

STAND. COM. REP. NO. 1240

Honolulu, Hawaii

**MAR 21 2025**

RE: H.B. No. 727  
H.D. 1  
S.D. 1

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi  
President of the Senate  
Thirty-Third State Legislature  
Regular Session of 2025  
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Judiciary, to which was referred H.B. No. 727, H.D. 1, entitled:

"A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO THE WOMEN'S COURT,"

begs leave to report as follows:

The purpose and intent of this measure is to:

- (1) Establish a three-year Women's Court Pilot Program in the circuit court of the Second and Fifth Circuits, which is intended to acknowledge the distinct pathways that lead women into the criminal justice system and address their individualized needs; and
- (2) Require 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.

Your Committee received testimony in support of this measure from the Judiciary, Department of Health, Office of the Public Defender, State Council on Mental Health, Department of the Prosecuting Attorney of the County of Maui, Office of the Prosecuting Attorney of the County of Hawai'i, County of Hawai'i Committee on the Status of Women, Hawaii Substance Abuse



Coalition, West Hawaii Bar Association, Community Alliance on Prisons, and nine individuals.

Your Committee finds that Mohala Wahine, or the State's Women's Court three-year pilot program, was established in the First Circuit by Act 243, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022, and has been operational since January 2023. The mission of Mohala Wahine is to assist and guide participants in meeting their legal and statutory responsibilities and to facilitate change in the participants' well-being by providing gender-responsive services that uphold the mission of the State's Judiciary and the Adult Client Services Branch. Additionally, Mohala Wahine aims to enhance community safety by reducing recidivism through evidence-based, trauma-informed care, and cultural practices. Your Committee further finds that thus far, the Women's Court Pilot Program has been successful, with eleven participants in phase one of treatment and twelve participants in phase two of treatment. Given the success of the First District's Mohala Wahine, your Committee believes that the Mohala Wahine Pilot Program should become permanent.

Your Committee additionally finds that the Third Circuit, specifically the Kona area, is at a disadvantage to address crime motivators such as substance abuse, mental health, and homelessness, given its limited community resources and funding, geographic restrictions, limitations of court supervision authorities, overcrowded correctional facilities, understaffed law enforcement, and shortage of direct service providers. Additionally, Hawaii County has the highest poverty rate in the State, high rates of domestic violence, and limited opportunities for employment, all of which disproportionately impact women, who are more likely to be victims of violence and more likely to have dependent children in their care. Your Committee believes that, based on data and information provided by the Judiciary in testimony at the public hearing on this measure, closing the service gap for the most at-risk women in the Kona area of the Third District is imperative. This measure will support women in the State dealing with trauma, abuse, unhealthy relationships, and more by providing substance abuse treatment, mental health support, and assistance with navigating the criminal and social services systems.

Accordingly, your Committee has amended this measure by:



- (1) Inserting language making the Women's Court Pilot Program in the First Circuit permanent;
- (2) Establishing a three-year Women's Court Pilot Program in the circuit court of the Kona division of the Third Circuit, rather than the Second and Fifth Circuits;
- (3) Specifying that the Women's Court Pilot Program is under the supervision of the Big Island Drug Court;
- (4) Inserting an appropriation amount of \$514,900 for fiscal year 2025-2026 and \$557,000 for fiscal year 2026-2027 for services and two temporary positions for the Women's Court Pilot Program in the Kona division of the Third Circuit;
- (5) Deleting language that would have appropriated an unspecified amount of funds to the Department of Health for an unspecified number of temporary positions;
- (6) Deleting language that would have required 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;
- (7) Requiring the Judiciary to submit a report to the Legislature no later than forty days prior to the Regular Session of 2026 regarding the need for and the associated costs of a pilot program for Women's Court in the Second and Fifth Circuits and Hilo division of the Third Circuit;
- (8) Amending section 1 to reflect its amended purpose;
- (9) Inserting an effective date of April 23, 2027, to encourage further discussion; and
- (10) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity and consistency.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Judiciary that is attached to this report, your



Committee is in accord with the intent and purpose of H.B. No. 727, H.D. 1, as amended herein, and recommends that it pass Second Reading in the form attached hereto as H.B. No. 727, H.D. 1, S.D. 1, and be referred to your Committee on Ways and Means.

Respectfully submitted on  
behalf of the members of the  
Committee on Judiciary,



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KARL RHOADS, Chair



