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February 24, 2026

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HB2288 HD1: RELATING TO PAROLE ELIGIBILITY

Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe and Members of the Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs

The Office of the Public Defender (OPD) **supports HB2288 HD1** with the caveat expressed in the final paragraph of this testimony which is based on concerns raised by the Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission in its testimony for the February 11, 2026 hearing before the Committee on Public Safety.

This measure amends Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) § 353-64 to clarify that the Parole Board may require, as a condition for parole eligibility that a committed person participate in work furlough, or “other programs designed to assist the committed person with successful reintegration back into the community.”

HRS § 353-64 properly recognizes that the requirement of program participation shall not apply if the committed person is in a correctional facility where such programs are not available. HB2288 further amends HRS § 353-64 to clarify that the “program requirements can be waived at the discretion of the Hawaii paroling authority.” Many programs are available only at certain facilities and require a committed person to move through the system via changes in custody level and transfer to participate in those programs. For example, a corrected person generally starts off their incarceration at medium custody. In order to reach a work furlough facility, their custody level must be reduced via the point system from medium to minimum to community custody. The transfer to a minimum, then community custody facility requires available space at those facilities. The Hawaii Paroling Authority should retain discretion to allow committed persons who, by not fault of their own, are unable to participate in programming due to their inability to transfer to an appropriate facility. This does not create a public safety issue as the Hawaii

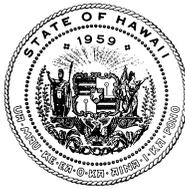
Paroling Authority still retains the discretion to require a person, as a condition of granting parole, to participate in appropriate programming in the community.

In its testimony for the February 11, 2026, hearing on this measure before the House Committee on Public Safety, the Hawai'i Correctional Oversight Commission pointed out that there has been a persistent issue with access to furlough and programming. The OPD agrees that access to programming do occur due to backlogs in movement and that individuals should not be denied release simply due to the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's inability to provide fair and expeditious movement of individuals to facilities that have required programming. One suggestion is that language be added at the end of SECTION 2 as follows:

... A grant of parole shall not be subject to acceptance by the committed person [-], and the foregoing program participation requirements may be waived at the discretion of the Hawaii paroling authority. **If the committed person is eligible for movement to a facility where recommended programming is available and the department fails to move the individual to a facility where such programming is available, the Hawaii paroling authority shall waive the program requirements for that person and shall not deny parole due to failure to participate in that program.**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

JOSH B. GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA
MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAI'I



KATHERINE AUMER, PhD
COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON
LUNA HO'OMALU O KA PAPA

STATE OF HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH
P.O. Box 3378, Room 256
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STATE COUNCIL ON MENTAL HEALTH
Testimony to the House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs
In SUPPORT of H.B. 2288 HD1
RELATING TO PAROLE ELIGIBILITY
February 25, 2026, 2:00 p.m., Room 325 and Video

Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

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1st VICE CHAIRPERSON

Kathleen Merriam, LCSW CSAC

2nd VICE CHAIRPERSON

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Kristin Will, MA, CSAC

EX-OFFICIO:

Marian Tsuji, Deputy Director

Behavioral Health Administration

WEBSITE:

scmh.hawaii.gov

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doh.scmhchairperson@doh.hawaii.gov

Hawaii law, HRS §334-10, established the State Council on Mental Health (SCMH) as a 21-member body to advise on the allocation of resources, statewide needs, and programs affecting more than one county as well as to advocate for adults with serious mental illness, children with serious emotional disturbances, individuals with mental illness or emotional problems, including those with co-occurring substance abuse disorders. Members are residents from diverse backgrounds representing mental health service providers and recipients, students and youth, parents, and family members. Members include representatives of state agencies on mental health, criminal justice, housing, Medicaid, social services, vocational rehabilitation, and education. Members also include representatives from the Hawaii Advisory Commission on Drug Abuse and Controlled Substances and county service area boards on mental health and substance abuse.

A majority of Council members support the intent of this measure. Individuals with serious mental illness or behavioral health disorders are more likely to succeed on parole when they have access to treatment, stable housing, employment opportunities, and family connection prior to release.

However, the pathway to parole must be individualized, trauma-informed, and flexible. Individuals should be able to demonstrate readiness through clinical engagement, functional progress, and continuity of care planning rather than solely through completion of a single program endpoint.

