

March 31, 2011

The Honorable Representative Scott Nishimoto, Chair
House Committee on Higher Education
The Honorable Representative Jessica Wolley, Chair
House Committee on Culture & The Arts
Hawai'i State Capitol
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: Testimony supporting HCR 261

Aloha Chairs Nishimoto and Wooley, and Members of the Committees:

The Outdoor Circle (TOC) appreciates this opportunity to present testimony in support of HCR 261.

In general, it has been the experience of The Outdoor Circle that U.H. Manoa deals with tree related issues in a professional manner. It has an excellent certified arborist who oversees the workers who maintain campus trees. But the issue that is the focus of HCR 261 is not about the quality arbor care, instead it is about the quality of administrative decision making at U.H.

TOC was deeply involved in efforts to dissuade the University of Hawaii from removing a celebrated, historic Ficus Benjamina Comosa from the Manoa campus in order to construct a student recreation building adjacent to the UH Campus Center.

The now-removed Ficus was one of the most beautiful and rare trees at U.H. and beyond. It was the kind of treasure that should have been preserved and protected, not chopped down to make room for a building for which a much better site is available.

As part of TOC's involvement in this issue we were invited to join UH and Campus Center administrators to tour the preferred site—an already cramped area Koko Head of the Campus Center. During the visit we also inspected the "alternative" site for the Recreation Center, the relatively vast open areas immediately Ewa of the Campus Center—a large space with virtually no trees and two, quite expendable, one-story office buildings.

Most disturbing of all is that when asked why the project was moving forward at the least desirable of the two sites, we were told that it was because of timing. Campus Center officials said that if they didn't get the project started soon the funding would lapse. In other words, administrators decided to spend millions of dollars of public money to put a building in the wrong spot rather than consider the best long-term interest of the University and place the building in a space that would meet all of the needs with far fewer drawbacks.

We respectfully submit that bad decisions were made about this project based on a “spend it or lose it” mentality. The result was a decision that will be regretted on the Manoa campus forever. A historic and beautiful tree is gone and in its place UH will “shoehorn” the Recreation Center into a site extremely close to many other trees and buildings making the Manoa campus even more cramped than it is now.

It is our sincere hope that through this Resolution, UH administrators and Regents will understand the importance of preserving valuable trees and landscaping and in the future make better decisions that will benefit the long-term aesthetics of the Manoa Campus—and all campuses within the UH system.

Respectfully,

Bob Loy
Director of Environmental Programs
The Outdoor Circle

**Testimony for the Hearing by the House Higher Education Committee
on House Resolution 224**

March 31, 2011, 3:30 p.m., Capitol Conference Room 309

In January 2010, University of Hawai'i student Adam Williams appeared at a meeting of the Campus Center Board and made an eloquent and impassioned appeal on behalf of the many signers of a petition to save the Comose Fig tree. Here are excerpts from his speech:

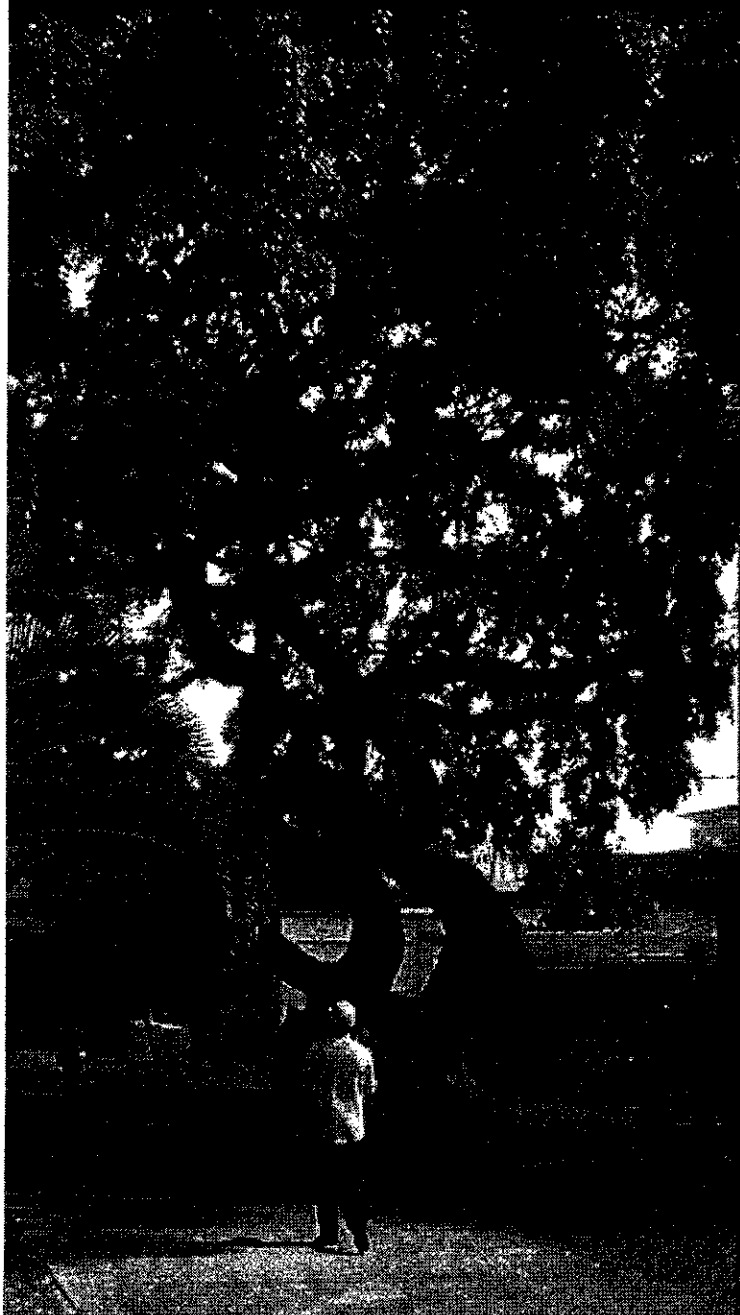
When I first saw the design for the new recreation center last summer, when I looked online at your website, it included the Comose Fig tree. In fact the tree was part of the architectural renderings in both the top view and the rendering of the mauka side of the new building.... I was shocked and dismayed when the old design was replaced in September with the current plan to build right over this magnificent tree. That was when I decided to ask my fellow students if they wanted their fees to go towards cutting down the Comose Fig tree to make room for a recreation center. I am asking you now, on behalf of over 1900 people who have signed the petition, to design around the Comose Fig tree, not over it!

Wanting to expand the petition to include more than just current students, I launched an online petition [<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/savetree/>] as well. As of today the online petition has 573 signatures, including not just students, but also current and past faculty, alumni, and community members[, such as] Dr. Jerry Carr, former chair of the UH botany department; Robert Loy, of the Outdoor Circle; and State Representative Corinne Ching.....

I encourage you all to read [their] many comments and really think about how important this tree is, and not just in an abstract historical sense. The Comose Fig tree has left a profound impression on many people over the years who have been a part of UH. And now its future is in your hands. This is your opportunity to stand up for historic preservation, to make a statement about sustainability and responsible development.

In August 2011, the University of Hawai'i cut down the tree. In a September issue of *Ka Leo*, the student newspaper of the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa, a full-page ad publicizing this action appeared. If I may, I'd like to read the text of this ad:

UH: BAD FOR TREES?



One of UH Mānoa's rarest and rarest treasures has been destroyed despite a year-long effort to save it. Last fall, a campaign was started to petition the Campus Center Board and UHM administration to reconsider the design of a recreational facility that would threaten the Comose Fig tree.

More than 2,000 people signed the petitions. In January, the petitions were delivered to the Campus Center Board and a formal request was made to preserve the tree. In addition, the UHM Landscape Advisory Committee and the Outdoor Circle issued strong statements supporting the tree's preservation. These efforts were covered by local news media, including the HONOLULU ADVERTISER, KOMO, KTV, and KALEO.

Unfortunately, the petitions, statements of support, and media attention were not enough to save the beautiful, rare, and historically and scientifically significant tree, planted nearly a century ago by Joseph Rock, renowned botanist and explorer.

The Campus Center Board and UHM administration chose not to consider alternative locations or designs for the recreational facility; not to listen to the pleas of students, other university members, and the public; and not to spare the tree.

On Saturday, August 14, the tree was stealthily cut down while the campus paused between the end of the



Top: Aerial view of the tree on a hillside and below the tree. (Photo: Dawn Aoyagi, KALEO) Bottom: The area after the tree's destruction.

second summer session and the start of fall student orientations. In this way, the Campus Center Board and UHM administration avoided media attention and intervention by the thousands of people who had tried to save the tree.

This treasure has been lost forever. Unfortunately, the fate of the Comose Fig tree is not an isolated incident, but only the most recent example of UHM's practice of sacrificing prized botanical treasures to "modernize" its campus.

