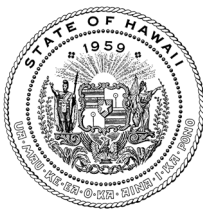


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I
**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
AND REHABILITATION**
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a Ho'oponopono Ola*
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Sanna Muñoz
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Programs

No. _____

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2044
RELATING TO OFFENDER REENTRY.

by
Tommy Johnson, Director
Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

House Committee on Public Safety
Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair
Representative Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 4, 2026; 9:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 411 & Via Video Conference

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) **supports the intent of** House Bill (HB) 2044, which proposes to expand programming and training for the comprehensive offender reentry program under the DCR to reduce the rate of recidivism and increase inmate marketability and appropriate funds.

As you may recall, during last year's legislative session, the Legislature supported a proposal to provide the DCR with \$4 million in reoccurring funding specifically for programming and reentry efforts. DCR sincerely appreciates the Legislature's continued support and interest in this critically important area. With part of the \$4 million appropriated last year, DCR has increased services and programs including programs that result in opportunities for inmates to earn a living wage. Some recent efforts include increased collaboration with the Hawai'i Laborers' Apprenticeship and Training Program, where after passing a pre-evaluation course during which time participants were paid union wages, and 8 of 9 participants became employed with the union. As a pilot project, DCR also paid for and supervised the first Hawai'i Carpenters Apprenticeship and Training Fund Indenture Day for 1 inmate.

In addition, DCR's partnership with the Oahu Workforce Development Board, Hawai'i American Job Center and Simply 3D Hawai'i, ensured three (3) graduates from the first dental assistant training program cohort became paid interns with dental clinics in Hawai'i (earning \$20 to \$23 per hour). Additionally, women inmates can earn a yoga instructor certificate through Koa Yoga, and earn \$20 per hour teaching yoga classes within the facility.

DCR also continues to increase educational and career training opportunities such as the addition of the Mental Health Technician program through Windward Community College (WCC) to provide foundational training to inmates. The college credits they earn will transfer to their University of Hawai'i transcripts and they can opt to further their post-secondary education. Additionally, we continue to offer Associate and Bachelor Degree opportunities through WCC and Chaminade University of Hawai'i, with plans to expand.

To further assist inmates with critical thinking, understanding and preparing for their roles in the community, we have partnered with lead programs such as Try Think, Mohalu Talks, Project NAM (NAACP, Afro-American Association of Hawai'i and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Coalition) and Peer Mentor Services. These programs provide support and guidance, help develop plans for release, addresses challenges that arise, and increase successful reentry into the community for the incarcerated individuals in DCR's custody.

As we continue to secure additional educational and vocational opportunities to increase inmate marketability, we will monitor the outcomes of these initiatives and pursue those that demonstrate positive outcomes towards successful reentry and reducing recidivism. We appreciate the Legislature's patience as we develop, implement, assess, and make adjustments to our comprehensive offender reentry efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the intent of HB 2044.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



STATE OF HAWAII
HAWAII CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM OVERSIGHT COMMISSION
E HUIKALA A MA'EMA'E NŌ
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HON. RONALD IBARRA (ret.)

MARTHA TORNEY

HON. MICHAEL A. TOWN (ret.)

TO: The Honorable Della Au Belatti, Chair
The Honorable Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair
House Committee on Public Safety

FROM: Mark Patterson, Chair
Hawai'i Correctional System Oversight Commission

SUBJECT: House Bill 2044, Relating to Offender Reentry
Hearing: Wednesday, February 4, 2026; 9:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Room 411

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawai'i Correctional System Oversight Commission (HCSOC) submits testimony in **support** of House Bill 2044, relating to offender reentry, which 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.

This bill aligns directly with the Commission's mandate to support Hawaii's transition toward a rehabilitative and therapeutic correctional model. The proposed amendments target key drivers of recidivism, including low educational attainment, limited job skills, unemployment, emotional dysregulation, and insufficient life skills. By addressing these barriers during incarceration, the bill increases the likelihood of successful reintegration and strengthens long-term public safety.

The measure modernizes Hawaii's correctional approach by embedding education pathways, strengthening career training aligned with real-world labor market needs, expanding mentorship and counseling supports, and building stronger employment pipelines. These reforms shift the system away from a punitive, custodial framework and toward one focused on rehabilitation, accountability, and economic stability.

Expanding access to job training, educational programming, and structured reentry services is a proven strategy for reducing reoffending. Individuals who leave custody with marketable skills, credentials, and employment opportunities are more likely to remain stable, support their families, and avoid returning to the justice system. Over time, these investments reduce correctional costs and ease strain on communities, courts, and public resources.

Should you have additional questions, the Oversight Coordinator, Christin Johnson, can be reached at 808-849-3580 or at christin.m.johnson@hawaii.gov. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

JON N. IKENAGA
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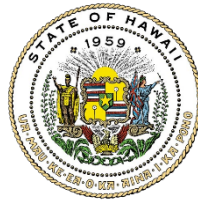
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February 2, 2026

HB 2044: OFFENDER REENTRY

Chair Belatti, Vice-Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee on Public Safety:

The Office of the Public Defender (OPD) **supports** HB 2044 which expands and strengthens Hawai'i's comprehensive offender reentry system by investing in education, vocational training, mentorship, and employment-focused programming designed to reduce recidivism and promote successful reintegration into the community.

As the Legislature has recognized, Hawai'i's correctional system is not producing acceptable or sustainable outcomes. Prison populations have increased dramatically since the 1980s, with Native Hawaiians disproportionately represented, and recidivism rates remain unacceptably high. Nearly fifty-four percent of individuals released from incarceration in Hawai'i are repeat offenders, imposing significant social and financial costs on our communities. The current system is not working.

This measure builds upon evidence-based strategies shown to improve post-release outcomes, including individualized case management, substance use and mental health treatment, life-skills education, mentorship, and workforce development. Research cited in the bill demonstrates that individuals who participate in mentorship and reentry programs are substantially more likely to obtain employment and significantly less likely to reoffend.

From the OPD's perspective, this investment is critical. Our clients routinely enter jail or prison with limited education, unstable housing, untreated mental health or substance use needs, and fragile employment histories. During incarceration, many

lose access to government benefits, housing, and employment, leaving them in a worse position upon release than when they entered custody.

