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**THE HONORABLE DAVID A. TARNAS, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS
Thirty-Third State Legislature
Regular Session of 2025
State of Hawai`i**

February 6, 2025

RE: H.B. 394; MAKING AN APPROPRIATION FOR THE VICTIM WITNESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe and members of the House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs, the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney of the City and County of Honolulu (“Department”) submits the following testimony in **strong support** of H.B. 394. This bill is part of the Department's 2025 legislative package, and we thank you for hearing it.

H.B. 394 provides additional funding in the amount of **\$736,785** for fiscal year 2025-2026 to maintain the current level of service for the Department’s Victim Witness Kokua Services (“VWKS”) Unit. This is the remaining balance for actual costs after costs covered by federal funds, funding from the Department of the Attorney General, and funding from the City and County of Honolulu.

VWKS advocates guide and assist victims, witnesses, and/or surviving family members throughout the criminal system—before, during, and after criminal prosecution of a case. They are specifically trained and qualified to do so.

Support services are crucial, not just because crime often inflicts direct trauma on victims, but because the criminal justice system itself can be bewildering. Victims of crime are doubly involuntary participants in the criminal justice system. They did not consent to the criminal act. Nor can victims control the course and scope of the resulting litigation because the State in a criminal case can only vindicate a general interest in justice, not any private advantage or individual concern. Guidance and support for victims gives them some measure of autonomy, sympathy, and hope.

Legislative support for the Victim Witness Assistance Program dates back to 1983. In 1986, the Legislature enacted HRS § 28-111, formally creating a victim-witness assistance program “whose purpose shall be to provide information, assistance, and support services to the victims of and witnesses to crimes committed in the State.”

While the statute established this program to be administrated by the Department of the Attorney General, direct services are provided by the county prosecutors.¹ The prosecutor continuously provide the most up-to-date information, assistance, funding, and support services to crime victims and witnesses in their respective counties. Adequate funding is necessary for our Department and the neighbor island counties to continue these vital services.

The Department **strongly supports** the passage of H.B. 394.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.

¹ See HRS § 28-111(b) (“The county prosecutors shall implement the program in their respective counties.”).