This ad was paid for by Friends of UHM Trees. For information on the fig tree and the effort to save it, see www.petitions.com/petition/saveatree/

Also supporting preservation of the tree was Brian Schatz, then a candidate for lieutenant governor. Mr. Schatz said, “This important UH landmark has to be saved. The project plans for the facility can and should be revised to preserve the tree. Part of the extraordinary experience of learning at UH-Mānoa is in the beauty of the campus, and that must be aggressively protected.”

The University of Hawai‘i failed to protect the Comose Fig tree despite the pleas of Mr. Schatz and many others to “aggressively” protect the irreplaceable natural environment of the campus. That it cut down the tree without regard for public opinion strongly suggests it will not protect similar natural resources. We therefore respectfully urge the support of the 2011 Hawai‘i State Legislature for House Resolution 224, “Requesting the University of Hawaii to Reconsider Its Practice of Removing Trees with Historic Value.”

Submitted by Patricia Matsueda

Staff, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

Testimony for HR224 on 3/31/2011 3:30:00 PM

mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov [mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov]

Sent: Tuesday, March 29, 2011 5:13 PM

To: HEDtestimony

Cc: leberk@hawaii.rr.com

Testimony for HED 3/31/2011 3:30:00 PM HR224

Conference room: 309
Testifier position: support
Testifier will be present: No
Submitted by: Keith K. Leber
Organization: Individual
Address:
Phone:
E-mail: leberk@hawaii.rr.com
Submitted on: 3/29/2011

Comments:

The trees on the campus of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa are an integral part of the University's identity. Removing any tree, but especially one of particularly important historical or aesthetic value, should only be permitted if the tree is diseased or is a hazard to students, staff, or visitors. Arbitrarily cutting down a tree to make room for a new structure without carefully investigating alternative sites is unacceptable and must be prohibited. The University's trees are a priceless, living asset to the school and to the University community, including our visitors...an asset that deserves to be recognized and better protected. Let's not lose any more of our beautiful and historic trees in the name of progress.

Testimony for HR224 on 3/31/2011 3:30:00 PM

mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov [mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov]

Sent: Tuesday, March 29, 2011 4:15 PM

To: HEDtestimony

Cc: anejame@hpu.edu

Testimony for HED 3/31/2011 3:30:00 PM HR224

Conference room: 309

Testifier position: support

Testifier will be present: No

Submitted by: Adele Ne Jame

Organization:

Address:

Phone:

E-mail: anejame@hpu.edu

Submitted on: 3/29/2011

Comments:

Testimony for HR224 on 3/31/2011 3:30:00 PM

mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov [mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov]

Sent: Wednesday, March 30, 2011 6:07 PM

To: HEDtestimony

Cc: kolekolea@gmail.com

Testimony for HED 3/31/2011 3:30:00 PM HR224

Conference room: 309

Testifier position: support

Testifier will be present: No

Submitted by: Jennie Peterson

Organization: Individual

Address:

Phone:

E-mail: kolekolea@gmail.com

Submitted on: 3/30/2011

Comments:

I wholeheartedly support HR224. In 1975, The Hawaii State Legislature had the wisdom to require counties to safeguard exceptional trees from injury or destruction by passing ACT 105. Certain qualities were necessary for a tree to be designated as an Exceptional Tree: age, rarity, size, aesthetic qualities and historical significance among them. The University of Hawaii's comose fig tree was an outstanding example of these attributes and deserved to be saved. I t seems inconceivable that U.H. trees have no real safe guards. The University's historic trees need protection for the environmental, aesthetic, historic, cultural and spiritual benefits they offer current and future generations. I urge you to pass HR224.

Thank you, Jennie Peterson

Testimony in Support of HR 224

I wholeheartedly support this resolution. As the premier University of the state of Hawai'i, the campus of UH at Mānoa should be given the reverence it deserves. The defining character of the campus is not the eclectic mix of old buildings, but the uniqueness of the landscape. The Comose Fig was a beautiful old tree, the only one of its kind on the campus, and one of only very few in the state. It was an irreplaceable loss, but unfortunately it was not alone. The campus has seen many old trees cut down in the name of progress and modernity, viewed only as obstructions to new buildings rather than recognized for what they are: a living history of the University.

May no more Historic trees be removed from the campus! Please pass this resolution and grant protection to our elders!

Sincerely,

Adam Williams

B.A. Botany, UH 2010

3.30.11