Individuals released from incarceration without meaningful programming or transitional support are often returned to the very conditions that contributed to their involvement with the criminal legal system in the first place. Reentry programming that connects individuals to employment, education, counseling, and community-based supports is essential not only to their success, but to the safety and well-being of the broader community.

By reducing recidivism, Hawai'i can also reduce the enormous fiscal burden of incarceration, which has been estimated at approximately \$72,000 per person per year. Savings generated by successful reentry can be reinvested into education, housing, healthcare, and other community priorities that further enhance public safety.

This measure reflects a thoughtful, data-driven approach to public safety - one that recognizes that lasting safety is achieved not through warehousing individuals, but through education, treatment, employment, and meaningful community connection.

For these reasons, the Office of the Public Defender **strongly supports** HB 2044.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Public Safety
February 4, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.

By

Lui Hokoana, Interim Vice President for Community Colleges
University of Hawai'i System

HB 2044 – RELATING TO OFFENDER REENTRY.

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports HB 2044, which 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.

Windward Community College (Windward CC), part of the ten-campus system of the UH, has partnered with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) since 2017 to offer credit-bearing education for incarcerated students. Other UH campuses have also partnered with DCR to offer non-credit education.

Windward CC currently offers associate's degrees in Hawaiian Studies and Liberal Arts at Halawa Correctional Facility (HCF), the Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC), and Saguaro Correctional Center (SCC) in Eloy, Arizona. Windward CC also offers the Mental Health Tech certificate at HCF and WCCC, as well as coursework through early college at Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility (HYCF) and a course that leads to increased City & County of Honolulu employability at WCCC. Students in these programs are incredibly successful with 86% earning a C or better in their classes and a grade point average of 3.2 (out of 4.0). Over 1,100 students have been served with over 3,500 credits earned. Forty-nine students have earned certificates, and three have earned associate's degrees.

Through strong collaboration with DCR, Windward CC is the first and only U.S. Department of Education designated Prison Education Program (PEP) in Hawai'i. This means Windward CC can provide federal financial aid (PELL) at WCCC and HCF. The SCC program has been accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges and is in the process of PEP designation. Thus, credit courses can be offered based on financial aid, with no cost to DCR for these courses when students are PELL eligible.

Data based on Windward CC's programs has demonstrated significantly decreased recidivism of those who participated in college credit-bearing education, in line with national statistics. Nationally, recidivism can be directly tied to education with the highest recidivism rates for those with no high school diploma or GED (55%-60%), slightly lower rates for those attaining high school diploma/GED (46%-54.6%), and large decreases in recidivism for those with associate's degrees (13.7%-27.2%), bachelor's degrees (5.6% - 7.8%), and master's

degrees (almost 0% recidivism). Hawai'i's high overall recidivism rate (54%) underscores the need to expand access to credit bearing degrees during incarceration.

Higher education is a particularly cost-effective measure in carceral settings. For example, the cost of tuition at UH community colleges are \$131/credit. The cost of a 60-credit associate's degree is about \$7,860. In comparison, the cost to house one inmate in Hawai'i is over \$72,000 per year. By preventing recidivism, higher education in prison proves highly cost effective to the State.

The case management aspects of this bill are also important to provision of carceral education. Currently, upon notification of release, Windward CC works with incarcerated students to form a post-release educational plan, including a zoom meeting with a counselor at their intended institution, decision-making regarding current enrollment, and post-release advising beyond academics, including potential student employment and basic needs support, such as food pantries, clothing closets, and other supports offered by campuses and community partners.

Barriers exist to increasing educational offerings in Hawai'i's carceral facilities. These include limitations on facilities (i.e. limited classroom space) and staffing (i.e. limitations on classroom hours due to both education and corrections officer staffing), as well as competition for the time/focus of incarcerated individuals between different programs, such education and workline, which provides a paid incentive for the individual and overlaps in timing with education.

Our partnership with DCR continues to grow, providing vital education to incarcerated individuals, despite barriers. The UH is thankful for this partnership and would look forward to expanding educational and training opportunities as outlined in this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2044.

"Education as crime prevention," Open Society Institute, Criminal Justice Initiative, Research Brief Occasional Paper Series No. 2 (September 1997); E.R. Meiners, "Resisting Civil Death: Organizing for Access to Education in our Prison Nation," DePaul Journal for Social Justice, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2009), H. McCarty 2006 op. cit.

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 9:20:39 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Colin Kumabe	Touch a Heart	Support	In Person

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB2044

(As A Proof of Concept Model)

Touch A Heart (TAH) is a Honolulu-based nonprofit that advances workforce development through vocational training and lived-experience-informed support services for adults and youth facing barriers to employment—including justice involvement, recovery from substance use, and other hardships that impact stability and opportunity. Our work is rooted in a simple belief: transformation happens when people are united by growth, not defined by their past. TAH’s workforce model builds job readiness, confidence, accountability, and long-term stability so participants can secure meaningful employment and contribute to their families and communities.

Since 2004, Touch A Heart has served individuals and families experiencing hardship through outreach, mentorship, meals, and supportive services. In 2012, TAH strengthened its focus on employment pathways for individuals facing significant barriers to work, particularly those impacted by incarceration and justice system involvement. To date, Touch A Heart has graduated over 145 participants, with more than 90% remaining successfully employed. TAH also prioritizes continuity of care and connection by keeping justice-impacted participants engaged throughout their transition process—including consistent communication, relationship-building, and demonstrating values in action—so individuals remain supported before, during, and after re-entry.

TAH’s workforce training model is anchored in our signature Growth Mindset Core Curriculum, which equips individuals to build resilience, strengthen workplace behaviors, and develop leadership skills that support long-term retention and advancement. Leadership development is built organically into the program, creating pathways for participants to grow into mentors, trainers, and lived-experience leaders over time. Participants gain real-world experience through TAH’s employment social enterprises—‘Ohana Meals, Baker’s Heart, and Touch A Heart Catering—while the organization works toward its 2026 goal of building a best-in-class, scalable workforce development program that develops lived-experience leaders and strengthens sustainability through earned revenue and partner-based training services.

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE ON PRISONS

P.O. Box 37158, Honolulu, HI 96837-0158

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Today's Inmate; Tomorrow's Neighbor



COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Representative Della Au Belatti, Chair

Representative Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 4, 2026

9:00 am

Room 411 and VIDEOCONFERENCE

SUPPORT FOR HB 2044 - REENTRY

Aloha Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto and Members of the Committee!

My name is Kat Brady and I am the Coordinator of Community Alliance on Prisons, a community initiative promoting smart justice policies in Hawai'i for almost three decades. This testimony is respectfully offered on behalf of the 3,654 Hawai'i individuals living behind bars¹ and under the "care and custody" of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation on January 26, 2026. We are always mindful that 799 – 43% of Hawai'i's imprisoned male population are serving their sentences abroad -- thousands of miles away from their loved ones, their homes and, for the disproportionate number of incarcerated Kanaka Maoli, far, far from their ancestral lands.

Community Alliance on Prisons appreciates the opportunity to express our support for REAL REENTRY PROGRAMS.

¹ DCR Weekly Population Report, January 26, 2026
[Pop-Reports-Weekly-2026-01-26.pdf](#)

The problems we see with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) all stem from lack of communication with the staff that have daily contact with incarcerated persons. The Hawai'i Correctional System Oversight Commission (HCSOC) conducted a staff survey² that was very revealing as to the problems with DCR.

Correctional Staff Survey, Findings, and Recommendations Report

The HCSOC deliberately undertook this staffing survey and report as the Commission's first system-wide report due to the concerning conditions that staff are expected to work in. For years, the Commission has heard devastating stories from uniform and civilian correctional staff regarding their working conditions whether it be in person during facility tours, or through correctional staff contacting the Commission directly. Corrections staff are desperate to be heard and for meaningful change to occur. This report was intentionally prioritized by the HCSOC to address the critical issues outlined by staff.

Here is a sample of some of the questions and responses by Uniform Staff on page 3:

Consider the Dept of Public Safety/Corrections & Rehabilitation overall ("Downtown")

10) Downtown communicates a clear vision (mission) for Corrections.

Strongly disagree 38%

Disagree 37%

11) There are discussions involving all staff about the vision for Corrections and rehabilitation and ways to achieve it.

Strongly disagree 43%

Disagree 42%

12) Downtown has a clear understanding of what it's like for staff to work in this facility.

² **Correctional Staff Survey, Findings, and Recommendations Report**
<https://hcsoc.hawaii.gov/systemic-reports/>

Strongly disagree 62%

Disagree 29%

13) Downtown takes the things I say seriously and treats me and my ideas with respect.

Strongly disagree 48%

Disagree 34%

The name change from the Department of Public Safety to the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has appears to be cosmetic, not substantive since its inception in 2022. Community Alliance on Prisons receives many calls and letters from jails and prisons that all note the name change and question where the rehabilitation is.

How can anyone expect things to change when 'Downtown' – the leadership of DCR ...

- Does not communicate a clear vision to their Uniform Staff (75%)
- Does not have discussions involving staff about the vision for corrections and rehabilitation and ways to achieve it (85%)
- Does not have a clear understanding of what it's like for staff to work in facilities (91%)
- Does not take things staff say seriously and doesn't treat them and their ideas with respect (82%)

How can anything be expected to change when the front-line staff doesn't have any clear vision or direction?

This is why it is vital for leadership to understand that their role is not punishment – it is to care for people in their care and custody and prepare them to reenter society as pro-social, law-abiding, and contributing community members. The only way for this to happen is for the leadership of DCR to understand why they are there.

Community Alliance on Prisons supports strong reentry programs, however, the staff must be included in the formation of these programs. As has been shown in the past, contracting with programs from other places without involving the Uniform Staff is a recipe for disaster and discontent.

DCR had an incredible opportunity to partner with AMEND, a program from California that presented at a conference a few years ago and they were offered

assistance, yet never followed through. There was a gentleman there who was an ACO for 25 years and was now the Director of a Reentry Program where he clearly saw the problem with traditional corrections – it was an adversarial relationship with the incarcerated. Now, as Director of the Tri-State Reentry Center he saw the value of forming positive relationships with the participants in this program to help people achieve successful reentry. Sadly DCR was not interested in accessing AMEND'S assistance.

This is the problem: For years, Hawai'i kept asserting that "we are different" and didn't need to learn from the success of other jurisdictions.

To think that 'downtown' knows what the Uniform staff experience every day because of downtown's punitive policies, is naïve and dangerous. That is the reason so many people exit incarceration in bad shape and return to the community in poor health and with damaged psyches. When someone is constantly told they are bad – they live down to that reputation.

Community Alliance on Prisons has been advocating for the incarcerated for almost 30 years and we have met some of the most incredible people who are smart and caring about making amends for their past behavior. They want to positively contribute to the communities where they may have caused harm, if given the opportunity and encouraged to believe that they can change.

A department that truly cares for the people in their care and custody and believes that people can change will make a tremendous difference across Hawai'i nei.

In closing, we strongly support and believe in reentry programming, however, there is a lot of work to be done downtown for these programs to be successful. We must change the mindset of leadership to be champions for the people in their care and custody in order for the success of reentry programs and rehabilitation. We cannot give up on people, we must support and encourage each person to be the best version of themselves.

We cannot continue doing the same things and expect different results.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share our mana`o on the important issue of reentry.

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 3:26:42 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Laura Nakanelua	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chair Ballatti, Co-Chair Iwamoto and Committee Members,

I respectfully offer my strong support for HB2044 because, after more than two decades of studying Hawai'i's persistently high recidivism rates—including the 2019 update to the 2002 baseline—the time for meaningful action is long overdue. Our correctional system continues to deliver unacceptable, costly, and unsustainable results, failing too many individuals, especially our Native Hawaiians, who are disproportionately impacted.

HB2044's expansion of comprehensive offender reentry programming and training represents a vital step forward. Evidence clearly shows that well-administered educational and vocational opportunities significantly reduce recidivism, while mentorship programs more than double post-release employment prospects and cut the likelihood of reoffending by 35% within one year.

By passing this bill, we can finally provide incarcerated Native Hawaiians—and all inmates—with the tools, support, and opportunities needed for successful reintegration into our communities. This is not just about individual redemption; it is essential for the health of our kānaka maoli, the safety and well-being of our society, and the ability of these individuals to build stronger futures for themselves and their 'ohana.

I urge the committee to advance HB2044 without delay so we can begin breaking the cycle of incarceration and foster true rehabilitation for the benefit of all Hawai'i.

