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**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
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**WRITTEN  
ONLY**

**Testimony in SUPPORT of H.B. 1416 H.D. 1  
RELATING TO HEALTH**

REPRESENTATIVE SYLVIA LUKE, CHAIR  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hearing Date: February 26, 2019

Room Number: 308

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health estimates approximately \$12,000 would be  
2 needed for research, facilitation, and Neighbor Island commission member travel. The  
3 Department defers to the priorities in the Governor's Executive biennium budget request.

4 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health supports the intent of H.B. 1416 H.D. 1.  
5 The purpose of H.B.1416 H.D. 1 is to establish a suicide prevention commission to examine,  
6 evaluate, and determine methods to improve education, awareness, support services, and inmate  
7 outreach to best prevent suicides in Hawaii's correctional facilities. The commission will submit  
8 a report and strategic plan 20 days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2020.

9 In response to HCR 66, passed by the 2016 Legislature, the plan to reduce suicides in Hawaii by  
10 25% by 2025 was completed by the Prevent Suicide Hawaii Task Force (PSHTF) in  
11 collaboration with the Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention System Branch  
12 (EMSIPSB). One of the plan's key goal is to increase knowledge of discrimination and stigma  
13 in the context of mental health and suicide prevention with marginalized and/or vulnerable  
14 communities such as prison inmates.

15 According to the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), Hawaii's inmate suicide rate was the  
16 seventh highest in the nation with 390 suicide deaths per 100,000 in the period 2001 – 2014.  
17 Establishing a time-limited subcommittee with representative membership tasked with a strategic  
18 plan, will give greater visibility and weight to addressing the problem of suicide in Hawaii's  
19 correctional facilities.

- 1 Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

# COMMUNITY ALLIANCE ON PRISONS

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## COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Sylvia Luke, Chair

Rep. Ty Cullen, Vice Chair

Tuesday, February 26, 2019

11 am

Room 308

## STRONG SUPPORT - HB 1416 HD1- SUICIDE PREVENTION COMMISSION FOR CORRECTIONS

Aloha Chair Luke, Vice Chair Cullen and Members of the Committee!

My name is Kat Brady and I am the Coordinator of Community Alliance on Prisons, a community initiative promoting smart justice policies in Hawai'i for more than two decades. This testimony is respectfully offered on behalf of the families of **ASHLEY GREY, DAISY KASITATI, JOEY O'MALLEY, JESSICA FORTSON AND ALL THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIED UNDER THE "CARE AND CUSTODY" OF THE STATE** as well as the approximately 5,500 Hawai'i individuals living behind bars or under the "care and custody" of the Department of Public Safety on any given day. We are always mindful that more than 1,600 of Hawai'i's imprisoned people are serving their sentences abroad thousands of miles away from their loved ones, their homes and, for the disproportionate number of incarcerated Kanaka Maoli, far, far from their ancestral lands.

Community Alliance on Prisons is in strong support and thanks the committee for hearing this important bill. HB 1416 HD1 incorporated the amendments suggested by the Department of Health. This has become a very pressing situation. We have been working on justice issues for more than two decades and we have never seen the number of suicides or attempted suicides that we have witnessed over the last several years. And this is not happening in just one facility – the four mentioned above happened in WCCC, Halawa, and MCCC. Something is very wrong.

In 2017 CNN reported<sup>1</sup> that Suicide rates in prisons are rising after holding steady for years, suicide rates started rising sharply in 2013. In state prisons, it went up 30% from 2013 to 2014. In 2014, there were 3,927 inmate deaths in state (3,483) and federal (444) prisons, the largest number of inmate deaths reported since tracking began in 2001. Although illness remained the most common cause of death, **suicides represented 7%**. That's the largest percentage of deaths due to suicide since tracking began.

An [international study](#),<sup>2</sup> conducted with Professors Seena Fazel and Keith Hawton at the University of Oxford, shows the increased risk of suicide for men and women in prison, compared to the general population, in 24 high-income countries between 2011–2014. The study found that the **risk of suicide increased at least three-fold for male prisoners** compared to the general male population. For females, this risk was amplified, **with female prisoners being at least nine times more likely to die from suicide** compared to the general female population.

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<sup>1</sup> **Prison suicides are on the rise nationally and it's pretty bad in Massachusetts**, By Emanuella Grinberg, CNN, Wed April 19, 2017. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/19/health/prison-suicides-massachusetts-trnd/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> 'Suicide in prisons: an international study of prevalence and contributory factors. [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(17\)30430-3/supplemental](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(17)30430-3/supplemental)

In 2007, the World Health Organization released a report entitled, PREVENTING SUICIDE IN JAILS AND PRISONS<sup>3</sup> including a summary of best practices:

*First of all, staff culture and cooperation seem to be critical to the successful implementation of prison suicide prevention programmes. Best practices for preventing suicides in jail and prison settings are based on the development and documentation of a comprehensive suicide prevention plan with the following elements:*

- *A training programme (including refreshers) for correctional staff and care givers to help them recognize suicidal inmates and appropriately respond to inmates in suicidal crises.*
- *Attention needs to be paid to the general prison environment (levels of activity, safety, culture and staff-prisoner relationships). In particular, the quality of the social climate of prisons is critical in minimizing suicidal behaviours. While prisons can never be stress-free environments, prison administrators must enact effective strategies for minimizing bullying and other violence in their institutions, and for maximizing supportive relationships among prisoners and staff. The quality of staff-prisoner relationships is critical in reducing prisoners' stress levels and maximizing the likelihood that prisoners will trust staff sufficiently to disclose to them when their coping resources are becoming overwhelmed, feelings of hopelessness, and suicidal ideation.*
- *Procedures to systematically screen inmates upon their arrival at the facility and throughout their stay in order to identify those who may be at high risk.*
- *A mechanism to maintain communication between staff members regarding high-risk inmates.*
- *Written procedures which outline minimum requirements for housing high-risk inmates; provision of social support; routine visual checks and constant observation for acutely suicidal inmates; and appropriate use of restraints as a last resort for controlling self-injurious inmates.*
- *Inmates with mental disorders in need of treatment should receive it (pharmacological or psychosocial interventions) and be kept under strict observation.*
- *Development of sufficient internal resources or links to external community-based mental health services to ensure access to mental health personnel when required for further evaluation and treatment.*
- *A strategy for debriefing when a suicide occurs towards identifying ways of improving suicide detection, monitoring, and management in correctional settings.*