The State must also ensure adequate program capacity and continuity of care in the community so that recovery and reduced recidivism are realistic outcomes, rather than creating unintended inequities or delays in access.

The Council supports the intent of this measure and respectfully urges the Legislature to ensure that implementation prioritizes individualized assessment, adequate community capacity, and measurable outcomes that reduce recidivism and support recovery.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'
HAWAII PAROLING AUTHORITY
Ka 'Ākena Palola o Hawai'i
1177 Alakea Street, First Floor
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

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CHAIRMAN

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VACANT
MEMBERS

COREY J. REINCKE
ADMINISTRATOR

No. _____

TESTIMONY ON HB 2288, HD1
RELATING TO PAROLE ELIGIBILITY

by
Gene DeMello, Chairman
Hawaii Paroling Authority

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS
Representative David A Tarnas, Chair
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice-Chair

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 –2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 325 – State Capitol

Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Paroling Authority (HPA) strongly supports HB 2288, HD1. HPA performs quasi-judicial functions and is the central paroling authority for the State of Hawaii. The Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) and Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR) govern fixing and reducing minimum terms of imprisonment and granting parole, and other administrative functions.

The proposed HRS amendment to §353-64 addresses participation in additional correctional programs prior to parole eligibility besides academic, vocational education, or prison industries. These additional programs include treatment for substance abuse and mental health issues, work furlough, and other programs necessary to address an inmate's criminogenic needs and/or risk factors. The proposed amendment also allows the parole board the opportunity to waive these programs

These programs align with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's (DCR) paradigm shift from a punitive to rehabilitative and re-entry model. DCR administers a Receiving and Diagnostic (RAD) risk and needs assessment upon admission. The RAD assessment identifies and prioritizes an inmate's criminogenic (risk) factors and the necessary programs that address these factors and reduce recidivism. RAD assessments and program recommendations are the blueprint that incentivize progressing through the correctional system and improve readiness for parole. An inmate's risk posed to the community and risk of recidivism are substantially reduced after completion of substance abuse treatment and when mental health issues are addressed and managed. Both issues closely correlate to criminality and perpetual incarceration when they go unaddressed.

The benefits of requiring inmates to participate in work furlough and other correctional programs include:

- gradual transition into the community with improved stability
- readiness for parole consideration
- secured housing, employment opportunities, and increased financial stability
- gradual resocialization and reunification with family and the community
- overall seamless transition from incarceration to parole

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input in support of HB 2288, HD1.



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 2288 HD1
RELATING TO PAROLE ELIGIBILITY

Ke Kōmike Hale o ka Ho‘okolokolo a me ke Kuleana Hawai‘i
(House Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs)
Hawai‘i State Capitol

Pepeluali 25, 2026

2:00 PM

Lumi 325

Aloha e Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, a me Members of Ke Kōmike Hale o ka Ho‘okolokolo a me ke Kuleana Hawai‘i:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS HB2288 HD1** which updates parole eligibility criteria to recognize participation in treatment, work furlough, and other reintegration-focused programs in addition to academic and vocational education and prison industry programs. OHA appreciates recent amendments clarifying that in its discretion, the Hawaii Paroling Authority may waive program participation requirements.

OHA supports policies that strengthen rehabilitation, successful reentry, and long-term public safety. This bill reflects modern correctional best practices by recognizing that substance use treatment, mental health programming, behavioral interventions, and structured work furlough opportunities are central to reducing recidivism and improving post-release stability.

Expanding recognized program categories appropriately aligns incentives within correctional settings by encouraging meaningful participation in evidence-based and skills-building programs. These include treatment and cognitive-behavioral programming that address underlying drivers of justice system involvement, as well as work furlough and reentry-focused services that support employment readiness, family reconnection, and housing stability prior to release.

Native Hawaiians are disproportionately represented in Hawai‘i’s correctional system and face elevated barriers to employment, health care access, and stable housing upon release. Policies that support treatment, skill-building, and structured reintegration pathways are therefore especially important to improving outcomes for OHA beneficiaries and their 'ohana.

Importantly, this measure maintains practical flexibility by preserving discretion where programs are unavailable and allowing case-by-case waiver authority, ensuring that eligibility standards remain fair, realistic, and operationally workable. For these reasons, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs respectfully urges this Committee to **PASS HB2288 HD1**. Mahalo nui for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important measure.