Mahalo Nui,
Laura

Laura Nakanelua
Lauranakanelua@gmail.com
Cell: (808) 561-2325

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 11:21:42 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angela Young	Kapalama Neighborhood security watch	Comments	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Reference my video testimony

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 7:53:49 AM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire	Ohana Unity Party & Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

****Aloha Chair and Honorable Members of the Committees,****

As Chairman of the Ohana Unity Party and a resolute advocate for transparency, accountability, humane treatment, and the restoration of dignity within Hawaii's correctional system, I submit this written testimony in the strongest possible support of House Bill 2044. This essential legislation establishes an independent statewide Office of the Ombudsman for Corrections—an impartial, external watchdog dedicated to investigating complaints, monitoring conditions, and ensuring that the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation operates with fairness, humanity, and respect for the rights of incarcerated individuals. HB2044 creates an autonomous Office of the Ombudsman for Corrections, appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate, with full authority to: - Receive and investigate confidential complaints from incarcerated persons, families, staff, and the public regarding abuse, neglect, medical care, safety, retaliation, conditions of confinement, and administrative actions; - Conduct unannounced inspections of all correctional facilities (state-run, private, and out-of-state contracts); - Access all records, interview individuals privately, and issue public reports with findings and recommendations; - Recommend policy changes, disciplinary action, or legislative reforms; - Submit annual reports to the Legislature, Governor, and public, including trends, systemic issues, and progress on recommendations. This office is not redundant—it fills a glaring void in oversight, especially given Hawaii's history of out-of-state placements, medical neglect complaints, and limited internal accountability.

****Why I Stand Strongly in Support of HB2044****

1. **Addressing Long-Standing Systemic Failures and Lack of Independent Oversight**

Hawaii's correctional system has faced repeated criticism: overcrowding, medical neglect, retaliation against whistleblowers, inadequate mental health care, and the ongoing use of distant private prisons that isolate individuals from family and cultural support. The current Office of the Corrections Ombudsman (internal to DOCR) lacks true independence—complaints are often handled in-house, with limited transparency or enforcement power. An independent statewide Ombudsman is urgently needed to provide external, credible oversight free from departmental influence.

2. **Humanitarian and Constitutional Imperative** The Dalai Lama teaches: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." Mahatma

Gandhi reminds us: "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." Incarcerated individuals remain human beings entitled to dignity, safety, and humane treatment under the U.S. Constitution (8th Amendment) and Hawaii State Constitution (Article I, Section 12 – cruel and unusual punishment prohibited). HB2044 upholds these principles by giving incarcerated persons—and their families—a trusted, confidential avenue to report abuse, neglect, or rights violations without fear of retaliation.

3. ****Fiscal and Public Safety Benefits**** Independent ombudsman offices in other jurisdictions (e.g., Washington, Alaska, New York) reduce litigation costs, identify systemic issues early, prevent crises, and improve facility conditions—leading to lower recidivism and safer communities upon release. In Hawaii, where corrections costs exceed \$250 million annually and out-of-state placements add millions more in transportation and contracts, an effective Ombudsman can uncover waste, recommend cost-saving reforms (e.g., expanding in-state reentry programs), and help reduce the 50% statewide recidivism rate.

4. ****Real-World Example: The Urgent Need for External Accountability**** High-profile cases and public testimonies reveal ongoing concerns: medical neglect leading to preventable deaths, retaliation against those who report misconduct, inadequate mental health care, and the isolation of Native Hawaiian inmates sent thousands of miles away. Without an independent Ombudsman, these issues fester—families are left without answers, and systemic problems persist. HB2044 changes that: It creates a dedicated, external advocate who can investigate patterns, recommend corrective action, and hold leadership accountable—ensuring corrections serves justice, not just punishment.

5. ****Support for Native Hawaiian and Marginalized Populations**** Native Hawaiians are disproportionately incarcerated (up to 39% of the population) and face unique cultural and spiritual needs that are often unmet in distant facilities. An independent Ombudsman can investigate cultural insensitivity, barriers to cultural programming, and family visitation issues—advocating for culturally appropriate care and repatriation. This bill complements other reforms (e.g., compassionate release in HB1628/SB2688, trafficking prevention in HB1913) by ensuring oversight across the entire corrections continuum.

****Conclusion and Urgent Call to Action**** HB2044 is a moral, practical, and necessary reform. It will protect human dignity, reduce costs, improve rehabilitation outcomes, and restore public trust in our correctional system. Guided by the profound wisdom of the Dalai Lama and Mahatma Gandhi, let us choose compassion, accountability, and justice—establish this independent Office of the Ombudsman for Corrections and prove that Hawaii treats every individual with the dignity they deserve.

Mahalo nui loa for your consideration and service to our islands. I am available for questions or oral testimony if needed. In solidarity for justice, dignity, and ohana,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire, HRM Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I. Ohana Unity Party, Chairman www.Ohanaunityparty.com Presidentbillionaire@gmail.com

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:54:13 AM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

RECEIVED
Date & Time
Feb 04, 2026, 10:01 am

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Susan Kuwaye	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

I am here as a citizen of the state of Hawai‘i to support HB 2044 that expands training and rehabilitation for persons who are being released from the Department of Corrections. Having gone through a time of accountability and corrections of behavior, this bill expands provision for the kind of help and guidance needed to successfully rejoin our Hawai‘i community. This kind of guidance and direction will provide psychological and social skills to reenter the community at large and help to undo the inability to fit in. Being held accountable and serving time is one part. To complete corrections the state needs to continue to expand ways for persons to get back into life as a productive member of our state. Mahalo.



HB2404 Offender Reentry

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Rep. Della Au Belatti, Chair

Rep. Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

Wednesday, Feb 4, 2026: 9:00: Room 411 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports HB2404:

ALOHA CHAIR, VICE CHAIR, AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. My name is Alan Johnson. I am the ad hoc leader of the Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition (HSAC), a statewide organization for substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health disorder prevention and treatment agencies and recovery-oriented services.

Substance Use Disorder and Reentry Are Closely Connected

A significant portion of individuals involved in the justice system experience untreated or under-treated substance use disorders. Without **adequate access to treatment, recovery support, stable housing, employment opportunities, and mentorship**, individuals face increased risk of relapse, overdose, and recidivism upon release.

