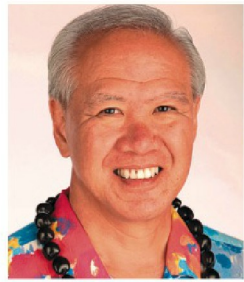


COMMUNITY MATTERS ...

STATE REP. GREGG TAKAYAMA

Addressing Drug Addiction Key In Improving Safety



Nothing prepares you for the shock of returning home to find that your private space has been invaded, plundered and left in disarray. That happened to me and two other nearby Pearl City homes on the same November weekday.

Responding police were totally professional, sympathetic and candid about the unlikelihood that the culprit would be found. Like many other burglars, the one in my home sought jewelry items that could be easily carried off and quickly sold — most likely for drugs.

Far too many Hawai'i homeowners deal with the same disturbing experience as mine. While our islands are relatively safe from violent crime — we rank in the lower one-third of states for murder,

robberies and other violence — our property crime rate is among the worst in the nation, ranking seventh highest among all states. Overall crime rates in Hawai'i and nationally are decreasing, but property crimes (burglaries, larceny and vehicle thefts) remain stubbornly high in our neighborhoods.

As chairman of the state House committee that oversees our prisons and jails, I often meet with corrections professionals and experts in rehabilitation, and they all agree on the underlying reason for our property crime crisis: drugs. A rough estimate is more than 80 percent of our inmates suffer from substance abuse, primarily crystal methamphetamine, or "ice."

One key to turning this around is to more effectively rehabilitate offenders by treat-

ing their substance abuse addictions. That's one of the recommendations of the Task Force on Prison Reform — chaired by Supreme Court associate justice Mike Wilson — which recently released its report after more than two years of study.

A legislative measure proposes to establish a minimum-security drug treatment facility capable of housing several hundred offenders as part of the new O'ahu Community Correctional Center to be built in Hālawā Valley. In other words, move from simply incarcerating offenders to

providing another tool to rehabilitate them. If we improve the prospects of offenders getting off their drug addictions, we'll address the root cause of many crimes.

Passage of HB 1551 or SB 1541 would be an important step toward approaching drug addiction as an illness that is treatable, with resources and community support. Change is possible. Let's not settle for being angry or fearful of crime victims, but channel our efforts toward producing effective results that improve public safety.

Contact state Rep. 6340, reptakayama@capi-
Gregg Takayama (District tol.hawaii.gov or in person
34 – Pearl City, Waimalu, at Room 323 at the state
Pacific Palisades) at 586- Capitol.

LETTERS NOTE ...

Have any thoughts about what's happening in Central O'ahu? We certainly are interested in your opinions (in 350 words or fewer, please). Email letters to jkim@midweek.com or send a fax to 585-6324. Remember to include your name and phone number.

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