



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
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**Testimony in SUPPORT of H.B. 1416 H.D. 1**  
**RELATING TO HEALTH**

SENATOR DONOVAN M. DELA CRUZ, CHAIR  
COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Hearing Date: April 3, 2019

Room Number: 211

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 is to submit  
8 a report and strategic plan 20 days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2021.

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 WAYS AND MEANS

Senator Donovan Delacruz, Chair

Senator Gilbert Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

10:25 am

Room 211

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

Aloha Chair Delacruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran 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. This has become a very pressing situation. The tragedy reported in the Honolulu Star Advertiser<sup>1</sup> by an incarcerated man who attempted to kill himself 15 times is a clarion call for a strategic plan by professionals trained in suicide prevention to address suicides in Hawai'i's correctional facilities. The need for this bill was articulated in the HCR 85 Correctional Reform Task Force report:

*Recent deaths "have been or are being investigated by the Department of Public Safety, but to our knowledge no outside experts have been consulted about the situation and the Department of Public Safety has consistently asserted that there is nothing wrong with its suicide prevention policies or staff training,"*

PSD reported that more than two dozen incarcerated persons have killed themselves in Hawai'i jails and prisons since 2010.

In 2017 CNN reported<sup>2</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. That's the largest percentage of deaths due to suicide since tracking began.

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<sup>1</sup> **State to pay \$75K to family in prisoner suicide at Halawa Correctional Facility**, By Mark Ladao, March 31, 2019.  
<https://www.staradvertiser.com/2019/03/31/hawaii-news/state-to-pay-75k-to-family-in-prisoner-suicide/>

<sup>2</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>

An [international study](#),<sup>3</sup> 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.

In 2007, the World Health Organization released a report entitled, PREVENTING SUICIDE IN JAILS AND PRISONS<sup>4</sup> including a summary of best practices. The conclusion of the report reads:

*“...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 submit testimony and we urge the committee’s support of this important bill!

*“Compassion is to look beyond your own pain, to see the pain of others.”*

*Yasmin Mogahed*

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<sup>3</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)

<sup>4</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)

Senator Donovan Dela Cruz , Chair  
Senator Gilbert S.C Keith Aragan, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Emilygrace Kaaiakamanu  
University of Hawaii at Manoa - Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work

My name is Emilygrace Kaaiakamanu and I am a student of the Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. As a Master's degree candidate in UH Manoa's social work program, I'm here to advocate for those who may not have the opportunity to advocate for themselves therefore, I am testifying in full support of House Bill 1416 HD1.

Mental Health is an issue that is being brought to attention more in this day and age. Inmates face many challenges and pressures entering not only the criminal justice system also when they are released. Therefore, to have appropriate support and guidance from staff is crucial for their personal well-being, growth and to end recidivism. Staff and faculty play a big role in the lives of these inmates because they are the most frequent and consistent contact that they have on a daily basis. Staff and faculty need to be equipped to notice and identify the needs of a person whether or not the person is vocally sharing it. Trainings on mental health awareness and suicide prevention will allow for staff to meet these needs and notice signs of a person who struggling with such issues. The statistics for suicide in our Nation is increasing and we need to be teaching our staff in all areas of work to appropriately handle if such mental health concerns arise. To even have all employers know the suicide hotline number and make that part of the training will be a step in the right direction. As a person who has lost a loved one due to suicide I urge the committees to pass House Bill 1416 HD1. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.

**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/1/2019 2:01:39 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/3/2019 10:25:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Jen Jenkins	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

April 1, 2019

To: **WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE, HAWAII STATE SENATE**  
Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senator Gilbert Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair

Re: **HB 1416 HD 1 — SUICIDE PREVENTION COMMISSION — hearing on April 3, 2019**

***STRONG SUPPORT***

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran and members of your committee,

Thank you so much for hearing this potentially life-saving bill.

Twenty years ago, beloved local musician Mackey Feary ended his life in Halawa, while in the care of our Department of Public Safety. Every time I hear “Nightbird” and “Moon and Stars,” I think of that, imagining how much more beautiful Hawaii would be with Mackey still alive.

Mackey’s suicide was not unique, nor is the enduring pain that it caused. Many other families also are suffering, and our collective grief cries for answers and solutions to a horrible problem that in recent years has only grown. Whether this commission can provide these is unknown. However, we owe it to our past, our present and our future to try.

Please pass this bill.

Mahalo nui loa.