National Justice System Estimates (SAMHSA)¹

Population ²	% with SUD (national estimate)	% with mental health disorder
People in <i>prison</i> (U.S.)	~58 %	~37 %
People in <i>jail</i> (U.S.)	~63 %	~44 %
Hawaii court-ordered psychiatric admissions (linked data) ³	~70 %+ with co-occurring SUD	(co-occurring status noted)

¹ Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration SAMHSA Many in these populations have **co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders** because these conditions often overlap. https://www.samhsa.gov/communities/criminal-jvenile-justice/about?utm_source=chatgpt.com

² Hawaii-specific system linkage work suggests high co-occurrence but not yet published in a single public data table.

³ Linking Public Health and Public Safety Data on Co-occurring Disorders Among Adults in Hawaii's Criminal Justice System Tiana Fontanilla, MPH; Sunja Kim, MPH; Kristy Bowen, BA; Ho Suk Choi, MS; Deveraux Talagi, PhD; Victoria Y. Fan, ScD; Vincent Borja, MS; Tammie Smith, MPH; Amy Curtis, PhD, MPH November 2022 chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://icis.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Linking-Public-Health-and-Public-Safety-Data-on-Co-Occurring-Disorders-Among-Adults-in-Hawaii-s-Criminal-Justice-System.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Correctional mentorship, counseling, educational, and vocational training as well as motivational practices to encourage substance abuse or mental health treatment are instrumental to successful reentry programming that can significantly reduce recidivism.

The Importance of Education, Vocational Training, and Mentorship

HSAC has consistently seen individuals succeed in recovery and reintegration when they have access to:

- Evidence-based SUD treatment and behavioral health services
- Educational opportunities and skills development
- Vocational training leading to sustainable employment
- Peer mentoring and culturally grounded support networks
- Wraparound services that reduce barriers to stability

Employment and purpose are powerful protective factors in recovery. Policies that strengthen workforce pathways and mentoring reduce relapse and promote long-term rehabilitation.

Recommendation

We respectfully urge the Legislature to adopt policies that:

- Expand access to SUD treatment and recovery support for reentering individuals
- Promote collaboration between corrections, treatment providers, and workforce programs
- Increase funding for peer mentoring, vocational training, and transitional services
- Recognize substance use disorder as a health issue, not solely a criminal issue

Conclusion

Reentry is a critical transition period, and policies must reflect the reality that recovery is a long-term process requiring coordinated community-based support.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and are available to answer questions.



HB2044 Offender Reentry

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Rep. Della Au Belatti, Chair

Rep. Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

Wednesday, Feb 4, 2026: 9:00: Room 411 Videoconference

Hina Mauka Supports HB2044:

ALOHA CHAIR, VICE CHAIR, AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. My name is Brian Baker. I am the President and CEO for Hina Mauka, a mental health and substance use disorder treatment and prevention agency for thousands of adults and adolescents on Oahu and Kauai, including recovery-oriented services and housing transitional living programs.

Connection Between Substance Use Disorder and Justice System Reentry

Many individuals who come into contact with the criminal justice system struggle with substance use disorders and co-occurring mental health conditions that often remain insufficiently treated. When individuals return to the community without access to treatment, recovery supports, safe and supported housing, employment opportunities, and positive guidance, the likelihood of relapse, overdose, and repeat justice involvement increases significantly.

Across the country, data consistently show that **more than half of incarcerated individuals experience substance use disorders**, with a substantial portion also living with mental health challenges. In Hawai'i, court-ordered psychiatric admissions frequently involve individuals with both substance use and mental health conditions. These realities underscore the need for comprehensive reentry strategies that address health and stability, not punishment alone.

Effective Reentry Supports

Experience has shown that reentry **outcomes improve when individuals have access to structured supports** while transitioning back into the community. Programs that combine counseling, treatment engagement, education, job readiness training, and mentorship help reduce recidivism and strengthen long-term recovery. Encouraging participation in treatment and skill-building while individuals are still justice-involved lays a critical foundation for success.

Education, Employment, and Mentorship as Protective Factors

Hina Mauka has consistently observed improved recovery and reintegration outcomes when individuals are supported by:

- Clinically appropriate substance use disorder and behavioral health services
- Educational and workforce skill development opportunities
- Job training that leads to stable, meaningful employment
- Peer mentors and culturally responsive support systems
- Coordinated services that remove barriers to housing and stability

Access to employment and a sense of purpose are key contributors to sustained recovery. Policies that invest in workforce pathways and mentorship help individuals rebuild their lives and reduce the likelihood of returning to the justice system.

Policy Recommendations

We respectfully encourage the Legislature to consider measures that:

- Broaden access to treatment and recovery services for individuals reentering the community
- Strengthen partnerships between correctional systems, treatment providers, and workforce organizations
- Support funding for peer mentorship, vocational training, and transitional services
- Acknowledge substance use disorder as a public health issue that requires treatment and long-term support

Closing

The period following release is a pivotal moment. Successful reentry depends on coordinated, community-based systems that recognize recovery as an ongoing process.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify.



CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

SUPPORT FOR HB 2044: RELATING TO OFFENDER REENTRY

TO: House Committee on Public Safety
FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawai'i
Hearing: Wednesday, 02/04/26, 9:00 AM; CR 411 or Videoconference

Chair Au Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members, Committee on Public Safety:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **support of HB 2044**, which expands programming and training for the comprehensive offender reentry program under the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, to reduce recidivism and increase inmate marketability.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i (CCH) is a tax-exempt, Community-Based Organization that has provided social services in Hawai'i for more than 78 years, now serving over 40,000 individuals statewide each year. Our mission is to provide services and advocacy for Hawai'i's most vulnerable, and we have a long-standing history of leadership in affordable housing, homelessness solutions, and child welfare.

Catholic Charities Hawai'i supports this bill to expand education, vocational training, and mentorship within the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. These strategies have shown much success in significantly lowering repeat offense rates. The program would emphasize career-focused training, "earn-and-learn", and apprenticeship-style programs that increase job readiness and marketability upon release. These strategies can reduce further offenses, benefitting the individual, families, communities and victims across our state. Lower recidivism can lower incarceration costs (now an estimated \$72,000/inmate/year), freeing up much needed funding for education, housing and social service needs in the uncertain future. It can also lead to less homelessness among those discharged into the community, another important state priority.

We urge the Legislature to consider that long-term, ongoing investment will be needed for success. Sustained funding is needed to overcome challenges faced by DCR. Without sufficient staffing, infrastructure and coordination within DCR, these proven strategies may face operational or workforce limitations. Many in Hawai'i's workforce are moving out of state. This is an opportunity for the state to develop strong community and employer partnerships, across the state. These are the key to successful outcomes for this program. These outcomes are especially important for our Native Hawaiians who are overrepresented in the correctional system.

All this will take time since successful results are seen in the medium- to long-term. Research supports the success for these strategies but lower recidivism and cost savings may not be immediate. We urge your long-term political support.

If you have any questions, please contact our Legislative Liaison, Betty Lou Larson, at (808) 527-4813.



CLARENCE T. C. CHING CAMPUS • 1822 Ke'eumoku Street, Honolulu, HI 96822
Phone (808) 527-4813 •



HB-2044

Submitted on: 1/31/2026 10:14:48 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Taryn Do	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this measure, which advances a data-driven, fiscally responsible, and humane approach to improving Hawai‘i’s correctional system.

As documented by the House Concurrent Resolution No. 85 Task Force on Prison Reform, Hawai‘i’s correctional system is not producing acceptable, cost-effective, or sustainable outcomes and requires immediate and profound change. Data shows that nearly **54% of individuals released from incarceration reoffend**, demonstrating that incarceration without rehabilitation fails to improve public safety.

This approach also imposes a significant financial burden on the State. Hawai‘i spends an estimated **\$72,000 per inmate per year** on incarceration. Reducing recidivism even modestly would result in substantial cost savings that could be reinvested in education, infrastructure, healthcare, and social services.

A large body of national research demonstrates that correctional education, workforce training, and paid apprenticeship-style programs are among the most effective strategies for reducing recidivism and improving post-release employment outcomes:

- A landmark **RAND Corporation meta-analysis** of correctional education programs nationwide found that incarcerated individuals who participated in educational programs were **43% less likely to return to prison** than those who did not. The study also found that **every dollar invested in correctional education saves approximately \$4–\$5** in reincarceration costs.
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR266.html
- According to the **U.S. Department of Justice**, individuals who completed vocational education programs while incarcerated had substantially lower recidivism rates—some as low as **8–9%**, compared to **over 25%** for individuals who did not participate in any educational programming.
<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/231611.pdf>
- Evaluations of **prison apprenticeship and “earn and learn” programs** by the **U.S. Department of Labor** found that participants were **approximately 30% less likely to be re-incarcerated** and had higher rates of post-release employment. These programs combine paid work experience, hands-on skills training, and industry-recognized

credentials.

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/apprenticeship/about/prison-apprenticeship>

- The **Bureau of Justice Statistics** has consistently shown that individuals who secure stable employment shortly after release are significantly less likely to reoffend, underscoring the importance of workforce readiness, licensure, and job placement support prior to release.

<https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/recidivism-prisoners-released-30-states-2005-2010>

- Research by the **Vera Institute of Justice** demonstrates that public-private partnerships and structured correctional work programs increase employment, wages, and job retention while reducing recidivism—particularly when paired with mentoring and education.

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/vera/WorkingReentry.pdf>

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/1/2026 10:42:48 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Chelsea McDonough	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Public Safety Committee:

My name is Chelsea McDonough, and I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of HB2044, a measure relating to offender reentry. I am a social worker and current graduate student, and I also bring lived experience that informs my professional commitment to rehabilitation and the successful reintegration of justice-involved individuals into our Hawai‘i communities

HB2044 is a critical and forward-thinking measure that addresses the root causes of recidivism by investing in people rather than perpetuating cycles of incarceration. Specifically, I support this bill for its efforts to encourage inmate participation in correctional educational and vocational programs, expand access to high-quality mentorship, counseling, and training opportunities, and allow incarcerated individuals to earn income while participating in supervised apprenticeship programs that lead to licensure and increased workforce readiness.

From both a social work and systems perspective, education and vocational training are among the most effective evidence-based strategies for reducing recidivism and promoting public safety. In Hawai‘i, where reentry support is limited, programs like these provide incarcerated individuals with skills, credentials, and hope for a meaningful future. When individuals are equipped to gain lawful employment and reconnect with their communities, they are far less likely to return to the correctional system. These programs not only reduce repeat involvement with the justice system but also lower the long-term financial burden on the correctional system and Hawai‘i’s taxpayers.

Beyond employment outcomes, participation in structured educational, mentorship, and vocational programs supports personal growth, accountability, and emotional intelligence. These opportunities foster critical thinking, communication skills, self-regulation, and a sense of purpose— factors that are essential for successful reintegration into families and communities. When individuals are given the tools to rebuild their lives, they are better equipped to contribute positively to society rather than return to the justice system.

As a social worker with lived experience, I have seen firsthand how access to meaningful education, skill-building, and supportive programming can be transformative. HB2044 recognizes that rehabilitation is not only possible but necessary if we are truly committed to safer communities, reduced incarceration rates, and more effective use of public resources. Supporting

HB2044 is not only an investment in the lives of individuals but also in the safety, health, and prosperity of our communities across Hawai‘i.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the House Committee on Public Safety to support HB2044. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your commitment to policies that promote rehabilitation, accountability, and public safety.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,
Chelsea McDonough

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 10:13:28 AM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bradford Davis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this legislation because it will potentially reduce crime.

Respectfully,

Bradford Davis

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 10:21:46 AM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ralph Garcia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Ralph Garcia, and I am a constituent of Representative Garner Shimizu. I am writing in strong support of HB2044, relating to offender reentry.

This bill strengthens Hawai‘i’s correctional system by expanding access to education, vocational training, mentorship, and earn-and-learn apprenticeship opportunities for incarcerated individuals. These investments are not only practical, they are proven to reduce recidivism and improve public safety.

For decades, Hawai‘i has struggled with persistently high recidivism rates and an overreliance on costly incarceration. Research consistently shows that people who participate in education and workforce-readiness programs are far less likely to reoffend and more likely to secure stable employment. This bill expands precisely those programs and creates a clearer pipeline for individuals to reenter our communities successfully.

This legislation also helps address a long-standing issue that affects our local families: Hawai‘i’s reliance on mainland private prisons. When our correctional population exceeds local capacity, we send people thousands of miles away to the continental U.S., separating them from their ‘ohana, culture, and support networks. By reducing recidivism and expanding pathways to early release and reintegration, this bill helps reduce the future need to house Hawai‘i residents in mainland facilities.

I also appreciate that the bill aligns with restorative justice values that many in our community care deeply about. Strengthening family connections, offering meaningful education, and creating real employment pathways all help restore balance and support healing for individuals and the communities affected by their actions.

Additionally, this bill supports efforts to address the disproportionate incarceration of Native Hawaiians, who remain overrepresented in our correctional system. Policies that expand access to education, life skills, and mentorship are particularly important for reducing these disparities and supporting more equitable outcomes.

Finally, this measure is a sound financial decision. Hawai‘i spends approximately \$72,000 per year to incarcerate a single individual. When people succeed after release, we save taxpayer

dollars that can instead be invested into education, housing, healthcare, and other pressing needs across the state.

For these reasons: Improving public safety, advancing restorative justice, reducing disparities, lowering costs, and decreasing our reliance on mainland private prisons, I respectfully urge the committee to pass this bill.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify, and mahalo to Representative Shimizu for bringing forward this important legislation.

Respectfully,
Ralph Garcia

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 12:30:27 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jerry Dolak	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I strongly support HB2044, which expands programming and training for the comprehensive offender reentry program under the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. This bill is an evidence-based investment in public safety, workforce development, and long-term cost savings for our State.

Hawaii’s current recidivism rate — where more than half of individuals released from incarceration are re-arrested — represents both a human tragedy and a significant fiscal burden. Studies have shown that recidivism costs the State tens of millions annually, with incarceration costs averaging roughly \$72,000 per inmate per year. Reducing these rates not only enhances community safety but also frees up public funds for education, housing, and social services.

HB2044 will strengthen the reentry continuum by ensuring access to high-quality educational courses, life-skills training, vocational credentials, and mentorship programs while individuals are still in custody. Research indicates that incarcerated individuals who participate in reentry mentorship programs are significantly more likely to gain employment and less likely to return to prison after release.

The bill also promotes apprenticeship-style “earn-and-learn” opportunities that allow individuals to work toward licensure and meaningful employment before reentering society — a proven strategy to increase employability and stable community integration.

Beyond economic benefits, these programs strengthen families and communities by helping returning citizens reconnect with loved ones, engage in dependable work, and contribute positively to Hawaii’s economy.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB2044 and authorize the necessary funding to expand these critical programs that enhance public safety and help transform lives.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Jerry Dolak

House Committee on Public Safety

Wed. Feb. 4, 2025 9am

Chair Della Au Belatti Co-chair Kim Coco Iwamoto
and committee members

Mark Hashem, Linda Ichiyama, Dee Morikawa, Mahina Poepoe
Justin Woodson, Garner Shimizu and Kanani Souza

Re: HB2044 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.

Thank you for allowing me to share my support for this bill and I ask you to please pass it through.

Based on the following:

- ◇ 44% of criminals in Hawaii are repeat offenders,
- ◇ the cost to us taxpayers is about \$72,000 plus per year
- ◇ While Native Hawaiians make up only 20% of our state's population, they make up 40% of the prison population, so very disheartening.

These are men and women who have been shamefully overlooked and forgotten. Why are we surprised at the number of repeat offenders? They have been pretty much told that they do not matter!

That is a lie, they do matter!

It is time to stop study study talk talk and do something!

The recommendations listed in this bill are **obvious**:

- ◇ to encourage participation in correctional education programs and vocation training ...
- ◇ increase quality/quantity mentorship, counseling etc.
- ◇ and allow inmates to earn income and → ... pg. 3 lines 13-16
- ◇ let them know they do matter!

So, I ask you to please pass this bill through.

Respectfully,
Rita Kama-Kimura

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 1:11:43 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bulla Eastman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha and mahalo for allowing me to testify in support of HB2044. I am an ordained Pastor and have been doing prison ministry since 2008 here in Hawaii and in Arizona at Saguaro CC located in Eloy. I fully support this bill that will attempt to reduce the recitivism rate for Hawaii inmates. The annual dolllar cost for incarcerating is closer to \$91,00 here in Hawaii and approximately \$33,000 in AZ. I was recently in AZ to minister at Saguaro CC and that was our 33 trip to minister to the inmates there. At Saguaro they have a carpentry program, a plumbing program and an extensive library for the inmates to study for their GED exam and also pursue Assoicates Degrees online. The men there have an opportunity to better themselves if they choose to participate in the programs available to them.

I have been to every facility on Oahu, Kauai, and Maui to minister. We need to improve the living conditions at every facility. Overcrowding, hygiene and health issues are common across the board. We know better so we need to do better.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB2044.

Pastor Bulla Eastman

AYMAN EL-SWAIFY PUBLIC TESTIMONY
HB2044 - RELATING TO OFFENDER REENTRY

My name is Ayman El-Swaify and I am IN FAVOR OF House Bill 2044.

This bill seeks to address the longstanding problem of high recidivism in our criminal justice system through expanded mentorship, education and wage-earning opportunities.

Several states have reported success in reducing recidivism rates, including Iowa, Kentucky, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, primarily through such reentry and rehabilitative programs. These initiatives focus on providing support and resources to individuals after their release from prison, contributing to lower reoffending rates. We can likely learn more from them.

The potential benefits are readily apparent – building individual self-worth and confidence through the gain of marketable skills and business contacts, resulting in productive contributions to our communities.

I feel this is worth pursuing and ask that you support HB2044. Thank you.

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 5:29:19 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lanette Bourg	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It's important to do all we can to keep inmates from offending again. I support SB2044. Thank you.

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 7:16:22 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Charlene Lum	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill as everyone needs a second chance. There needs to be a stronger transition program to strengthen their mind, soul, and spirit to be a productive citizen in Hawaii nei.

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 7:24:04 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mary Smart	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

support portion of HB2044 with amendments.

Improving work related training is needed to reduce recidivism of prison populations. This would be successful if our state would discontinue the failed "catch and release" habits of Hawaii's criminal justice system. Incarceration with improved training would be helpful to reduce crime in our state/neighborhoods.

Amend Paragraph (10):

From: (10) Programs that compel inmates convicted of a felony to undergo emotional, academic, and behavioral mentoring or counseling by recommending that inmates be granted parole or early release upon completion of the program;

To: Inmates convicted of a felony who are compelled to undergo emotional, academic, and behavioral mentoring or counseling who complete the educational/apprentice program may be considered for parole or early release prior to his/her normal eligibility after at least half of his/her sentences has been served.

Rationale: If the participant of a short program has years left to serve, it is unacceptable to release him or her into the community too soon in his/her sentence. This provision is offered in consideration of the safety of the community and victims of the crime(s).

