

EACP Committee

From: Me D <xi.su@live.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 04, 2019 9:10 AM
To: EACP Committee
Subject: Testimony on Behalf of Preserving Canoe Beach

Aloha Council Members,

My name is Susan Dils, and I live in Lahaina. I am an educational assistant at one of the elementary schools on the west side. I have not lived here very long, only since 2015. When I and my family decided to move here to Maui, it wasn't for the shave ice or the snorkel expeditions. It wasn't for the resort living or the sunset cruises. We moved here because, for each of us, out of all the places we've lived in the world, nowhere else felt more like home than Maui. There is such a strong sense of place here, a sense of community, and from the very beginning, we felt drawn to be a part of it.

This "sense of place" that I'm talking about is what makes Maui unique. It is created by the rich land and the mountains that I love so much, by the ocean that surrounds and nourishes the island, and by the people whose history and culture do so much to preserve and promote the connection between land and sea. Since moving to Maui, I have sought to connect with the land by volunteering with organizations like Maui Cultural Lands. To explore my connection with the ocean, this year, I decided to join the Lahaina Canoe Club.

I have not been disappointed, not one bit. On day two of practice, I think it was, one of our coaches, Boi, began by talking about why the club exists. Spreading his arms out to face the canoes, he said, "We teach you this," and then, turning towards the land, said, "to respect this." And he was right. I have learned so much, not just about paddling, but about Maui. I am learning the local history, the culture and values important to our society here. I am making friendships with not just my club members, but with people from the clubs that share our beach. On the West Side, the three clubs may be competitors, but we are family too. We look out for each other, we encourage each other, we talk story after we pull the wa'a ashore. We do this in the presence of the ancestors whose graves overlook the beauty of the sea. We do this in the presence of our children. The sense of community here is strong, and if I feel it, a 53 year-old non-Hawaiian who has just started paddling, imagine the impact this beach and these clubs is having on our keiki.

That is why we are really here today. We are here to fight for the preservation of a beach that is important to promoting the values of community to our keiki. We are fighting for them to see how the three - land, ocean, people - form the trifecta of Maui no ka oi.

Since moving to Maui, in these few short years I have witnessed the growing encroachment of tourism and businesses on local places that make Maui the community that it is. At Baby Beach, rental businesses advertise right on the shore, and SUPers plow over the reef without any concern for the coral that is TRYING to grow there. At Mala, fishermen have to make way for divers and snorkelers and boats...sometimes, it seems so crowded, I wonder how they can fish at all. At Hanakao'o, or Canoe Beach, I have watched as SUPers paddle obliviously through celebration of life ceremonies. Jet skiers do it too, and I wonder if they even think about the people who are there on the water, in canoes, trying to send off their loves ones or trying to practice. Divers and cruise boats -

it's the same thing. It really does feel as if we - the people who live here, are being squeezed out, even as we try to practice or hold an event that is, by all rights, in space we are entitled to.

The thing is, we are entitled to that beach, but no one seems to notice the plaque that designates Hanakao'o as a cultural site. I am sure the people who picnic in between the boats, climbing on them, sitting in them, think they have a right to do so since they are "paying good money" to vacation here. You would think people would have respect, but when I approach people to let them know that what they are doing is not pono, I often get a shrug and a "so" in response. Really.

How are we to protect our heritage and values when commercialism creates attitudes like this?

A couple months ago, the owner of a diving company submitted a complaint on Facebook when dive guides were confronted for diving in the canoe practice lanes. The company was given a permit to dive there, the owner argued, so what were they to do? It wasn't their fault. The responses by the community were overwhelming - people are tired of the onslaught of commercial businesses moving in to spaces where we teach our keiki and come together as family. Having a permit does not make it right. It puts people at risk, it puts our pastime at risk, it puts our society at risk.

Maui is special because it is a community - one that is connected by land, ocean, and people. People are integral to the island, as our history, values, and traditions teach us to care for the land and the sea. If we do not preserve the spaces that enable us to teach our families these values, then we lose, and Maui loses. Please, for the sake of what REALLY is important to our future, approve this bill and keep commercial businesses out of the water and off the beach at Hanakao'o. Give our community the right to live and make Maui no ka oi.

Respectfully,
Susan Dils
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Lahaina