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

FROM: Mark Patterson, Chair
Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission

SUBJECT: Senate Concurrent Resolution 21, Requesting the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to make available to correctional facility staff members throughout the State clinical counseling services that are separate and distinct from the existing mental health resources available to inmates.
Hearing: Monday, March 10, 2025; 3:05 p.m.
State Capitol, Room 225

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

The Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission (HCSOC) **supports** Senate Concurrent Resolution 20, Requesting the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to make available to correctional facility staff members throughout the State clinical counseling services that are separate and distinct from the existing mental health resources available to inmates.

As reported in the Commission's [*Correctional Staff Survey, Findings, and Recommendations*](#) report released on January 22, 2025, staff across various correctional facilities in Hawaii have raised significant concerns about their health and wellness, emphasizing the detrimental effects of chronic understaffing and excessive workloads. They frequently face long shifts and mandatory overtime, often working 16-hour days and sometimes even 24 to 36-hour shifts over weekends, leading to severe burnout and exhaustion. This intense workload has adverse effects on their physical health, contributing to issues like insomnia, reliance on substances for sleep, and the overconsumption of energy drinks, which can impact heart health. The demanding job also strains personal relationships and overall mental health.

Additionally, staff highlighted the need for robust mental health support. They advocated for a mental health program based in Downtown with practitioners trained in trauma-informed care specific to correctional settings. Mandatory trauma-informed training for all leadership levels and the establishment of a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) to provide debriefings and follow-up support after traumatic incidents were also recommended. Staff emphasized the importance of having a

mental health team that can offer immediate and continuous support, including group debriefings and individual follow-ups after critical events.

Furthermore, staff called for better physical wellness resources, such as onsite gyms and improved dining options that are distinct from those provided to inmates. They stressed the need for a supportive environment where staff feel valued and respected by Downtown leadership, including addressing basic facility conditions like adequate restroom facilities and the maintenance of working equipment and infrastructure to prevent additional stress and anxiety related to poor working conditions.

The report included the following recommendations, which came directly from corrections staff, for Staff Health and Wellness:

1. **Mental Health Support:** Implement a mental health program based in Downtown with practitioners trained in trauma-informed care specific to correctional settings. This includes mandatory trauma-informed training for all leadership levels and the establishment of a Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) to provide debriefings and follow-up support after traumatic incidents (this recommendation is intentionally included in two sections because it was present in staff discussion in this section and the training section).
2. **Physical Wellness Resources:** Establish facilities and opportunities for physical health activities, such as onsite gyms, group fitness classes, and better dining options that offer nutritious meals distinct from those provided to inmates. These resources aim to enhance staff well-being and promote a healthier work environment.
3. **Work-Life Balance:** Develop policies to address chronic understaffing and excessive workloads by hiring more staff and implementing flexible scheduling options. This approach will help reduce burnout, improve mental health, and allow staff to maintain a healthier work-life balance.

For the above reasons, the Commission supports Senate Concurrent Resolution 21. Should you have additional questions, the Oversight Coordinator, Christin Johnson, can be reached at 808-900-2200 or at christin.m.johnson@hawaii.gov.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.