*In conclusion, although we sometimes lack the ability to accurately predict if and when an inmate will attempt or commit suicide, prison officials and correctional, health care, and mental health personnel are in the best position to identify, assess, and treat potentially suicidal behaviour. Even though not all inmate suicides are preventable, many are, and a systematic reduction of these deaths can occur if comprehensive suicide prevention programmes are implemented in correctional facilities throughout the world.*

Community Alliance on Prisons implores the committee to pass this important legislation to establish a Suicide Prevention Commission with experts to develop a strategic plan to address this important issue and address the preventable deaths happening in our correctional facilities.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify and support this important bill!

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<sup>3</sup> Preventing Suicide in Jails and Prisons, World Health Organization and the International Association for Suicide Prevention. [https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/prevention/suicide/resource\\_jails\\_prisons.pdf](https://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/resource_jails_prisons.pdf)



Monday, February 25, 2019

Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair  
House Committee on Finance

Subject: **Support HB1416 H.D.1**

Dear Chair Luke, and Members of the Committee,

The Injury Prevention Advisory Committee **strongly supports HB1416 H.D.1** to establish a suicide prevention commission to examine, evaluate, and determine methods to improve education, awareness, support services, and inmate outreach to best prevent suicides in Hawaii's correctional facilities.

Established in 1990, the Injury Prevention Advisory Committee (IPAC) is an advocacy group committed to preventing and reducing injuries in Hawai'i. IPAC members include representatives from public and private agencies, physicians and professionals working together to address the eight leading areas of injury, including violence prevention.

Between 2001-2014, the federal Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), reported that Hawaii's inmate suicide rate was the seventh highest in the nation with 390 suicide deaths per 100,000. Establishing a time-limited subcommittee with representative membership tasked with a strategic plan will give greater visibility and weight to addressing the problem of suicide in Hawaii's correctional facilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Deborah Goebert  
Chair  
Injury Prevention Advisory Committee

**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2019 5:24:42 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2019 11:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Brett Kulbis	Honolulu County Republican Party	Support	No

Comments:

## Helping Hawai'i Live Well

To: Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair, Representative Ty Cullen, Vice Chair, Members, House Committee on Finance

From: Trisha Kajimura, Executive Director

**Re: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1416 HD1 RELATING TO HEALTH**

**Hearing: February 26, 2019, 11:00 am, CR 308**

Thank you for hearing **HB 1416 HD1, which establishes a suicide prevention commission to examine, evaluate, and determine methods to improve education, awareness, support services, and inmate outreach to best prevent suicide in Hawai'i's correctional facilities.** Mental Health America of Hawaii supports HB 1416 HD1 as a way to address the concern of the high rate of suicide within the state's incarcerated population. This measure will enhance the strategies the Department of Public Safety is currently using.

Mental Health America of Hawaii is a 501(c)3 organization founded in Hawai'i 77 years ago, that serves the community by promoting mental health through advocacy, education and service. One of our signature services is a training for middle and high school age youth on Youth Suicide and Bullying Prevention that we developed here in Hawaii called "Ho'olohe Pono." This training has been evaluated to show that over 80% of participants increase their knowledge of bullying, suicide, helpful resources, and how they can assist someone in need.

In Hawai'i, we unfortunately have very high rates of suicide, suicide attempts, and suicidal ideation amongst various age groups. Shockingly, our state's most recent Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (part of a national survey) results show that 23.2% of middle age youth in Hawaii self-report suicidal ideation, 16.3% has made a suicide plan, and 12.4% have made a suicide attempt.<sup>1</sup> Suicide-related behavior has a serious and profound impact on communities that can be reduced with education, awareness, and appropriate mental health treatment services. It is critically important that our community members currently incarcerated also receive these services.

Thank you for considering my **testimony in support of HB 1416 HD1.** Please contact me at [trisha.kajimura@mentalhealthhawaii.org](mailto:trisha.kajimura@mentalhealthhawaii.org) or (808)521-1846 if you have any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance System, Hawaii, 2017

**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/23/2019 9:34:03 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2019 11:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
E. Ileina Funakoshi	Individual	Support	No

Comments:



**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/25/2019 7:21:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2019 11:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Tracey Clay-Whitehurst	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/22/2019 9:13:15 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2019 11:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Christine Weger	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Hawaii has an inordinate number of suicides in its prisons and jails--far out of proportion to those experienced in other states. It does not require us to judge who or what is responsible--we can do something about it by adopting this bill, finding out where the evidence leads, learning what best practices consist of and recommending changes.

This bill is in keeping with the recommendations and the spirit of the report and recommendations of your own HCR 85 Correctional Reform Task Force. Let's get to work addressing this problem.

Mahalo for your good work!

Christine Weger, Atty at Law

**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/22/2019 5:28:14 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2019 11:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Joy Marshall	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/25/2019 7:23:45 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2019 11:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Kai Lorinc	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/25/2019 7:38:48 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2019 11:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Quentin Whitehurst	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/25/2019 1:50:58 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2019 11:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Stefani jeremiah	Individual	Support	No

Comments: