May 17, 2011

To: Howard Karr, Chair
    Board of Regents
    University of Hawai`i

From: Susan Hippensteele, Chair
    Manoa Faculty Senate
    University of Hawai`i at Manoa

Re: Proposal to Abolish the Pacific Biosciences Research Center (PBRC)

In October 2010 the Manoa Faculty Senate voted overwhelmingly to oppose the Proposal to Abolish PBRC (Proposal). My previous testimony to the BOR Academic Affairs Subcommittee summarizes Manoa Faculty Senate reports from the three standing committees that reviewed the matter: Administration and Budget, Research, and Professional Matters. Those reports can be viewed at http://www.hawaii.edu/uhmfs/agendas/20101020agenda.html.

When this matter first came to the Senate the dominant claim was that closing PBRC would save money. At the time Kewalo Marine Laboratory (Kewalo) was included in the plan. By the time a formal proposal to abolish PBRC was received, Kewalo had been eliminated from the proposal, and justification for the cost savings claim had effectively disappeared.

Some faculty believe the continued effort to abolish PBRC is motivated by a desire on the part of Manoa administration to eliminate the administrative home of Kewalo so that it can be closed without the same level of scrutiny abolishing a BOR approved entity receives. It does appear that the two issues continue to be merged for many people; BOR members have even visited Kewalo as part of their due diligence on the Proposal to Abolish PBRC and questions about whether UH can afford to support two marine laboratories continue to be raised during discussions about PBRC.

The Senate does not believe the Proposal, on its face, justifies closure of this unit; the claim for cost savings and arguments for other efficiencies are unconvincing. If this Proposal is intended to clear the way for closure of Kewalo, rather than dealing with that issue more directly, the Senate strenuously objects to the lack of transparency. The events surrounding the effort to eliminate PBRC, with its significant history, strong faculty and student presence at Manoa, and ongoing positive community impact, have been damaging to the campus. Should this Proposal prove proxy for a different purpose, we will have lost far more than the important research and instructional support units at issue in this controversy.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Manoa Faculty Senate.