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TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 1203
RELATING TO TECHNICAL LITERACY FOR INCARCERATED
INDIVIDUALS AND PAROLEES

by
Nolan P. Espinda, Director
Department of Public Safety

Senate Committee on Public Safety, Intergovernmental, and Military Affairs
Senator Clarence K. Nishihara, Chair
Senator Glenn Wakai, Vice Chair

Tuesday, February 14, 2017; 2:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 229

Chair Nishihara, Vice Chair Wakai, and Members of the Committee:

The Department of Public Safety (PSD) **appreciates the intent** of Senate Bill (SB) 1203, which would create a pilot program at one male and one female correctional facility for a 500-hour computer science and programming course, administered by a third-party entity, for incarcerated men and women offenders and parolees.

The Department already has similar programs in place, provided by private entities, but would welcome the additional resources to improve and expand on this important area of training.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

To: Hawaii State Senate Committee on Public Safety, Intergovernmental, and Military Affairs
Hearing Date/Time: Tuesday, February 14, 2017, 2PM
Place: Hawaii State Capitol, Rm. 229

Position Statement Supporting Senate Bill 1203

Thank you Chair Nishihara, Vice Chair Wakai, and committee members,

YWCA O'ahu **supports the Senate Bill 1203**, which would establish a technical literacy program for incarcerated individuals. Giving people a highly valued skill set would help with employment and potential earnings- two obstacles upon reentry.

YWCA O'ahu manages Ka Hale Ho'āla Hou No Nā Wāhine, a community-based women's work furlough program dedicated to empowering women to successfully transition from prison into the community. We understand the need for increased employment options for those transitioning from prison. Too often, we see women taking minimum wage jobs because they lack education or training. While our program helps women move beyond that first job and onto a successful career, it would be to the benefit of the people incarcerated and the state to have additional job trainings in prison.

Technical programs in prisons are popping up all over the country. Successful reentry has become a priority issue for many states. As states work to increase post-incarceration employment, and therefore decrease recidivism rates, there is a need for improved training and programs while incarcerated. For some, they have taken a non-traditional route and looked to computers and engineering as solutions. California based The Last Mile program launched a coding curriculum in the San Quentin State Prison in 2014. The goal was to rehabilitate prisoners by teaching them to code. The intensive six-month program boasts that no graduate of the program has returned to prison. The developers of the program expect their graduates to be earning six-figures with their new skills. Employed, productive citizens with a low recidivism rate is the goal for many but attained by few.

Employment post-incarceration can be difficult to obtain. A criminal record is still an obstacle for people to gain employment and for those who do, their earnings are typically less than what they could have earned if they had not been incarcerated. The gap in employment history due to incarceration combined with often lower levels of education lead to lower wages and high unemployment rates.¹ It is estimated that yearly earnings are reduced by 40 percent due to incarceration. The majority of people who are currently incarcerated will return to the community. The loss of wages and earnings does not only effect the person, but the community and local economy as a whole. A study in 2008 estimated the country was losing \$57 to \$65 billion in gross domestic product loss due to incarceration of adult males.² While the state currently offers job training in areas like furniture making and landscaping, there is a need for training in higher earning areas like coding. Jobs in the technical field are in demand and expected to grow.

¹ Pew Trust (2010). *Collateral costs: Incarceration's effects on economic mobility*.

http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/collateralcosts1.pdf

² Center on Economic and Policy Research (2010). *Ex-offender and the labor market*.

<http://cepr.net/documents/publications/ex-offenders-2010-11.pdf>

eliminating racism
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ywca

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Vocational and educational programs are necessary for reentry. A technical program like Senate bill 1203 offers an enhanced second chance. It gives a specialized skill set in an area primed for economic growth and prosperity. For these reasons, the YWCA O'ahu **respectfully requests that this committee report the bill favorably on Senate bill 1203.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your consideration on this matter.

Kathleen Algire
Advocacy Coordinator
YWCA O'ahu

YWCA IS ON A MISSION