

JAN 28 2026

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO PRETRIAL REFORM.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that Hawaii has many
2 defendants incarcerated pretrial - that is, before they have had
3 an opportunity to defend themselves against the charges alleged.
4 The legislature further finds that Hawaii has spent at least a
5 decade analyzing and considering reforms to the pretrial system.
6 These efforts have produced extensive recommendations and
7 critiques; yet, by many accounts, too many individuals continue
8 to be detained before trial.

9 Detaining an arrestee before a court has determined guilt
10 contradicts the fundamental principle of "innocent until proven
11 guilty." More than one hundred thirty years ago, the United
12 States Supreme Court affirmed that "[t]he principle that there
13 is a presumption of innocence in favor of the accused is the
14 undoubted law, axiomatic and elementary, and its enforcement
15 lies at the foundation of the administration of our criminal
16 law" (*Coffin v. United States*, 156 U.S. 432, 453 (1895)).



1 The Supreme Court has also stated that "[i]n our society
2 liberty is the norm, and detention prior to trial or without
3 trial is the carefully limited exception" (*United States v.*
4 *Salerno*, 481 U.S. 739, 755 (1987)). Pretrial detention may be
5 imposed for arrestees charged with certain felonies only when
6 the government demonstrates, by clear and convincing evidence
7 after an adversarial hearing, that no release conditions "will
8 reasonably assure . . . the safety of any other person and the
9 community" (481 U.S. 739).

10 Drawing on these foundational cases, the Hawaii judiciary
11 conducted the most comprehensive recent statewide efforts to
12 improve the pretrial system, which culminated in the final
13 report of the criminal pretrial task force in 2018. This two-
14 hundred-fifty-page report outlined twenty-five recommendations
15 to improve the pretrial system. For purposes of this
16 legislation, one of the most significant recommendations states:
17 The use of monetary bail should be eliminated and
18 defendants should be released on their own
19 recognizance for traffic offenses, violations, non-
20 violent petty misdemeanor and non-violent misdemeanor
21 offenses with certain exceptions. Many jurisdictions



1 across the nation have shifted away from money bail
2 systems and have instead adopted risk-based systems.
3 Defendants are released based on the risks they
4 present for non-appearance and recidivism, rather than
5 their financial circumstances. At least for lower-
6 level offenses, the Task Force recommends a shift away
7 from money bail.

8 The legislature also finds that Act 179, Session Laws of
9 Hawaii 2019, guided by task force recommendations, made
10 significant changes to pretrial laws. However, little, if any,
11 change has occurred in the number of defendants held pretrial.

12 Nationwide trends also show growing support for releasing
13 nonviolent defendants without cash bail. In 2022, Illinois
14 became the first state to eliminate all cash bail for all
15 defendants. Other jurisdictions, including the District of
16 Columbia and several major cities, have also eliminated cash
17 bail for nonviolent misdemeanors and felonies.

18 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to reduce the
19 number of pretrial defendants incarcerated in jails by:

20 (1) Eliminating the use of monetary bail and requiring
21 release on recognizance for violations, traffic



1 offenses, nonviolent petty misdemeanor offenses,
2 nonviolent misdemeanor offenses, and certain
3 nonviolent class C felony offenses unless specified
4 statutory exceptions apply;

5 (2) Creating a "wilful flight" standard that is fairer to
6 the arrestee and focuses on ensuring safety and
7 compliance, rather than penalizing an isolated failure
8 to appear; and

9 (3) Requiring victim notification at each stage of the
10 decision-making process in a case.

11 SECTION 2. Chapter 804, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
12 amended by adding two new sections to be appropriately
13 designated and to read as follows:

14 "§804- Pretrial release; nonviolent offenders. (a)

15 Except as otherwise provided in this section, any defendant

16 arrested, charged, and held for a violation, traffic offense,

17 nonviolent petty misdemeanor offense, nonviolent misdemeanor

18 offense, or nonviolent class C felony offense shall be ordered

19 by the court to be released on the defendant's own recognizance

20 at arraignment and plea, conditioned upon:



1 (1) The general conditions of release on bail set forth in
2 section 804-7.4; and
3 (2) Any other least restrictive, non-monetary condition
4 necessary to:
5 (A) Ensure the defendant's appearance in court; and
6 (B) Protect the public.

7 Conditions under section 804-7.1 may also be imposed at the
8 court's discretion.

9 (b) This section shall not apply if:
10 (1) The offense involves:
11 (A) Assault;
12 (B) Terroristic threatening;
13 (C) Sexual assault;
14 (D) Abuse of family or household members;
15 (E) Violation of a temporary restraining order;
16 (F) Violation of an order for protection;
17 (G) Violation of a restraining order or injunction;
18 (H) Operating a vehicle under the influence of an
19 intoxicant; or
20 (I) Negligent homicide;



1 (2) The defendant presents a specific, real, and present
2 threat to any other person or to the community; or
3 (3) The defendant has a high likelihood of wilful flight.
4 (c) If the court releases the defendant on personal
5 recognizance, the court may require the defendant to sign a
6 written acknowledgement agreeing to comply with the conditions
7 of release, including the general conditions of release on bail
8 set forth in section 804-7.4. The defendant's address shall
9 remain a matter of public record with the clerk of the court.
10 (d) Failure to appear as required shall constitute an
11 offense subject to punishment at the court's discretion for
12 violation of pretrial release conditions.
13 (e) If any of the exclusions in subsection (b) apply, bail
14 may be set in a reasonable amount pursuant to section 804-9,
15 based upon all of the available information including the
16 defendant's financial ability to afford bail. If the defendant
17 is unable to post the amount of bail set, the defendant shall be
18 entitled to a prompt hearing as set forth in section 804-7.5.
19 (f) If the court decides to detain the defendant or set
20 monetary bail, the court shall make written findings explaining
21 why less restrictive conditions would not reasonably assure:



1 (1) The safety of any person or the community; or
2 (2) The defendant's appearance in court.
3 At each subsequent appearance, the court shall determine whether
4 continued detention or the continued imposition of conditions
5 remain necessary to avoid a specific, real, and present threat
6 to any other person or to the community, or to prevent the
7 wilful flight of the defendant. The court may reconsider
8 detention or conditions at any time without requiring new
9 information or changed circumstances.

10 (g) This section shall neither preclude a law enforcement
11 agency from setting an initial bail amount before arraignment,
12 nor prevent a court from determining bail or conditions of
13 release at arraignment if an initial bail amount was set by a
14 law enforcement agency before arraignment.

15 (h) For the purposes of this section, "wilful flight"
16 means intentional conduct undertaken with the purpose of
17 thwarting the judicial process to avoid prosecution, as
18 evidenced by recurring or patterned conduct to evade prosecution
19 or by a failure to take affirmative steps to communicate
20 regarding or remedy missed court dates. "Wilful flight" does
21 not include isolated instances of nonappearance in court.



1 §804- Victim rights notification. Notwithstanding
2 chapter 801D, during all stages of a defendant's pretrial case,
3 the prosecution shall notify any victim of decisions made in the
4 case."

5 SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.

6 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

7

INTRODUCED BY: Karl Rhoads



Report Title:

Bail; Pretrial Release; Nonviolent Offenders

Description:

Requires release on recognizance for defendants charged with violations, traffic offenses, nonviolent petty misdemeanors, nonviolent misdemeanors, and nonviolent class C felonies, subject to conditions. Establishes exclusions for specified offenses, threats to public safety, and wilful flight. Requires findings when bail or detention is imposed, ongoing review of continued detention or conditions, and a prompt hearing if bail cannot be posted. Requires prosecutors to notify victims of pretrial decisions.

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

