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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE WOMEN'S COURT.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1 PART I

2 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that there has been a  
3 significant increase in the number of women in Hawaii jails and  
4 prisons over the past forty years, resulting in a higher  
5 proportion of women who are incarcerated. Research reflects  
6 that for women, histories of abuse, trauma, poverty, mental  
7 illness, substance use disorders, and unhealthy relationships  
8 intersect with their entry into criminal behavior. Women  
9 offenders also face unique barriers to success after  
10 incarceration. They are more likely to be primary caregivers  
11 for young children, have lower educational attainment, lack  
12 stable work history, and experience economic or social  
13 marginalization, which prevents them from having more positive  
14 outcomes.

15 The legislature further finds that Act 243, Session Laws of  
16 Hawaii 2022, established a three-year women's court pilot  
17 program in the circuit court of the first circuit. This



1 program, known as Mohala Wahine, focuses on non-violent women  
2 who are at high risk of recidivism and in need of multiple  
3 services such as substance abuse treatment, therapy, or housing.  
4 The program began accepting participants in January of 2023,  
5 with a goal of admitting twenty women each year. As of August,  
6 2024, twenty-three women are currently participating in the  
7 program, with eleven participants in phase one of treatment and  
8 twelve participants in phase two of treatment.

9 The purpose of this Act is to:

- 10 (1) Establish a three-year women's court pilot program in  
11 the circuit court of the second and fifth circuits,  
12 which is intended to acknowledge the distinct pathways  
13 that lead women into the criminal justice system and  
14 address their individualized needs; and
- 15 (2) Require the third circuit of the judiciary and big  
16 island drug court to conduct an interim study to  
17 establish a blueprint for a women's court pilot  
18 program in the third circuit.

19 PART II

20 SECTION 2. (a) There shall be established within the  
21 second and fifth circuits of the judiciary the women's court



1 pilot program. The pilot program shall implement trauma-  
2 informed and evidence-based practices, employ gender-responsive  
3 programming, collaborate with stakeholders, and provide services  
4 to women in the court system with the goal of diverting  
5 participants from incarceration, supporting their success in the  
6 community, and reducing recidivism.

7 (b) The services offered by the pilot program shall  
8 address the following areas:

- 9 (1) Trauma and mental health treatment;
- 10 (2) Family support, including parenting, education, and  
11 relationship improvement;
- 12 (3) Life-skills training;
- 13 (4) Education and vocational training;
- 14 (5) Domestic violence prevention;
- 15 (6) Medical services and health education;
- 16 (7) Substance abuse detection, prevention, and treatment;
- 17 (8) Mentoring; and
- 18 (9) Housing support.

19 SECTION 3. The judiciary shall submit a report of its  
20 findings and recommendations, including any proposed  
21 legislation, to the governor and legislature no later than forty



1 days prior to the convening of the regular sessions of 2026,  
2 2027, and 2028, regarding:

- 3 (1) The status of the women's court pilot program;
- 4 (2) The number of women accepted into the women's court  
5 pilot program;
- 6 (3) The number of women who were eligible to participate  
7 in the women's court pilot program but who could not  
8 be accepted into the pilot program because of pilot  
9 program limitations;
- 10 (4) The number of women completing the women's court pilot  
11 program;
- 12 (5) The number of women who were removed from the women's  
13 court pilot program; and
- 14 (6) Recommendations as to whether the women's court pilot  
15 program should:
  - 16 (A) Continue as a pilot program;
  - 17 (B) Expand to include additional participants;
  - 18 (C) Provide additional services; or
  - 19 (D) Be discontinued.

20 SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general  
21 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so

1 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and  
2 the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal  
3 year 2026-2027 for equipment; mental health, substance abuse  
4 treatment, and other services; and the establishment  
5 of temporary positions as follows:

6 (1) full-time equivalent ( FTE) social worker V  
7 positions;

8 (2) full-time equivalent ( FTE) social worker IV  
9 positions;

10 (3) full-time equivalent ( FTE) circuit court  
11 clerk II positions; and

12 (4) full-time equivalent ( FTE) judicial clerk  
13 positions;

14 for the women's court pilot program established pursuant to  
15 section 2 of this Act.

16 The sums appropriated shall be expended by the judiciary  
17 for the purposes of this Act.

18 SECTION 5. There is appropriated out of the general  
19 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so  
20 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and  
21 the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal



1 year 2026-2027 for the women's court pilot program established  
2 pursuant to section 2 of this Act and the establishment  
3 of temporary positions as follows:

4 (1) \$ for full-time equivalent ( FTE)  
5 clinical psychologist position;

6 (2) \$ for full-time equivalent ( FTE)  
7 social worker/human services professional IV position;  
8 and

9 (3) \$ for full-time equivalent ( FTE)  
10 social services assistant V position.

11 The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department  
12 of health for the purposes of this Act.

13 PART III

14 SECTION 6. (a) The third circuit of the judiciary and big  
15 island drug court shall conduct an interim study to establish a  
16 blueprint for a women's court pilot program in the third  
17 circuit.

18 (b) The third circuit of the judiciary shall submit a  
19 report of its findings and recommendations, including any  
20 proposed legislation and resource requirements, to the



1 legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of  
2 the regular session of 2026.

3 PART IV

4 SECTION 7. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000, and  
5 shall be repealed on June 30, 2028.



# H.B. NO. <sup>727</sup> H.D. 1

**Report Title:**

Judiciary; Women's Court Pilot Program; Reports; Appropriations

**Description:**

Establishes a temporary three-year women's court pilot program within the Second and Fifth Circuits. Requires the Third Circuit of the Judiciary and Big Island Drug Court to conduct an interim study to establish a blueprint for a women's court pilot program in the Third Circuit. Requires reports. Establishes temporary positions. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. Sunsets 6/30/2028. (HD1)

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

