

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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TESTIMONY ON SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 20
REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND REHABILITATION TO
COMPREHENSIVELY REEVALUATE ITS POLICIES REGARDING IN-PERSON
CONTACT VISITATION AT CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES THROUGHOUT THE STATE
TO BEST SUPPORT INCARCERATED PERSONS IN STAYING CONNECTED WITH
LOVED ONES WHO CAN HELP THEM ON THEIR JOURNEY OF REHABILITATION.

by
Tommy Johnson, Director
Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

House Committee on Judiciary
Representative Au Belatti, Chair
Representative Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

Thursday, April 17, 2025; 3:15 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 430 & via Videoconference

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

The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) **supports the intent** of Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) 20, which requests that DCR conduct a comprehensive reevaluation of its policies regarding in-person contact visitation at correctional facilities throughout the state to best support incarcerated persons in staying connected with loved ones who can help them on their journey of rehabilitation. This measure also urges DCR to identify alternative policies that would allow for in-person, contact visitations at all correctional facilities throughout the State.

DCR understands the intent of SCR 20, and appreciates the Legislature's interest in this matter. As requested, DCR will review and reevaluate its policies regarding in-person, contact visitations statewide with the understanding that the safety, security, and good governance of the facilities are of primary concern.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the intent of SCR 20.



Testimony in Strong Support of Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 20

Aloha Chair Della Au Belatti, Vice Chair Kim Coco Iwamoto, and members of the Committee on Public Safety,

As the Network Coordinator of the Hawai'i 'Ohana Support Network, I write in strong support of **Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 20**, which calls upon the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to comprehensively reevaluate its policies regarding in-person contact visitation at correctional facilities throughout the State.

Our organization is deeply committed to the health and well-being of Hawai'i's families, particularly those most impacted by systems of incarceration. Maintaining strong familial and community connections is a vital component of rehabilitation and successful reentry. It is well-documented that in-person, physical contact with loved ones significantly reduces recidivism, improves mental and emotional health, and fosters a sense of hope and accountability among incarcerated individuals.

We are especially concerned about the impact of restrictive visitation policies on children. When children are only able to see their incarcerated parents through glass partitions or in highly impersonal settings, the trauma of separation is compounded. Children need the reassurance of physical presence—being able to hug their parent, hold their hand, or simply sit next to them—to preserve the bond and maintain a sense of stability during what is already a difficult and confusing time.

This resolution offers a meaningful path forward—one that balances institutional safety with human dignity. We respectfully urge the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to take swift and thoughtful action to reevaluate its current visitation policies and prioritize contact visits as a core component of rehabilitation and family unity.

On behalf of the Hawai'i 'Ohana Support Network, I strongly support SCR No. 20 and the call for more compassionate, family-centered corrections policy in our islands.

Thank you,
Kathleen O'Dell, PhD
Network Coordinator
Hawai'i 'Ohana Support Network
kat@hawaiiohanasupportnetwork.org

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/15/2025 4:28:00 PM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessica Zagami Chang	Keiki O Ka 'Aina	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Allowing visitation through programs like “Kids Day” for incarcerated individuals is incredibly valuable—not just for the parents, but especially for the children. It gives kids a chance to maintain a meaningful connection with their parent, which can be a vital source of emotional stability and reassurance. For the parent, it’s a powerful motivator to maintain good behavior and to work toward positive change. I’ve seen firsthand how these visits can strengthen family bonds and give both the parent and child hope for a better future. It’s not just about a visit—it’s about preserving a relationship that can help break the cycle and promote healing on both sides.



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“ Blueprint for Change develops and supports community-driven services that promote the well-being of children and families. ”

Testimony in STRONG Support of SCR20

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

Blueprint for Change strongly supports SCR20, which requests the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to reevaluate in-person visitation policies at correctional facilities statewide.

About Us: Founded in 2000, Blueprint for Change is a nonprofit organization that works to prevent child abuse and neglect and child welfare involvement through our network of community-based Family Resource Centers called Neighborhood Places.

Our Involvement: In 2013, we observed a significant increase in services to families affected by incarceration statewide. This led to our creation of the Family Reunification Working Group in 2014 and our participation in the HCR 85 Task Force on Prison Reform in 2016, where we, among many other things, advocated for maintaining family connections during incarceration, our participation in a working group to explore visiting policies and practices established by SCR No. 7, S.D.1 in 2019, and our efforts to bring the Waiawa Visiting and Family Resource Center to fruition through ACT 125 in 2022.

Key Support Reasons:

- Research shows that maintaining family connections reduces recidivism by up to 26% and decreases misconduct by up to 25%
- Regular contact improves incarcerated individuals' mental health and behavior
- Family-friendly visitation centers strengthen family bonds
- Family reunification should be prioritized

We urge your support of SCR20 to help incarcerated individuals maintain vital connections with their families, supporting successful rehabilitation and reducing recidivism.

