

LORENN WALKER, JD, MPH

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY & MILITARY AFFAIRS

Honorable Representative Henry J.C. Aquino, Chair
Honorable Representative Ty Cullen, Vice Chair

Thursday, February 9, 2012 • 9:00 AM • Room 309

HB 2063 RELATING TO PUBLIC SAFETY

STRONG SUPPORT TO PROVIDE RESTORATIVE CIRCLES AND OTHER SUPPORT FOR INCARCERATED PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES

I STRONGLY SUPPORT this measure providing restorative circles for incarcerated people and their families.

I have been designing, facilitating, researching and training others on public health approaches, including restorative justice programs, for over 15 years. As a health educator and former deputy attorney general representing state agencies and employees, I believe restorative justice provides an avenue toward healing basically overlooked by our current justice system.

The reentry Huikahi Restorative Circle prison program has successfully helped families cope with the hardship of having a loved one imprisoned, and in dealing with other past harms. Children, parents, siblings, grandparents and others have all appreciated the Circles. Everyday I witness testimonies about the program's helpfulness. Yesterday a 20-year-old California man, who last saw his incarcerated mother over 10 years ago, was able to express his feelings and what his mother might do to make things right. She will also hear about her son's continued love for her. The man's voice will be heard at his mother's Circle regardless of his actual presence.

The Huikahi Restorative Circle program has been discussed in many publications. We authored a book about it last year because of numerous inquires. Organizations in New York, Texas, Virginia and California are replicating it. Last year I went to Finland, Norway, Singapore and New York, and so far this year I am going to Virginia and California to train people on this restorative justice reentry work.

While preliminary evidence suggests the Circles may reduce repeat crime, the primary goal of the process is to heal damaged relationships. Research shows even when there is relapse and re-incarceration, loved ones continue to appreciate their participation in the Circles even when their family member has returned to prison.

This bill could also provide means for unrelated victims to meet with incarcerated people who harmed them. I am currently working with a family that wants to meet with a man imprisoned in Arizona concerning the vehicular homicide of their loved one. Despite the man's desire to also meet with the family, there is no mandate for a restorative meeting. It is unclear the department of public safety will help provide it. Last October I facilitated a similar meeting for a Washington family at Walla Walla prison. They lost a loved one in a murder by unrelated robbers. The meeting aired on the Oprah Winfrey Network: <http://www.oprah.com/own-confronting/Colleen-Meets-Her-Husbands-Killer>. Since the meeting the parties are all doing vastly better.

Currently the department of public safety has limited our restorative justice programs to the women's prison (WCCC). More people want Huikahi Restorative Circles than what is being provided due to the lack of resources. Please see my website for publications and more information about our prison based restorative circle reentry program: www.lorennwalker.com

LATE TESTIMONY

TO: Committee on Public Safety & Military Affairs
Honorable Representative Rep. Henry J.C. Aquino, Chair
Honorable Representative Ty Cullen, Vice Chair

February 8, 2012

Hearing: Thursday, February 9, 2012, 9:00 am, Room 309

RE: **HB 2063 Relating to Public Safety**

STRONG SUPPORT FOR HB 2063

I STRONGLY SUPPORT this legislative measure to fund restorative justice circle programs in Hawai'i, because restorative circles are powerful, respectful, and effective programs that deserve financial support from the State.

I have worked in the restorative justice field for nine years and have continually been humbled and inspired with the effects of responsive programs such as those supported in HB 2063. Hawai'i has been particularly impressive with culturally respectful initiatives, solution-focused approaches, and extensive research and scholarship.

In these difficult economic times, it *is* fiscally responsible to invest in programs such as restorative circles, which have been shown to reduce recidivism, which lowers the overall burden on our police, courts, DOH, and prison systems... eventually saving taxpayers money while providing appropriate and responsive avenues for healing.

Prison restorative circles address traditional recidivism contributing factors, such as lack of support and appropriate planning, as well as addressing restorative justice issues of accountability, healing, and forgiveness. These valuable programs provide opportunities for prisoners to take accountability for their actions and address concerns in a safe, professionally facilitated space that incorporates support, services, and access to information critical to creating a success plan for reentry into our communities. These programs, however, need support and funding to be viable.

Funding skill-building and reentry workforce support are also important investments in lowering the recidivism rate by providing real opportunities for success. These programs address both the needs of incarcerated individuals to become productive members of our community and the needs of communities to build capacity for a larger and diversified workforce in our economy. The effect of these programs in-turn strengthens families and our communities.

I urge you to please support HB 2063 as a commitment to strengthening our communities by giving access to justice for families who want to go through a restorative circle process and creating viable support for reentering individuals.

Respectfully Submitted,

Name: Robyn Pfahl

Address: 4114 Maunaloa Ave. Honolulu, HI 96816; pfahl@hawaii.edu