

HAWAII STATE COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

To: THE HONORABLE DAVID Y. IGE, CHAIR
THE HONORABLE MICHELLE N. KIDANI, VICE CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

From: Veronika Geronimo, Executive Director
Hawaii State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

RE: HB2226, HD2 – SUPPORT

DATE and TIME: 3/28/2012 9:30:00 AM

The Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence submits the following testimony in support of HB2226. As a statewide coalition of domestic violence service providers, our mission is to engage communities and organizations to end domestic violence through education, advocacy, and action for social justice.

This bill amends Chapter 353, Hawaii Revised Statutes, by creating a new part establishing a permanent statewide victim notification system in the Department of Public Safety (PSD), a governance committee to advise PSD on the implementation of the statewide victim notification system, and a special fund to underwrite the cost of the statewide victim notification system.

Domestic violence survivors are terribly frightened when their perpetrator is released from custody. Perpetrators often see the survivor as being directly responsible for their incarceration and may seek retaliation when released. The victim notification system is a valuable tool which survivors of domestic violence, their family members and advocates can use to receive timely information about changes in an offender's custody status. Knowing when offenders are to be released gives survivors and service providers a life-saving mechanism that keeps them informed and gives them time to plan for their safety. HSCADV's membership, which is made up of domestic violence programs and shelters, report that the victim-notification system is a user-friendly tool that they use often; some advocates use it as often as three times a week. According to one service provider, "Sometimes it is the only thing that allows a victim to sleep at night, knowing that she/I will be alerted if he is released/escaped."

Without a continuing funding source, the victim notification system in Hawaii is in danger of ending when federal funding runs out in 2012. If the program was eliminated, it would compromise the safety of survivors and their families. Prior to this system, survivors and service providers had to call the probation officers, the prison, or both, to find out when an offender would be released. That was a time consuming process that jeopardized victim safety.

Finally, the need for this program is even more critical in light of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative's (JRI) proposals to increase supervised release of felons. The victim

notification system will work hand-in-hand with other JRI proposals to increase victim and public safety.

Thank you for your consideration.