

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



MARK PATTERSON
CHAIR

CHRISTIN M. JOHNSON
OVERSIGHT COORDINATOR

COMMISSIONERS
HON. R. MARK BROWNING (ret.)

HON. RONALD IBARRA (ret.)

MARTHA TORNEY

HON. MICHAEL A. TOWN (ret.)

STATE OF HAWAII
HAWAII CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM OVERSIGHT COMMISSION
E HUIKALA A MA'EMA'E NŌ
235 S. Beretania Street, 16th Floor
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
(808) 587-4160

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 2287, Relating to Peer Support Counseling
Hearing: Wednesday, February 11, 2026; 8:40 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 2287, relating to peer support counseling, which includes correctional workers as protected participants in peer support counseling sessions, giving them the same confidentiality protections provided to law enforcement officers and emergency services personnel.

This measure directly addresses urgent wellness concerns identified in the Commission's [Correctional Staff Survey Findings and Recommendations Report \(2025\)](#), which documented widespread emotional exhaustion, trauma exposure, depression, PTSD symptoms, substance use concerns, and suicidal ideation among correctional employees across the state. The Commission's survey revealed that correctional staff routinely experience high levels of stress and trauma, including exposure to violence, medical emergencies, and suicide incidents, while lacking sufficient mental health resources and safe avenues to process these experiences. Many respondents expressed reluctance to seek help due to fear of stigma, retaliation, or negative professional consequences. As a result, burnout, absenteeism, turnover, and staffing shortages that compromise both employee safety and institutional stability are exasperated.

HB2287 responds directly to these documented needs by ensuring that peer support counseling conversations remain confidential. This protection will encourage correctional workers to seek mental health assistance earlier, reduce barriers to care, and foster a healthier and more resilient workforce. Expanding confidential peer support aligns with the Commission's recommendations to strengthen trauma-informed practices, improve staff wellness infrastructure, and promote retention in a system facing ongoing recruitment and morale challenges. By advancing this bill, the Legislature would take a meaningful and cost-effective step toward protecting the mental health of correctional workers. For these reasons, the Hawai'i Correctional System Oversight Commission urges the Legislature to pass HB2287.

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.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



TOMMY JOHNSON
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Deputy Director
Correctional Institutions

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STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII

**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
AND REHABILITATION**

*Ka 'Oihana Ho'omalua Kalaima
a Ho'oponopono Ola*

1177 Alakea Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

No. _____

**TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 2287
RELATING TO PEER SUPPORT COUNSELING.**

by

Tommy Johnson, Director
Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

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

Wednesday, February 11, 2026; 8:40 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 411 & via Videoconference

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

The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) **strongly supports** House Bill (HB) 2287, which proposes to include correctional workers as protected participants in peer counseling sessions under Section 78-52, Hawai'i Revised Statutes.

In 2025, DCR established the Staff Wellness Response Team, a peer support counseling program designed to assist corrections staff in managing stress, trauma, and burnout. The purpose of the program is to provide support to staff following critical incidents in facilities, and for those facing personal challenges. This bill closely aligns with DCR's initiative and reinforces our commitment to the mental health and well-being of our workforce.

Correctional staff, like law enforcement officers and emergency services personnel, face high-stress and emotionally traumatic situations daily. HB 2287 recognizes the critical need to protect these employees by extending confidentiality protections to peer support counseling sessions. This ensures staff have a safe and secure environment to seek help without fear of disclosure.

Peer support counseling is an essential tool for promoting resilience and reducing the impact of stress and trauma. By safeguarding communications during these sessions, this legislation fosters trust, encourages participation, and ultimately contributes to a healthier, more effective workforce. A strong and resilient correctional staff benefits not only the employees themselves but also the safety and stability of our correctional facilities and the broader community.

DCR respectfully urges the passage of this measure. It is a proactive step towards supporting those who serve in one of the most challenging and demanding public safety roles.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support** of the intent of HB 2287.



HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION
AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

RANDY PERREIRA, Executive Director • Tel: 808.543.0011 • Fax: 808.528.0922

The Thirty-Third Legislature, State of Hawaii
House of Representatives
Committee on Public Safety

Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association

February 11, 2026

H.B 2287– RELATING TO PEER SUPPORT COUNSELING

The Hawai'i Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO (HGEA), submits testimony in support of H.B. 2287, which includes correctional workers as protected participants in peer support counseling sessions, giving them the same confidentiality protections provided to law enforcement officers and emergency services personnel.

Correctional workers operate in high-stress, high-risk environments and are routinely exposed to traumatic incidents similar to those experienced by law enforcement officers and emergency services personnel. However, unlike their public safety counterparts, correctional workers are not currently afforded the same confidentiality protections when participating in peer support counseling.

H.B. 2287 addresses this gap by extending confidentiality protections for peer support counseling sessions to correctional workers. These protections are essential to ensuring employees feel safe seeking support without fear of disclosure, retaliation, or stigma. Peer support counseling is only effective when trust and confidentiality are assured.

HGEA supports this measure as an important step toward promoting employee wellness, strengthening retention, and aligning mental health protections across public safety professions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Perreira
Executive Director



UNITED PUBLIC WORKERS

AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 2026**

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY
Rep. Della Au Belatti, Chair
Rep. Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 11, 2026, 8:40 AM
Conference Room 411 & Videoconference

Re: Testimony on HB2287 – RELATING TO PEER SUPPORT COUNSELING

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

The United Public Workers, AFSCME Local 646, AFL-CIO (“UPW”) is the exclusive bargaining representative for approximately 12,000 public employees, which includes blue collar, non-supervisory employees in Bargaining Unit 1 and institutional, health, and correctional employees in Bargaining Unit 10, in the State of Hawaii and various counties.

UPW **supports** HB2287, which includes correctional workers as protected participants in peer support counseling sessions and provides them with the same confidentiality protections provided to law enforcement officers and emergency services personnel.

As the exclusive representative for adult corrections officers (“ACOs”) in the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (“DCR”), properly addressing employee mental health for correctional workers has been a longstanding issue. Due to long hours resulting from staffing shortages, escalating safety risks, daily exposure to violence and harassment, and crumbling infrastructure, we believe DCR is in the midst of a mental health crisis. To compound these issues, the large majority of ACOs will currently not seek mental health assistance due to concerns about confidentiality. More specifically, ACOs, who are required to carry a firearm as part of their duties, are concerned about how their jobs could be impacted if they did seek assistance.

UPW believes codifying confidentiality for correctional workers is a significant step in addressing this growing mental health issue in Hawaii’s correctional facilities. We hope this will ultimately lead to DCR investing adequate resources into an Employee Assistance Program that could significantly help its correctional workers.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

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Toll Free - Molokai/Lanai only

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

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: February 10, 2026

RE: House Bill 2287
Measure Title: RELATING TO PEER SUPPORT COUNSELING.
Report Title: Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation; Correctional Workers;
Peer Support Counseling

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 2287. Thank you for introducing this bill.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore