
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO OFFENDER REENTRY.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that House Concurrent
2 Resolution No. 85, H.D. 2, S.D. 1 (2016), requested the
3 convening of a task force to make recommendations to the
4 legislature on ways to improve Hawaii's correctional system.
5 The final report of the House Concurrent Resolution 85 Task
6 Force on Prison Reform was submitted to the legislature in
7 December 2018. According to the 2018 report, "the State's
8 correctional system is not producing acceptable, cost-effective,
9 or sustainable outcomes and needs immediate and profound
10 change." Prison populations have risen noticeably since the
11 1980s, with Hawaii experiencing an eight hundred and seventy per
12 cent increase in prison populations between 1980 and 2018. This
13 increase has had a disproportionate impact on native Hawaiians,
14 with the task force finding that native Hawaiians make up forty
15 per cent of the prison population but only twenty per cent of
16 the overall population in the State. Additionally, prisons are



1 failing to correct unwanted behavior, leading to higher rates of
2 recidivism.

3 The legislature further finds that the 2019 Recidivism
4 Update to the 2002 Hawaii Recidivism Baseline Study shows that
5 nearly fifty-four per cent of criminals in Hawaii are repeat
6 offenders. The State correctional system's high rate of
7 recidivism, and the corresponding overall increase in prison
8 populations since the 1980s, produces a serious financial burden
9 on local communities. A 2020 study evaluating the corrections
10 system in Hawaii estimates that it costs the State approximately
11 \$72,000 to incarcerate an inmate for one year. By lowering
12 recidivism rates, the State could save significant amounts of
13 money that it could invest in other programs, such as education,
14 infrastructure, or social services.

15 The legislature further finds that offering extensive and
16 high-quality educational and vocational programs to inmates is
17 effective in reducing rates of recidivism and the overall cost
18 of the correctional system.

19 The legislature further finds that inmate participation in
20 mentorship reentry programs translates to higher rates of
21 employment and lower rates of recidivism. According to a



1 Public/Private Ventures study, inmates who participated in
2 mentorship programs were more than twice as likely to find a job
3 after release than inmates who did not. The same study found
4 that one year after release, participants who were mentored were
5 thirty-five per cent less likely to recidivate than inmates who
6 were not mentored.

7 The purpose of this Act is to:

- 8 (1) Encourage inmates to participate in correctional
9 educational programs and vocational training;
- 10 (2) Increase the quality and quantity of correctional
11 mentorship, counseling, educational, and vocational
12 training programs available to interested inmates;
- 13 (3) Allow inmates to earn an income and engage in
14 supervised apprenticeship training to obtain licensure
15 and increase marketability and workforce readiness
16 upon the completion of their sentencing; and
- 17 (4) Appropriate funds to expand model programs to include
18 more quality educational and vocational programs.

19 SECTION 2. Section 353H-4, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
20 amended to read as follows:



1 " [§]S353H-4 [§] **Model programs; department of corrections**
2 **and rehabilitation.** Subject to funding by the legislature, the
3 department of corrections and rehabilitation shall enhance the
4 State's comprehensive offender reentry system by developing
5 model programs designed to reduce recidivism and promote
6 successful reentry into the community. Components of the model
7 programs shall include but are not limited to:
8 (1) Highly skilled staff who are experienced in working
9 with offender reentry programs;
10 (2) Individualized case management and a full continuum of
11 care to ensure successful reentry;
12 (3) Life skills development workshops, including
13 budgeting, money management, nutrition, and exercise;
14 development of self-determination through education;
15 employment training; special education for the
16 learning disabled; social, cognitive, communication,
17 and life skills training; and appropriate treatment
18 programs, including substance abuse and mental health
19 treatment;
20 (4) Parenting and relationship building classes. The
21 department shall institute policies that support



- 1 family cohesion and family participation in offenders'
2 transition to the community, and, where possible,
3 provide geographical proximity of offenders to their
4 children and families; [and]
- 5 (5) Ongoing attention to building support for offenders
6 from communities, community agencies, and
7 organizations[.];
- 8 (6) Programs that encourage inmates without a high school
9 diploma or equivalency certificate to obtain a high
10 school equivalency certificate while incarcerated by
11 matching inmates with an advisor, mentor, or guidance
12 counselor to support the inmates' understanding of
13 incarceration's impact on family, emotions, and
14 society;
- 15 (7) Programs that encourage eligible inmates to attend
16 community college or university by teaching inmates
17 the benefits of a college education;
- 18 (8) Programs that shift the focus of career training
19 programs to relevant and useful opportunities,
20 highlight job prospects and benefits that inmates can
21 obtain after completion of specific career training



- 1 programs, and teach inmates about the benefits of
2 stable employment beyond incarceration and its
3 benefits on themselves, family, and society;
4 (9) Programs that work with non-profit organizations and
5 the business community to secure job positions for
6 inmates that have completed necessary career training
7 programs and have the required qualifications;
8 (10) Programs that compel inmates convicted of a felony to
9 undergo emotional, academic, and behavioral mentoring
10 or counseling by recommending that inmates be granted
11 parole or early release upon completion of the
12 program; and
13 (11) Earn and learn programs that expand existing career
14 training opportunities and work furlough programs.

15 For purposes of this section:

16 "Earn and learn programs" means programs that allow
17 eligible inmates to participate in supervised apprenticeships to
18 work toward licensure while getting paid."

19 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
20 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much
21 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the



1 department of corrections and rehabilitation to expand existing
2 model programs to provide more educational and vocational
3 training opportunities for interested inmates.

4 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of
5 corrections and rehabilitation for the purposes of this Act.

6 SECTION 4. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
7 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

8 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

9

INTRODUCED BY:

John M. Sherry
JAN 23 2026



H.B. NO. 2044

Report Title:

Recidivism; Offender Re-entry Programs; Appropriation

Description:

Expands programming and training for the comprehensive offender reentry program under the department of corrections and rehabilitation to reduce the rate of recidivism and increase inmate marketability. Appropriates funds.

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