Aloha,



Peter Gellatly

Corrections Population Management Commission, 2004-2011  
Penal Code Review Committee, 2015



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**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/1/2019 7:46:34 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/3/2019 10:25:00 AM

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

Comments:

Mentally ill persons do not belong in prison. They need professional treatment and safeguards.



**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/1/2019 11:00:40 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/3/2019 10:25:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Diana Bethel	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

HB 1416 HD1 establishes a Commission of experts to improve programs and conditions to help prevent suicides in Hawaii's correctional facilities and also submit a strategic plan to reduce the number of suicides. The Commission will include a majority of experts on suicide and suicide prevention and will be based in the Department of Health.

Why are there so many suicides in Hawaii's correctional facilities? Could it be due to the fact that there are hardly any rehabilitation programs that would give hope to the inmates? Why can't an inmate expect to be safe from harm in prison? Why was Mr. Ibana, who killed himself in 2013, repeatedly raped while in prison? Is it surprising that he would want to kill himself?

We know that 95% of inmates will be released into the community eventually. I am sure that you know that our prisons are severely lacking in rehabilitation and reentry programs that will support inmate development and help them become productive citizens when they are released. Wouldn't it be cheaper and more effective to invest in rehabilitation and reentry programs in the community than have high rates of recidivism that increase the cost to Hawaii's taxpayers?

Hawaii will become famous for it's high and increasing rate of suicide, and it seems clear that the Department of Public Safety is incapable of making the situation better.

We need new people with a new vision of how to incarcerate inmates. This is what the HCR Task Force was tasked with. HB 1416 HD1 is based on one of the HCR 85 task force recommendations.

Please pass HB 1416 HD1.

Mahalo.

**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/2/2019 6:53:29 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/3/2019 10:25:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Cathy Tilley	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I strongly support this bill too many people are dying in our prisons and there needs to be accountability, We are not taking care of those in the system that need help

thank you Cathy Tilly

**HB-1416-HD-1**

Submitted on: 4/2/2019 9:19:48 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/3/2019 10:25:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Barbara Polk	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

The number of suicides in the correctional system are alarming. I urge you to pass this bill.

## Helping Hawai'i Live Well

To: Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair, Senator Gilbert Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair, Members, Senate Committee on Ways and Means

From: Trisha Kajimura, Executive Director

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

**Hearing: April 3, 2019, 10:25 am, CR 211**

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 Hawaii's correctional facilities.** Mental Health America of Hawaii supports HB 1416 HD1 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

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1416, HD 1

TO: Senate Committee on Ways & Means

FROM: Nikos Leverenz  
Grants, Development & Policy Manager

DATE: April 3, 2019 (10:00 AM)

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Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and Committee Members:

Hawai'i Health & Harm Reduction Center (HHRC) supports HB 1416, HD 1, which establishes 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.

The state has an obligation to ensure the life, health, and well-being of those in correctional custody. Of concern is the current overuse of segregation, which exacerbates pre-existing mental health conditions. [Segregation has negative emotional, cognitive, and behavioral impacts even for those without pre-existing mental health conditions. These impacts can impair functioning after release from segregation and from incarceration.](#)

The use of segregation without a concomitant commitment to routinely provide adequate mental health services to prisoners, including necessary therapeutic interventions by licensed medical professionals, heightens the risk of self-injury and suicide. The lack of adequate on-demand mental health services for all persons who are incarcerated also poses increased safety risks for those not in segregation and correctional staff.

The Department of Public Safety disclosed to the [HCR 85 Corrections Reform Task Force](#) that three-quarters of those in jail or prison are incarcerated for Class C felonies or lower. The continued incarceration of individuals who pose low safety risks to the community is costly, ineffective, and injurious to individual and public health. Recently the Robert Wood Johnson

Foundation [issued a report that surveyed the deleterious long-term effects of incarceration on a person's health:](#)

People who are incarcerated face greater chances for chronic health conditions, both while confined and long after their release. Incarceration exposes people to a wide range of conditions, such as poor sanitation and ventilation and solitary confinement, that are detrimental to long-term physical and mental health.

HHRC works with many individuals who are impacted by poverty, housing instability, and other social determinants of health. Many have behavioral health problems, including those relating to substance use and underlying mental health conditions.

The provision of medically supervised treatment outside of the correctional context is the most effective and humane policy response for those with behavioral health conditions. As such, this Legislature should endeavor to expand the state's treatment capacity to meet the ongoing unmet demand.

Incarceration for any length of time for those with undiagnosed or undertreated behavioral health conditions compounds human suffering and is neither wise nor compassionate public policy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.