Mahalo, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to the committee.

Shayne Kukunaokalā Yoshimoto
Executive Director

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/16/2025 7:16:59 PM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heather Guerrero	Keiki O Ka Aina	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Weathered by guilt and time, he softened the moment he saw his son. Regret gave way to tenderness—a raw, reverent love that filled the room. His eyes shimmered with awe, as if the tiny life before him was too good for a man so broken. Cradling his 5-month-old son for the first time, his hands trembled—not just from fear, but from a quiet promise to be better. She, the mother, long guarded, finally let her tears fall. Her whispered “I love you” broke through months of pain—strong, sincere, and hard-earned. In this fragile moment of reunion, forgiveness began to take root. It wasn’t loud, but it was real. A single act—father meeting son—became their light forward. Please support this bill to help families stay connected through incarceration. It matters.

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/16/2025 5:34:14 PM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heather Wong	Keiki O Ka Aina FLC	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Weathered by guilt and time, softened the instant his eyes landed on his son. His regret seemed to vanish, replaced with an unspoken tenderness—a love so raw it felt as though the room itself held its breath. His gaze, shimmering with unshed tears, was a mixture of awe and disbelief, as if the tiny being before him was too precious, to belong to a man who had fallen so far. For the first time he was able to hold his beautiful 5-month-old son.

The weight of his past—the shame, the failures, the self-inflicted wounds—seemed to dissolve in the glow of this moment. As his hands trembled their way toward the baby, cradling him gently for the first time, his expression was one of quiet redemption. It was as if holding his son wasn't just an embrace; it was a vow—a silent but unshakable promise to be better, no matter how steep the climb.

And then, there was her. The mother, fierce and unyielding for so long, finally allowed herself to collapse into the vulnerability she had been denying. Tears that she had dammed up for months now streamed freely, her face softening as she stepped closer, drawn by the fragile beauty of this reunion. When she whispered “I love you,” her voice broke—not from weakness, but from the overwhelming strength it took to say it and mean it.

In this fragile, timeless bubble of reunion, forgiveness began to grow. It wasn't loud or grand; it was delicate, tentative—a fragile seed planted in the soil of shared love and pain. They both knew the road ahead wouldn't be easy, but in this moment, they were no longer walking it alone. This single act, the meeting of father and son, became their lighthouse, casting hope where there had once only been shadow. This moment was truly transformation!

I strongly urge you to support this bill to bring families together and help them stay connected while incarcerated.



Testimony in Strong Support of Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 20

To: The Honorable Brandon J.C. Elefante, Chair The Honorable Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Public Safety and Military Affairs

From Momi Akana, CEO, Keiki O Ka Aina Family Learning Centers

Subject: Senate Concurrent Resolution 20, Requesting the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to comprehensively reevaluate its policies regarding in-person contact visitation at correctional facilities throughout the State to best support incarcerated persons in staying

Last Sunday and then again this past Saturday, I was privileged to be there to see the very best of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The happy faces on the children at the Waiawa Correctional Facility, who because of Kid's Day and special visits, are now not afraid of coming into the facility, but run from the van that drives them up to the field into the arms of their fathers. The guards are smiling and welcoming, the games and activities are inviting, and each of the families can gather at a table just for them where reconnections and loving interactions are happening.

At Halawa, volunteers cheered as the children and grandchildren rushed into the arms of the men who have not had contact visitation for years. You didn't need special activities or games for these families. Being together was enough.

Maintaining strong relationships with incarcerated parents is crucial for the emotional and psychological well-being of both the parents and their children. Regular visits can help bridge the gap created by incarceration, allowing children to feel connected to their parents despite physical separation. These visits provide an opportunity for parents to express their love and support, reinforcing the bond that is essential for the child's development. Moreover, children who maintain contact with their incarcerated parents are often better equipped to cope with the challenges of having a parent in prison, leading to improved mental health outcomes and a lower likelihood of engaging in delinquent behavior themselves.

Additionally, visiting incarcerated parents can foster a sense of normalcy and stability in the lives of children. It allows them to see their parents as active participants in their lives,

rather than as distant figures. This interaction can also serve as a platform for open communication, where children can share their feelings and experiences, and parents can offer guidance and encouragement. By prioritizing these visits, families can work towards healing and rebuilding their relationships, ultimately contributing to a more positive reintegration process for the incarcerated parent upon release. Strong family ties can significantly reduce recidivism rates, benefiting not only the individuals involved but also our communities.

I am in strong support of programs that support in-person contact visitation at Correctional Centers throughout the state. Keeping our families close and connected is in the best interest of the children, the incarcerated parent, and our communities.

Aloha Ke Akua,

Momi Akana , CEO

Keiki O Ka Aina Family Learning Centers

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/15/2025 2:56:26 AM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
April Bautista	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I hope you consider passing SCR 20 as a person (1) who's family member committed suicide in Hawaii after being released from an Arizona prison; (2) acquaintances at State operated prisons as employees; and (3) a long time Kalihi resident living within 3 miles of Puuhale prison.

thank you,

april bautista

kalihi-Pālama

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/15/2025 9:37:45 AM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erin Harner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am the mother of an inmate who is being held at the Waiawa Correctional Center. I live on the Big Island. His daughter and I try to visit once a month, but it is very expensive as we have to fly over and rent a car. There must be many others who aren't as lucky to be able to afford to visit from other islands. In your evaluation, please consider placing inmates on their home islands when possible, especially when they are in a minimum security facility.

I would also like to say a word about the wonderful family days they are having at Waiawa. We've been to two of them and I can't tell you how nice it is to be in a normal setting having fun with my son for a few hours instead of across a table for one hour. Whoever came up with that idea, I thank you!

Mahalo, Erin Harner

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/15/2025 11:38:51 AM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Devin Crawely	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Contact visitation is a pivotal element that helps strengthen bonds between incarcerated individuals and their families. While in person visits without contact can help keep families in touch, I saw first hand at how special it is for an incarcerated parent to hold their child. This happened at the first ever kids day at Halawa prison on 04/12/2025. These parents were happy to hug their loved ones and were thankful for every volunteer who showed up for support that they typically do not see. I saw a father playing catch with his son, a father decorating cookies with his daughter, and a father holding his young infant with the biggest grin on his face. Each of these families built memories for both parent and child to hold on to that will help guide them in the right direction. Contact visitation like this event not only strengthens the bond between family members, but creates a supportive role in their rehabilitation process. It gives the incarcerated person a goal of working on their rehabilitation to get back to their families to build more of these memories. This also creates a smooth transition from incarceration into society by building a strong support system at home. This bill will help foster the bonds of families and build a support system for these families affected by incarceration who feel left behind.

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/16/2025 9:54:05 AM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Kitsu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am support of this resoluion. Child and family visitations in prison plays a crucial role in maintaining or re-connecting the bond between incarcerated individuals and their families. It provides an essential opportunity for communication, healthy relationship building, and emotional support. All of which can have a significant impact to the mental well-being of both the inmates and their loved ones. Regular visits help to preserve family relationships, reduce feelings of isolation, and promote rehabilitation by allowing inmates to feel connected to to people and their community. Furthermore, maintaining these ties can facilitate a smoother reintegration back into society upon release, ultimately benefiting both the individual and the family unit. Fostering a supportive environment for visitation is vital for the health of families affected by incarceration.

Thank you very much for allowing me to testify on this important measure

Susan H. Kitsu

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/16/2025 12:39:06 PM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ty Tamagawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Della Au Bellati, and Vice Chair Kim Coco Iwamoto.

I support SCR20.

Though I understand the reasoning behind the current policies for in person visitation, I believe there needs to be a reevaluation in regulatory criteria and procedures regarding this topic due to the potential benefits it can have on rehabilitation and easier transitional stages for inmates integrating back into society.

In person visitations can impart vision, and give inmates hope for not only getting out, but staying out. Visitation not only offer practical support, but also emotional and mental well being. In person contact adds an extra layer of love that helps destigmatize the inmate not only to their loved ones but to themselves, and gives the inmate an opportunity to cherish and connect in more profound ways. When you are able to meet with loved ones with no physical barriers, connection is more real and tangible.

Not only the inmate benefits, but the loved ones as well. Imagine partners, keiki, and grand kids being able to see their loved ones in person. It keeps the inmates more deeply connected to a life outside of their current situation, which helps with integration and rehabilitation. It is the mental battle that is usually hardest on inmates, finding reasons for hope and perseverance to move on.

I support the need to reevaluate policies and come up with more humane ways to regulate and offer these types of visitations. It maybe extra work, but it is useful work towards a better life for our local communities, because yes, I see prison as a community no matter how dysfunctional it maybe. Though they maybe separated from society, they are still part of it, our ohana, a local community. So anything that benefits our local communities, ultimately benefit Hawaii as a whole.

Mahalo for your time.

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/16/2025 1:56:17 PM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katrina Fenner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Elefante, Vice Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committee,

I am Katrina Fenner an undergraduate student at UH Manoa and I am writing in support of bill SCR20 which calls for the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to reevaluate their in-person visitation policies for incarcerated individuals since many inmates in the Hawai'i prison system have gone for months, some for years, without physical contact from family members or loved ones. In order to rehabilitate, incarcerated folks need human connection and strong support systems. By ensuring individuals are rehabilitated we can help decrease recidivism and keep people out of the prison system which perpetuates harm and is extremely costly to tax-payers. PLEASE SUPPORT!

Mahalo for listening to my testimony

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/16/2025 3:08:14 PM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Haley Meyer	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Haley Meyer, and I am a Sociology student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

I am asking you to reevaluate the in-person contact visitation policies. In-person visitation is crucial as it improves relationships, helps with rehabilitation, and helps an inmate’s mental and emotional health. According to a 1972 study done on visitation in California prisons, those who had no visitors during their incarceration were six times more likely to reoffend. Years later, researchers found similar results from Hawai‘i State Prison. Evidence showing the benefits of prison visitation has grown since then, with studies showing visitations helped reduce depressive symptoms. These people are in a situation where they need loved ones more than ever. Please reevaluate the visitation policies. Mahalo.

Written Testimony #3- SCR 20

Dear Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and members of the house committee on Public Safety:

My name is Panda Valdenarro, and I am an MSW student at the University of Hawaii Manoa School of Social Work. I am also an educator working as a TA and substitute at Kamehameha Schools Kapalama and an intern with the Behavioral Health Service Department at KMS. I reside in Kaneohe, Hawaii. The views I will express are mine and do not necessarily reflect those of UH Manoa or Kamehameha Schools.

I am submitting **testimony in support of SCR 20**, which urges the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to reevaluate its policies regarding in person contact visitation at correctional facilities throughout the state of Hawaii. **In-person visitation plays a vital role in rehabilitation, mental well-being, and successful reintegration into the society at large.**

Numerous studies show that in-person visitation is directly linked to **positive outcomes**, including **reduced disciplinary infractions and improved post-release success**. This is what our corrections department should be aiming for.

A study published in Criminology & Public Policy found that incarcerated individuals who received visits were 26% less likely to reoffend after release (Bales & Mears, 2008). Another study from the Minnesota Department of Corrections found that visitation significantly reduced the risk of recidivism, particularly when visits were from close family members (Duwe & Clark, 2013)

This issue is deeply personal to me. My mother was incarcerated when I was younger, and I was able to visit her regularly during that time. Those visits made a tremendous difference—not only for her, but for our entire family. ***They reminded her that she was still loved, still connected to the outside world, and still had something to come home to.*** That connection helped her stay focused, follow facility rules, and ultimately qualify for early release due to good behavior. In person, the visitation was only through a glass wall for the first 6 months and in that time my mom grew agitated, hopeless, and more defeated than I had ever seen her. **Once we were able to have contact, share a meal and even do activities with my siblings, her demeanor changed.** She grew hopeful and gained more perspective about the life she wanted. **Most importantly, she has NOT returned to jail since.** I truly believe that without in-person visits, her outcome could have been very different.

Contrary to common assumptions, **in-person visitation is not a major source of contraband**. In fact, many correction agencies acknowledge that staff, mail, and official channels are more common sources. When South Carolina banned in-person visitation in favor of video-only options, it did not see a significant reduction in contraband—but it did see an **increase in unrest and behavioral issues within facilities** (Prison Policy Initiative, 2018). Removing these visits harms incarcerated individuals without addressing the root of the contraband problem.

In closing, **I urge you to support policies that protect and expand in-person visitation.** For my mom, it helped change her life. For many others, it could do the same. Cutting off that support system is not only unjust—it is counterproductive to the goals of rehabilitation and successful reentry.

Sincerely,
Panda Valdenarro

SCR-20

Submitted on: 4/17/2025 9:57:35 AM

Testimony for PBS on 4/17/2025 3:15:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Colleen Rost-Banik	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Committee on Public Safety,

My name is Colleen Rost-Banik. I am a resident of Honolulu and an instructor of Sociology at University of Hawaii, Manoa. I also facilitate a Creative Writing Program at the Women's Community Correctional Center.

I urge you to support SCR20, a resolution that calls for the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to evaluate its visitation policy. So many people who are incarcerated are prevented from seeing their loved ones on a regular basis. This separation ends up creating more isolation and harm rather than healing. If we are really about rehabilitating those who are incarcerated, we will make every effort to ensure that they are able to maintain in-person connection with the people who nurture and offer them support. This not only helps people during their time on the inside, but also assists them in preparation for their reentry as our neighbors.

Some of the facilities have been slow in reinstituting regular visitation days post-pandemic and due to staffing. However, we need to prioritize visitation so that loved ones are able to maintain connection with one another. It is through this connection that many of the folks incarcerated at WCCC have told me that they are able to be their better selves.

Please consider support of SCR20.

Mahalo,
Colleen Rost-Banik, PhD