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 1:53:48 AM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Vernelle Oku	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill to help reduce the rate of prisoner recidivism by offering more counseling and educational and occupational programs to help prisoners assimilate into the community when they are released from prison.

Thank you for helping to change the future for our state prison residents.

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 10:35:02 AM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cindy R Ajimine	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in **STRONG SUPPORT** of this bill to continue through the legislative process.

Data and news accounts strongly support the need to implement this as one strategy to reduce the rate of recidivism and increase the success of inmates when returning into the community. Crime and safety are at the top of community and voter concerns.

I would again ask that as with any bill that entails government funding, that reports be submitted annually by the applicable government agency who is responsible for monitoring and ensuring inmate recidivism lowers over time. If possible, prevention techniques that include family/friends would also be beneficial.

To close, I am in **STRONG SUPPORT** of this bill to proceed and thank you for the opportunity and your ears to hear the voice of the people you serve. Mahalo!

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 12:40:16 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Terri Yoshinaga	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 5:07:04 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Robin R Kennedy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I would like to keep this simple. I am in full support of every initiative listed and have personal experience to back up my opinion. Years ago I was a minister for my church The City of Refuge Cgriatian Church in Waipahu. I spent 3 days a week for 4 years volunteering at the three mens prisons.

After the first 2 I kept seeing inmates that had so much promise come back. Reciotivism was not a word I had ever heard.

Dissappointed I asked why? Why would you come back? How could you leave your family? Your mother who is dieing? Your kids?

Bottom line, they could not figure out how to make a living. They were getting paid 10 dollars and hour when they would make one thousand dollars in the same hour dealing drugs.

They had no self esteem and very little resources. Family had given up on them. No education. No one to treat them with respect.

I decided at that point to ask if I could teach a class. I was a volunteer doing prison minitry, so they were extremely happy to say yes.

I taught that class for almost 2 years. Get out Get a Job taught them everything they needed to know about things they were interested in. One inmate became a clothing designer and moved east. Still successful. One became a property.vacation rental owner and has several properties. Both were dealing drugs.

When we dug into what it actually took to be a drug dealer, I showed them what great sales people they were. I shared how they were 24/7 customer service agents and accountants. I taught them to see how they dealt with the many different personalities of the people they were working with or selling to. The list went on.

We turned what they were doing prevoiously into real life jobs and plans for their futures.I still have parents that reach out ten years later to thank me.

If they came in with no hope and they leave with the same, we will never see change.

I have lots more to say but will leave it here. Please reach out if you would like to hear more or I can help.

Mahala,

Robin Kennedy

808-478-0172 robin.kennedy@khon2.com

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 5:37:01 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Curtis H Kekahuna	Touch A Heart	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Curtis Kekahuna, and I am a Chef-Trainer at Touch A Heart (TAH), where I support adults and youth facing barriers to employment—including those coming out of the justice system—through culinary training, mentorship, and personal development.

Before my time at Touch A Heart, I worked as a chef in Hawai‘i, including at Roy’s Restaurant in Waikoloa, Jackie Rey’s in Kona, and Hawai‘i Preparatory Academy in Waimea. I know firsthand how meaningful work and skill development can transform a life.

In 2020, I graduated from Touch A Heart’s workforce development program. My experience wasn’t just about learning culinary skills—it was about rebuilding my confidence, my sense of purpose, and my belief that I could contribute to my family and community. In 2024, I was honored to return to TAH as a Chef-Trainer, guiding new interns and apprentices not only through hands-on kitchen work but through personal growth and life transformation.

You can hear more about my personal journey beginning at minute 20:00 to 29:45 in this video testimony:

👉 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncGwyaRvDTc>

What I learned through Touch A Heart is that people coming out of incarceration or facing other hardships don’t need to be defined by their past—they need opportunity, training, support, and belief. Today, I also lead the Growth Mindset curriculum at the Hawai‘i Youth Correctional Facility, encouraging young people to see their potential beyond the labels society often puts on them.

This is why I support [HB2044](#). This bill strengthens reentry services and workforce training that give people a real chance to succeed. Investments like this do not just help individuals — they strengthen families, employers, and communities across Hawai‘i.

Mahalo for your time and for your leadership in expanding opportunities for people rebuilding their lives.

With gratitude,
Curtis Kekahuna

Chef-Trainer, Touch A Heart
TAH Graduate (Class of 2020)

February 03, 2026

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am a concerned resident of the State of Hawai'i writing in strong support of HB2044.

Hawai'i's correctional system is not producing good outcomes. Nearly 54 percent of individuals released from incarceration return to prison, and the State now spends roughly \$72,000 per year per inmate. This approach is costly, ineffective, and harmful to families and communities, particularly Native Hawaiian families who are disproportionately impacted.

HB2044 takes a smarter approach by focusing on education, vocational training, mentorship, and earn-and-learn programs that prepare individuals for successful reentry. These programs reduce recidivism, increase employment, and strengthen public safety while making better use of taxpayer dollars.

If this bill does not pass, Hawai'i will continue to spend more while achieving less. Passing HB2044 invests in accountability, rehabilitation, and safer communities across our state.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass HB2044.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,
Nancy Valdez

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 7:23:03 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lora Burbage	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I support this bill. It makes sense that training and preperation to return to a community is necessary.

Not only is this good for the individual, it is also good for the communities where people who are starting again, will be living.

Mahalo!

Lora Burbage

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 11:13:35 PM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Barilyne Sakamoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in **STRONG SUPPORT** of this bill to continue through the legislative process.

Data and news accounts strongly support the need to implement this as one strategy to reduce the rate of recidivism and increase the success of inmates when returning into the community. Crime and safety are at the top of community and voter concerns.

I again ask that as with any bill that entails government funding, that reports be submitted annually by the applicable government agency who is responsible for monitoring and ensuring inmate recidivism lowers over time. If possible, prevention techniques that include family/friends would also be beneficial.

To close, I am in **STRONG SUPPORT** of this bill to proceed and thank you for the opportunity and your ears to hear the voice of the people you serve. Mahalo!

RECEIVED
Date & Time
Feb 04, 2026, 10:02 am

LATE

HB-2044

Submitted on: 2/4/2026 8:44:00 AM

Testimony for PBS on 2/4/2026 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joy Shimizu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha...

I am in support of this bill. Please vote YES and pass it. Thank you.