HB2288 HD1 Parole if Attend Treatment

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Sen. David Tarnas, Chair

Sen. Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Wednesday, Feb 25, 2026: 2:00: Room 325 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports HB2288 HD1:

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 is a **chronic, treatable medical condition**. For many, addiction—not criminal intent is the underlying driver of repeated offenses.

Allowing offenders to parole to access treatment does **not mean eliminating accountability**. Parole conditions can and should include strict supervision, mandatory program participation, regular testing, and swift consequences for non-compliance. This approach balances responsibility with rehabilitation and protects the community while giving individuals a real chance at recovery.

Hawaii State plans strategize the need to *identify and treat people with SUD when they interact with the criminal justice system*. This reflects a **science-based public health orientation** — recognizing SUD as a treatable condition that should be integrated with corrections and community supervision systems.

Hawaii has a track record of using structured supervision programs linked to treatment engagement — and those programs show **better compliance and reduced drug use** than traditional supervision alone.

High Prevalence of Substance Use Disorders Among Offenders. Hawai‘i’s recidivism exceeds **50%** for some cohorts, and testimony around policy reforms has explicitly linked **access to substance use treatment to reduce recidivism** when combined with supports like housing and food security.

National research from SAMHSA and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) shows that:

- **treatment reduces relapse and criminal behavior** compared with no treatment,
- **continuity of care from incarceration into community supervision** improves long-term outcomes, and

- **evidence-based treatment approaches (e.g., MAT, CBT)** reduce reoffending for people with SUD.

A California Parolee SUD treatment program data found that **providing effective SUD treatment to parolees** can:

- ✓ **Substance abuse treatment — especially when continued after release — is evidence-based and linked with better outcomes:**
- ✓ **Reduces Recidivism**
- ✓ **Supports Health Outcomes**
- ✓ **Save public funds by reducing costs of crime and re-incarceration**

Evidence consistently shows that individuals who receive structured, evidence-based substance abuse treatment are significantly less likely to reoffend. Treatment-focused parole reduces recidivism, lowers correctional costs, and helps individuals stabilize their lives through sobriety, employment, and family reunification. In contrast, denying parole solely due to untreated addiction often leads to a cycle of release, relapse, and re-incarceration.

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

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE ON PRISONS

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

Phone/E-Mail: [\(808\) 927-1214](tel:(808)927-1214) / kat.caphi@gmail.com

Today's Inmate; Tomorrow's Neighbor



COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Representative David Tarnas, Chair

Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

8:30 am

Room 411 and VIDEOCONFERENCE

SUPPORT FOR HB 2288 HD1 - REDUCING THE NUMBER OF OUR PEOPLE EXILED TO PRISONS OUTSIDE OF HAWAII

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe 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 3,669 Hawai'i individuals living behind bars¹ and under the "care and custody" of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation on February 16, 2026. We are always mindful that 797 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 share our SUPPORT for HB 2288 HD1 that expands the types of programs in which a committed person may participate to be eligible for parole. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

¹ DCR Weekly Population Report, February 16, 2026
[Pop-Reports-Weekly-2026-02-16.pdf](#)

This is such a great bill in concept, however, people have been denied parole because they could not get into the programs required by HPA. This is because opportunities for programs are not available until the last few years of a person's sentence. This is ridiculous, especially when we know that so many people are incarcerated for drug offenses. When people lose hope, they look for ways to ameliorate their depression and since drugs are available in prison, that is the route that people take.

This is why so many people choose to max out and serve their entire sentence. Many have been denied parole many times because they were unable to enter the programs mandated by HPA.

About the worst thing in prison is a population that loses hope.

HPA please work with DCR to change this backwards system which actually makes criminals, rather than rehabilitates people who may have lost their way.

Mahalo for letting us share our thoughts. Please, JHA committee pass this bill with the plea to HPA to help DCR do the right thing!

To: Representative David A. Tarnas, Chair
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair
Committee on Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: February 23, 2026

RE: House Bill 2288 HD1
Measure Title: RELATING TO PAROLE ELIGIBILITY.
Report Title: Parole Eligibility; Required Programs

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 2288 HD1. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

HB-2288-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 10:06:11 AM

Testimony for JHA on 2/25/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carolyn Eaton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

My name is Carolyn Eaton. I am a resident of Honolulu, and I wish to express strong support for this measure expanding avenues to parole.

Mahalo for your consideration of my testimony.