

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII  
**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS  
AND REHABILITATION**  
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**TOMMY JOHNSON**  
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**Melanie Martin**  
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No. \_\_\_\_\_

**TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 481  
RELATING TO OFFENDER REENTRY.**

by  
Tommy Johnson, Director  
Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

House Committee on Public Safety  
Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair  
Representative Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

Friday, January 31, 2025; 10:00 a.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 411 & via Videoconference

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) respectfully submits **comments** on House Bill (HB) 481, which seeks to require the DCR to issue a certificate of suitability for employment upon release, and collaborate with state and federal agencies and private employers to educate stakeholders on the certification. This measure also seeks to appropriate an unspecified amount of funding to carryout the provisions of this bill.

The DCR appreciates the legislature's interest in this matter, but it should be noted, employment suitability is generally conducted by a perspective employer's human resources staff, after a conditional offer of employment is made and accepted by an applicant. The DCR is not aware of any other correctional jurisdiction that issues certificate of suitability regarding an offender's readiness for employment upon their release. The DCR can provide verification of completion of programs (except those covered by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) without

written authorization from the exiting inmate) via transcript, and facility and community work line participation, etc.

The DCR notes that this measure falls outside of the priorities as listed in the Governor's executive budget for FY 25 and 26.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide **comments** on HB 481.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR



MARK PATTERSON  
CHAIR

CHRISTIN M. JOHNSON  
OVERSIGHT COORDINATOR

COMMISSIONERS  
HON. R. MARK BROWNING (ret.)

HON. RONALD IBARRA (ret.)

MARTHA TORNEY

HON. MICHAEL A. TOWN (ret.)

**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**HAWAII CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM OVERSIGHT COMMISSION**  
**E HUIKALA A MA'EMA'E NŌ**  
235 S. Beretania Street, 16<sup>th</sup> Floor  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
(808) 587-4160

TO: The Honorable Della Au Belatti, Chair  
The Honorable Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Public Safety

FROM: Mark Patterson, Chair  
Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission

SUBJECT: House Bill 481, Relating to Offender Reentry  
Hearing: Friday, January 31, 2025; 10:00 a.m.  
State Capitol, Room 411

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission (HCSOC) **supports** House Bill 481, Relating to Offender Reentry, which requires the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to issue a certificate of suitability for employment, and to collaborate with state and federal agencies and private employers to educate stakeholders on the certification.

The Commission believes that issuing the outlined certification will empower government agencies and private employers provide job opportunities individuals who may not have been considered before solely due to a criminal record. Employment is one of the most significant factors in preventing people from returning to prison. A stable job provides income, purpose, and a pathway to reintegration into society, reducing the likelihood of reoffending. This is of particular importance given Hawaii's recidivism rate (over 50%), and the Hawaii state government vacancy rate (just under 30%).

Additionally, formerly incarcerated individuals possess valuable skills with different life experiences, and many are eager to work. Elevating this workforce to government and private businesses can ensure they have access to qualified and motivated candidates who may have been previously overlooked. For these and the above reasons, the Commission supports this bill.

Should you have additional questions, the Oversight Coordinator, Christin Johnson, can be reached at 808-900-2200 or at [christin.m.johnson@hawaii.gov](mailto:christin.m.johnson@hawaii.gov). Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER**

January 30, 2025

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## **HB481: RELATING TO OFFENDER REENTRY**

### **Chair Au Belatti, Vice-Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee on Public Safety**

The Office of the Public Defender (OPD) **supports HB481**. This bill adds a section to Chapter 353H which requires the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) to issue a "certificate of suitability for employment" to incarcerated persons to include evidence of fulfillment of sentence and post-release obligations, completion of offender reentry program and readiness for employment opportunities.

One of the biggest challenges incarcerated persons face after release is obtaining employment. Opportunities are often limited due to employers' reluctance to take a chance on an ex-inmate.

How many formerly incarcerated people are jobless at the moment? A good guess would be 60%, to generalize from a new report released by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). The report shows that of more than 50,000 people released from federal prisons in 2010, a staggering 33% found no employment at all over four years post-release, and at any given time, no more than 40% of the cohort was employed. People who did find jobs struggled, too: Formerly incarcerated people in the sample had an average of 3.4 jobs throughout the four-year study period, suggesting that they were landing jobs that didn't offer security or upward mobility.

\* \* \* \*

For those who did find employment after release, their earnings were lower than the general population: In the first few months, formerly incarcerated people were earning just 53% of the median US worker's wage. And after four years of seeking and obtaining irregular employment, the study

population was making less than 84 cents for every dollar of the US median wage (which, in 2014, was about \$28,851 annually).

\* \* \* \*

Formerly incarcerated individuals tend to experience joblessness and poverty that started long before they were ever locked up. When they're released from prison, the pressure is on to get a job: People on parole (or "supervised release") often must maintain employment or face reincarceration, while struggling to access social services, and trying to make ends meet in a job market more hostile to them than ever before. This combination of pressures amounts to a perpetual punishment. And it's not just formerly incarcerated individuals who are punished: Policies that weaken their ability to turn down jobs with low wages may depress wages for other workers in their industries[.<sup>1</sup>]

Having a job has been shown to reduce recidivism and individuals are less likely to commit crimes when they have stable, full-time employment.<sup>2</sup> While having the certificate of suitability is no guarantee of employment, in conjunction with a more robust re-entry program, vocational training and increased community support for rehabilitation and reintegration, the certificate will assist incarcerated individuals' transition back into society.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

