



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 Public Safety and Intergovernmental and Military Affairs
Senate Committee on Higher Education
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By

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SB 712 – RELATING TO CORRECTIONS

Chairs Wakai and Kim, Vice Chairs Elefante and Kidani, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of SB 712, which creates a Trauma Informed Care Course designed for Adult Corrections Officers (ACO's) taught by Windward Community College (WCC).

This coursework, deeper than a short training, is urgently needed. According to the Center for Disease Control, 97% of inmates have had at least one traumatic childhood experience. A large national study found that 40.1% of female inmates and 17.8% of male inmates suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Other studies have found 30% of male inmates have current PTSD symptoms and 60% have lifetime PTSD. Incarceration compounds potential trauma related issues, as it is an environment where the incarcerated feel a lack of personal control over situations and their own safety. Due to this, individuals may remain in a constant state high alert due to concern for personal safety and may be triggered by perceived threats and actions and/or interactions which remind them of past trauma. This can lead to inappropriate responses, including aggression, violence, anxiety, depression, and self-harm. Suicide is the leading cause of jail deaths nationwide. These impacts of trauma create a negative environment for the incarcerated individual, fellow prisoners, and the prison staff.

Trauma Informed coursework helps those serving incarcerated populations to better manage this population through understanding the impact of trauma. ACO's will be provided information on the lifelong effects of trauma, recovery needs, and implementation of trauma-focused treatment interventions, including evidence based best practice. Trauma triggers and examples of calming and grounding strategies will be discussed to help staff conduct their work more effectively and with less frustration. Vicarious trauma impacting correctional staff and suggestions for self-care will also be explored. Through this deeper exploration, those completing the coursework become best equipped to handle difficult situations that arise and support their coworkers.

WCC is able to offer this course statewide both online and through a hub and spoke model in partnership with sister community colleges. The coursework can be completed in asynchronous, online classes, which can be taken at the employees' convenience and do not require a specific time in class or a specific location. Classes could also be offered in person at given facilities requesting this.

WCC has the expertise to offer this in collaboration with the Department of Public Safety (PSD). The program is based on our Mental Health Technician certificate developed in collaboration with the Hawai'i State Hospital and specific to the needs of workers and their context here in Hawai'i. WCC has been providing significant credit-based college education to incarcerated students since 2017.

This Trauma Informed Care Coursework positively impacts the prison environment for both workers and incarcerated individuals. This can have further positive impacts on retaining staffing due to decreased workplace frustration. This is important given the high turnover and staffing insufficiencies faced by PSD.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent of SB 712, 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 712.