



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
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By

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SB 710 SD1 – RELATING TO INCARCERATED WOMEN

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of SB 710 SD1, which provides for supportive education and re-entry of incarcerated women, as developed by Hawai'i Friends of Restorative Justice (HFRJ).

This program supports incarcerated women to achieve the high school equivalency and then to continue on to college while incarcerated, as well as to further studies post-incarceration. In the program developed by HFRJ in collaboration with the Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC), Windward Community College (WCC), University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and McKinley Community School for Adults (MCSA), the General Educational Development (GED) test is just a first step to college going and lifelong learning. This is not a GED program. GED testing is offered by the Department of Public Safety and is paid for through vouchers from MCSA. WCC and HFRJ do not proctor or offer the GED, ensuring testing integrity and removing conflicts of interest.

WCC and HFRJ have partnered to grow students through collaborative learning and peer tutoring techniques, which not only helps women study for and successfully pass the GED, but also builds workforce readiness skills. The students learn leadership, collaboration, alternative strategy development and effective methods for promoting learning. Recognizing these skills, we created a certificate for those who complete the HFRJ peer tutor training program which documents the training and experience as a qualification for student employee positions in college level tutoring. During their incarceration, the certificate allows them to serve as tutors both in the GED program and also in college level classes which they complete post-GED. Post-release, this helps students to find campus-based work in order to pursue their college studies. This can help them to comply with post-release work requirements and to survive economically.

In addition to supporting GED attainment and leadership building, the program actively promotes enrollment in college pre- and post-incarceration. Students are supported to enroll in WCC coursework at WCCC. The methodology used also helps the students support each other in these college courses.

When there are not enough students to offer a needed class in person at the facility, this program provides tuition for students to enroll in college level coursework via correspondence. This allows all students to progress toward their degree efficiently when incarcerated.

The program then further helps students again when they are ready to transition post-release, counseling them on educational opportunities post-incarceration and on making appropriate decisions as they transition to re-entry.

The GED is only the first stepping stone for women at WCCC to be able to continue on and then benefit from higher education. Through the program offered by HFRJ, women have been able to attain their GED at greater rates and in shorter time periods than previously. Furthermore, they then work to support other women to complete as well. This cycle of achievement and giving promotes a better living and learning environment. Education has been shown to decrease violence and negative behavior patterns while incarcerated and lead to better outcomes post-incarceration.

We urge the Committee to please pass this bill, which maintains a successful pathway to improved outcomes for incarcerated women.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of SB 710 SD1, as long as its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 710 SD1.