



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Higher Education  
Tuesday, January 30, 2018 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Robert McLaren

Interim Director, Institute for Astronomy

And

Michael Bruno, Vice Chancellor for Research  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

### HB 2047 – RELATING TO THE INSTITUTE FOR ASTRONOMY

Chair McKelvey, Vice Chair Hashem, and members of the committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2047, which would transfer the Institute for Astronomy (IfA) from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) to the University of Hawai'i at Hilo (UHH). The university appreciates the intent of this bill to further enhance IfA's connection to the Hawai'i Island community and its contribution to the Hawai'i Island economy. However, we are concerned about certain unintended consequences of pursuing that goal to the degree and at the rate implied by this bill. The university therefore **opposes** HB 2047 in its current form.

IfA has significant operations on three islands. It has office, classroom, laboratory, and machine shop facilities in Mānoa, O'ahu (approximately 51,000 square feet), Pukalani, Maui (approximately 15,000 square feet), and Hilo, Hawai'i (approximately 36,000 square feet). There are approximately 100 IfA faculty, staff, and graduate student employees on O'ahu, 30 on Maui, and 50 on Hawai'i Island. The university, through IfA, owns and operates observatories on Haleakalā, Maunakea, and Maunaloa, and has additional observing time and research collaborations in observatories operated by other parties, including the soon-to-be-completed Daniel K. Inouye Solar Telescope and other telescopes on Haleakalā as well the Maunakea observatories. IfA faculty teach undergraduate and graduate classes on both the Mānoa and Hilo campuses and advise graduate students resident on both islands. Faculty and graduate students conduct outreach programs to K-12 students and the general public on O'ahu, Maui, and Hawai'i Island, and to a lesser extent statewide.

IfA greatly values its connection to the Hawai'i Island community. There is a significant faculty presence in Hilo, with a particular focus in research and development of highly sophisticated astronomical instrumentation, and a number of our graduate students choose to pursue their research there. Through an MOU between IfA and UHH, IfA faculty fulfill a portion of their teaching commitment in UHH's undergraduate astronomy program. IfA collaborates closely with colleagues at UHH in teaching and outreach and

is working to enhance collaboration in the operation of telescopes. IfA's significant growth in Hilo and on Maui over the past 20 years has been good for those communities and good for the IfA.

However, IfA, UH and the state also derive important benefits from IfA's position as a unit of UHM, the state's flagship research university. IfA faculty and graduate students provide most of the instruction in UHM's successful undergraduate degree programs in astronomy and astrophysics, which have been developed in coordination with UHH, so as to minimize programmatic duplication. Currently there are approximately 54 majors. Many more Mānoa students – approximately 350 per year, some of whom take more than one course – enroll in astronomy courses as electives or to meet distribution requirements. Being part of the flagship research university also enhances opportunities for IfA faculty to collaborate with colleagues in other disciplines, such as physics, chemistry, biology (IfA successfully operated a NASA-funded Astrobiology Institute for many years), and computer and data sciences. IfA's Pan-STARRS telescopes are the largest user of server space in UH's Information Technology Center, and IfA faculty expertise is an important contributor to UH's efforts in this high-priority area and the startup of advanced programming in data sciences.

In addition to the programmatic aspects discussed above, we do have some serious concerns about certain practical aspects. Many IfA faculty and staff are not in a position to relocate from O'ahu or Maui to Hawai'i Island for a wide range of personal and professional reasons, including spouses' employment, school enrollment, home ownership, and other family commitments and factors. In addition, IfA's current facilities in Hilo could accommodate only a small fraction of the faculty, staff, shops, and labs that are currently in Mānoa and Pukalani. It is unclear how the approximately 66,000 square feet of space that IfA currently occupies in Mānoa and Pukalani could be replaced and at what costs – which would come at the expense of other university facility needs.

In conclusion, IfA is committed to Hawai'i Island and continued development of research, teaching, and service there. However, this would be best accomplished over time and in balance with opportunities and commitments on O'ahu and Maui. We therefore respectfully **oppose** HB 2047 in its current form.



The House Committee on Higher Education  
Tuesday, January 30, 2018  
2:00 p.m., Room 309

**LATE**

**RE: HB 2047 Relating to the Institute for Astronomy**

Attention: Chair Angus McKelvey, Vice Chair Mark Hashem and  
Members of the Committee

The University of Hawaii Professional Assembly (UHPA) **opposes HB 2047**, that transfers administrative authority, personnel, and all facilities for the Institute for Astronomy at UH Mānoa to UH Hilo.

UHPA believes that this is a significant legislative breach by elected officials that undermines the autonomy of the University of Hawai'i and harms the academic standing of the program and its' faculty members. The proposal which provides for implementation on June 30, 2018 is an attack on faculty members contractual and academic rights with the Legislature improperly substituting their judgement for that of UH Mānoa officials and Institute for Astronomy faculty members.

IfA is a world renowned program with both undergraduate and graduate programs. A shift to UH Hilo may well negatively impact student recruitment and faculty retention. UH Mānoa provides significant resources for discovery and learning that are not easily transferred nor replicated at UH Hilo.

Many employees have made decisions to live in Hawai'i based on an Oahu location. To assume employees will follow this legislative dictate and relocate is probably a misperception.

Efforts to expand education opportunities at UH Hilo have already begun but these do not require the transplanting of the totality of IfA to that physical location. While the Big Island needs more jobs this is not the manner in which to engage in economic expansion by undermining a successful academic endeavor.

**UHPA opposes HB 2047.**

Respectfully Submitted,

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Executive Director

University of Hawaii  
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**HB-2047**

Submitted on: 1/29/2018 3:25:52 PM

Testimony for HED on 1/30/2018 2:00:00 PM



Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Roy Gal		Oppose	No

Comments:

I am writing regarding House Bill 2047, which proposes relocating the Institute for Astronomy from UH Manoa to UH Hilo.

I am an astronomer at the IfA, and in charge of our public outreach programs. I appreciate the intent of this bill to add economic impact to Hawaii Island. However, I do not see how it is even conceivable to forcibly relocate something like 150 faculty, staff, and graduate students to Hilo. I have lived on Oahu for a decade; I have a wife and we have two small children in preschool here; we own a house in St. Louis Heights; my elderly mother lives about 5 minutes away. It is simply impossible for us to uproot and move to Hilo. I expect the same is true for just about everyone at the IfA in Manoa.

In addition, UH Manoa has a recently started undergraduate program in astronomy and astrophysics, and we already have roughly 20 majors annually. This makes it one of the biggest programs in the nation, and it capitalizes on the strength of both the IfA faculty and the UH Manoa physics dept. The program cannot be relocated to Hilo - it needs to be housed at a major research university. I also understand that the IfA is one of the "pillars of excellence" at UH Manoa that makes the campus a true research university and allows Manoa to charge the tuition that it does. Moving the IfA would be seriously damaging to UH Manoa as an institution.

At the IfA, we understand that our Hilo branch should be strengthened. We now regularly have graduate students completing their work there, and are working closely with UH Hilo on their education programs. Should TMT move forward, our Hilo faculty and staff will play an important role in the development of cameras for that observatory.

Personally, I strongly oppose this bill and ask that you do the same. Imagine if the State Legislature were ordered to pack up and move to another island - it would be neither practical nor successful.

If you would like to discuss astronomy, TMT, IfA, our outreach programs, or anything related, I am always happy to talk. I can be reached via email at [roygal@hawaii.edu](mailto:roygal@hawaii.edu)

Mahalo for your consideration

Dr. Roy Gal

**HB-2047**

Submitted on: 1/27/2018 1:37:44 PM

Testimony for HED on 1/30/2018 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Javier Mendez-Alvarez		Support	No

Comments:

**LATE**

**HB-2047**

Submitted on: 1/29/2018 5:57:11 PM

Testimony for HED on 1/30/2018 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Christoph Baranec		Oppose	No

Comments:

Aloha Legislators,

I am a faculty engineer/astronomer at the Hilo branch of UH Manoa's Institute for Astronomy (IfA). I live and work in Hilo. I primarily develop new technologies for astronomical telescopes, teach classes in engineering and research skills at both UH Hilo and UH Manoa, engage in outreach within the Big Island community and mentor local students in high-tech skills.

I am writing in regard to HB2047/SB2865, the purpose of which is to stimulate economic growth in Hawaii County. While I certainly agree with the bills' aim, there does not exist any evidence that the proposed method of transferring the IfA, an organized research unit (ORU) centered at UH Manoa, will accomplish this goal. I would encourage the legislature to contact the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization (responsible for 'The Economic Impact of Astronomy in Hawai'i', Aug 28, 2014 report) and commission a study whether the proposed set of bills will actually make an economic impact in Hilo. A large concern is the disruptive effect of moving an entire ORU from one island to another. Is there enough space or facilities for the transfer? Will new appropriations need to be made for relocation and new facilities that could be better used in other ways to stimulate economic growth in Hawaii County? How will the facilities and personnel at the IfA Maui facility be affected?

Personally I find it disturbing to for the Legislature to micromanage University activities (individual departments or ORUs) that are better handled at the system level. As it stands, I oppose the implementation of these bills, even if I agree with the stated aim.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss how the IfA is already making a positive impact on the economy and the people of the Big Island. I can be reached at [christoph.baranec@gmail.com](mailto:christoph.baranec@gmail.com) or my cell 808-498-9817.

Mahalo no kou manawa, Christoph Baranec