotionally Tapped/Drained, Manifest in Body** |  | **Harms Me** |
| **Harm to Physical & Spiritual** |  | **Domestic Violence** |
|  |  | **Not Upholding Traditional Knowledge/Ceremonies =Physical Ailments** |

**Participation in traditional practices are protective factors against distress**

Our analysis of the relationship between practicing traditional activities and reduced distress shows that those who practice traditional activities are less likely to suffer from distress compared to those who do not practice. This finding was statistically significant and remained significant after adjusting for education, income and age. Therefore we can conclude that practicing traditional activities is beneficial for health and wellness.

**Health disparities of Native Hawaiians cannot be explained by standard determinants of health (e.g. poverty or low education) and that causes, such as forced assimilation are causal factors in poor health outcomes**

Careful analysis of national health data demonstrates that Native Hawaiians suffer greater health disparities when compared to others. All statistical models which examine the causes of health disparities show that social determinants of health, such as poverty, low education, and unemployment can explain the root causes of poor health. However, for Native Hawaiians the impact of poverty, low education and unemployment do NOT explain all health disparities. Additional influential factors such as language loss, learned helplessness, and fatalism are essential to understanding health disparities of Native Hawaiians.

Simply put, when Hawaiians feel that their lives, their beliefs, their culture, their future are not respected or valued, it has grave effects on health.

References:

King, M., Smith, A., & Gracey, M. (2009). Indigenous Health Part 2: The Underlying Causes of the Health Gap. *Lancet*, 76-85.