

Testimony  
re: HB 2763, HD1 Relating to Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force  
by Ted Sakai, Co-Chair  
Task Force on Children of Incarcerated Parents

Senate Committee on Human Services and Public Housing  
Senator Suzanne Chun-Oakland, Chair

Senate Committee on Public Safety  
Senator Will Espero, Chair

Thursday, March 13, 2008, 1:15 a.m.  
Conference Room 016  
State Capitol

Chair Chun-Oakland, Chair Espero and Members of the Committees:

This testimony is in strong support of HB 2763, HD 1 relating to Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force. The Task Force on Children of Incarcerated Parents was established in Act 8, SLH 2006, with an ambitious set of responsibilities including:

- (1) Develop a system to identify children of incarcerated parents in Hawaii and to make referrals as appropriate;
- (2) Determine the impact that parental incarceration has on children of incarcerated parents;
- (3) Identify the needs of children of incarcerated parents and develop responsive programs;
- (4) Identify local programs and models, including neighbor island programs and models; and
- (5) Review other jurisdictions' activities, policies, directives, and laws relating to children of incarcerated parents and derive best practices models there from.

Unfortunately, the Task Force was not convened until May, 2007. It had less than eight months to address these complex issues before it expired on December 31, 2008. Nevertheless, we were able to make some findings which we believe significantly advances our understanding of the needs of the children of incarcerated parents in Hawaii. These findings are based largely on two separate but related efforts. First, the Task Force sponsored meetings in West Hawaii, East Hawaii, Maui, Waianae and Honolulu to obtain the views of caregivers, former inmates, former children of incarcerated parents, service providers, and other concerned citizens.

And second, Dr. Marilyn Brown, a professor of Sociology at the University of Hawaii in Hilo and a member of the Task Force, conducted a survey of inmates at the Hawaii Community Correctional Center (HCCC) in Hilo. Dr. Brown generously shared her results with us. We are indebted to her and to the Department of Public Safety, which made the surveys possible. While we recognize that this survey did not include a representative sample of our state's total inmate population, it nevertheless provided us with some invaluable insights.

Our findings and recommendations are contained in detail in a report that will be submitted to you very shortly. This report is in the final stages of review. A sample of our findings include:

- The data on inmates at the HCCC seem to confirm that many of our inmates are parents. 84% of the women and 70% of the men surveyed at HCCC are parents. This is consistent with national data. The women in the sample had an average of 3.3 children, and the men had an average of 2.3 children. 54% of the children were 12 years old or younger. This seems to confirm that parental incarceration impacts the lives of many children.
- Anecdotal reports from community members indicate that parental incarceration impacts children from the time the incarceration first occurs. The children are traumatized by factors such as the separation, the stigma, and the uncertainty regarding when and if the parent will return home.
- Parenting and reunification programs tend to be available to inmates after they are sentenced, and often, near the end of the sentence. By this time, the child has suffered from years of separation.
- The needs of caregivers require focused attention. Caregivers are usually mothers, if the offender is a male, and grandparents, unless and aunts when the offender is female. They suffer in many ways, including economically and sometimes legally.
- The children of incarcerated parents and their caregivers are indeed a gap group. The Departments of Public Safety, Human Services, Education, and Health all have other primary responsibilities. Each tries to do what it can, if particular children are brought to their attention. However, the children tend to come to the attention of the agencies when there is a crisis, and many of the children simply suffer in silence.

The Task Force believes that there is much needs to be done to assist children of incarcerated parents. We need to systematically identify the children, engage in research the impacts of incarceration on them, establish systems to link them and their caregivers to needed services at the earliest possible time, develop a full range of programs that help them maintain bonds with their parents during the incarceration period, and promote a healthy reunification after incarceration. We ask for this extension because we firmly believe that this is essential work. Until recently, children of incarcerated parents were an invisible group in our society. We cannot allow the light to be diverted again.

Please pass HB 2763, HD 1 and allow the Task Force to continue its work.

**testimony**

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**From:** Judith Clark [jfclark@hotmail.com]  
**Sent:** Monday, March 10, 2008 5:58 AM  
**To:** testimony  
**Subject:** Testimony HB 2763 Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force

Bill: HB 2763 Relating to the Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force  
Committees: Human Services and Housing; Public Safety  
Chairs: Senator Chun Oakland; Senator Espero  
Date/time: 3/13/08; 1:15 p.m  
Room 016  
Deliver 1 copy to room 226  
\*\*\*\*\*  
March 10, 2008

To: Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair  
And members of the Committee on Human Services and Public Housing  
  
Senator Will Espero, Chair  
And members of the Committee on Public Safety

**Testimony in Support of HB 2763 HD1 Relating to the Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force**

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of more than fifty youth-serving organizations, supports HB 2763 Relating to the Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force.

More than 6,000 children in Hawaii have a parent who is incarcerated. These children are seven times more likely to enter juvenile or adult prisons. They experience problems in school, are at high risk for substance abuse, and suffer emotional trauma, grief, and loss.

The Children of Incarcerated Parents Task Force has determined that there is little data available locally about these children and their families and few resources in our state for this population. It has brought together service providers, government officials, and family members to begin dialogue about service and policy needs. This work is not yet completed and Task Force members need more time to work with the government, non-profit, business, and faith-based communities to develop data collection systems; adopt model programs that have worked in other communities; and establish policies in our law enforcement, public safety, and child welfare systems to support children of incarcerated parents.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark, MPH

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