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<sup>1</sup> Wong, L. and Bertram, W., "New data on formerly incarcerated people's employment reveal labor market injustices," Prison Policy Initiative, Feb. 8, 2022 (<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2022/02/08/employment/>)

<sup>2</sup> Duwe, G. and Henry-Nickle, M., "A better path forward for criminal justice: Training and employment for correctional populations," Brookings, April 2021 ([https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-training-and-employment-for-correctional-populations/#:~:text=as%20work%20release.-,Having%20a%20job%2C%20however%2C%20has%20been%20shown%20to%20reduce%20recidivism,is%2C%20at%20best%2C%20minimal](https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-better-path-forward-for-criminal-justice-training-and-employment-for-correctional-populations/#:~:text=as%20work%20release.-,Having%20a%20job%2C%20however%2C%20has%20been%20shown%20to%20reduce%20recidivism,is%2C%20at%20best%2C%20minimal).)).



**HB481 Outreach Court**  
**COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY**

Rep. Della Au Belatti, Chair

Rep. Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

Friday, Jan 31, 2025: 10:00: Room 411 Videoconference

**Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports HB481:**

*ALOHA CHAIR, VICE CHAIR, AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. My name is Alan Johnson. I am the current chair of the Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition (HSAC), a statewide organization for substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health disorder treatment and prevention agencies and recovery-oriented services.*

**HB481 would help employers feel more comfortable to hire knowing that a prospective justice-involved employee has had extensive counseling and support services.**

Employment is crucial for offenders because it helps with reintegration into society, reduces recidivism, and provides financial stability.

1. **Reduces Recidivism** – Having a stable job lowers the likelihood of reoffending by giving individuals a sense of purpose, structure, and legal means of earning a living.
2. **Financial Independence** – Employment helps offenders support themselves and their families, reducing reliance on government assistance or illegal activities.
3. **Social Reintegration** – A job can help offenders rebuild relationships, develop positive social networks, and reintegrate into their communities.
4. **Builds Skills and Experience** – Employment provides an opportunity to learn new skills, gain work experience, and improve future career prospects.
5. **Improves Mental Health and Self-Worth** – Being employed can boost self-esteem, reduce stress, and improve mental well-being by fostering a sense of accomplishment and stability.
6. **Reduces Stigma** – Consistent employment helps change public perception by showing that former offenders can be productive, responsible members of society.
7. **Legal Compliance and Parole Conditions** – In many cases, maintaining employment is a requirement for parole or probation, helping offenders stay compliant with legal obligations.

HSAC appreciates the opportunity to testify and is available for questions.

**HB-481**

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 1:44:40 PM

Testimony for PBS on 1/31/2025 10:00:00 AM

| Submitted By   | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify                   |
|----------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Michael I Rice | Individual   | Support            | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

I stand in SUPPORT of this bill. While this is only one of many programs that should be undertaken to reduce recidivism, it is a necessary step to helping to reduce crime in the future, and will work better than what seems to be the current process of ‘catch and release’.

**HB-481**

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 1:59:49 PM

Testimony for PBS on 1/31/2025 10:00:00 AM

| Submitted By     | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify                   |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Andrew Crossland | Individual   | Support            | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

**I STRONGLY SUPPORT** this Bill to assist formerly incarcerated individuals in returning to the workforce. I urge all members of the Committee to **VOTE YES** on this Bill.



**HB-481**

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 5:33:25 PM

Testimony for PBS on 1/31/2025 10:00:00 AM

| Submitted By           | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify                   |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Chanara Casey Richmond | Individual   | Support            | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

My name is Chanara Richmond. I live in D42. I support this bill. thank you.

**HB-481**

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 12:27:03 AM

Testimony for PBS on 1/31/2025 10:00:00 AM

| Submitted By   | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify                |
|----------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Veronica Moore | Individual   | Support            | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

To: House Committee on Public Safety

House Committee on Finance

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: January 31, 2025

RE: Upcoming Hearing for HB481

Measure Title: RELATING TO OFFENDER REENTRY.

Report Title: DCR; Offender Reentry; Certification; Suitability for Employment (\$)

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I am in support of House Bill 481. Affording individuals in the custody of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation with an official certificate of suitability and employment can assist the individual by providing the recommendation and consideration needed to secure gainful employment without hesitation. The Department's stance on initiating the collaboration and educating state and federal agencies, private employers, etc., will also aid in dispelling myths and/or stereotypes associated with hiring individuals involved with the justice system. Thank you for introducing this bill and I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony regarding it.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

**HB-481**

Submitted on: 1/31/2025 9:53:31 AM

Testimony for PBS on 1/31/2025 10:00:00 AM

| Submitted By   | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify                |
|----------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Barbara Kalama | Individual   | Support            | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

**Testimony in Support of HB 481**

Aloha, my name is Barbara Kalama, and I am a resident of Wai‘anae. I write today in strong support of HB 481 because I personally understand the challenges of reentering society after incarceration.

After my own release, I struggled to find stable employment and rebuild my life. It was only through the support of some amazing people, including my church family, that I was able to get back on my feet, secure meaningful work, and become a positive contributor to my family and community. Many others, however, don’t have that same support system. This bill provides a crucial tool—an official certification of suitability for employment—that can help returning citizens find jobs, regain their dignity, and reduce recidivism.

HB 481 is not just about second chances; it’s about strengthening our communities by giving people the opportunity to succeed. I urge you to pass this bill and help those ready to turn their lives around.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

**Respectfully,**  
Barbara Kalama