



The Judiciary, State of Hawai‘i

Testimony to the Thirty-Third Legislature, 2025 Regular Session

House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
Representative Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair

Tuesday, January 28, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.
State Capitol, House Conference Room 329

by
Thomas A. K. Haia
District Family Judge

Bill No. and Title: House Bill No. 280, Relating to Community Outreach Court.

Purpose: Permanently establishes and appropriates funds for the Community Outreach Court as a division of the District Court of the First Circuit.

Judiciary's Position:

The judiciary offers its unconditional support for and urges the passage of HB280 relating to Community Outreach Court. Since 2017, with the passage of Act 55, Community Outreach Court has reached hundreds of our most vulnerable population, those dealing with poverty and homelessness.

HB280 is an opportunity for Community Outreach Court to become a permanent court in the First Circuit. Since its inception, Community Outreach Court has been instrumental in helping its participants address legal matters through alternative sentences like community service work hours and has provided participants a warm handoff to social service providers in order to help them get back on their feet.

In addition to the existing role of the Office of the Prosecuting Attorney representing the State of Hawaii in cases initiated by the Honolulu Police Department, HB280 offers an opportunity to expand its reach by including the newly created Department of Law



House Bill No. 280, Relating to Community Outreach Court
House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness
Tuesday, January 28, 2025
Page 2

Enforcement's cases in its calendars, which cases are handled by the Department of the Attorney General.

Passage of HB280 also offers an opportunity to expand the court's reach by adding additional sites to its existing ones, which include the Hawaii Health Harm and Reduction Center in Kakaako, the Moiliili-McCully Public Library near Waikiki, Lili'uokalani Trust kipuka in Kaneohe and Waimanalo, as well as the Waianae Public Library.

As Chief Justice Recktenwald emphasized during his State of the Judiciary Address, there is a continuing need for the judiciary to evolve as our society does. In this regard, the chief justice spoke of Community Outreach Court's meeting people in the communities where they live, from Waianae to Waimanalo. With the passage of HB 280, Community Outreach Court will become permanent and its efforts can be built upon and expanded. Imagine holding court in our community parks, at beach parks, in areas where many unsheltered communities exist.

Since its inception under the late Judge Darolyn Lendio, Community Outreach Court has helped more than six hundred participants, cleared nearly eleven thousand cases, lifted more than seven thousand license stoppers and recalled more than 900 bench warrants. And, with the passage of HB280, the court looks forward to doing much more.

The judiciary looks forward to the passage of HB280 in order to further its goal of providing equal access to justice for those vulnerable members of our community. Along with our partners, including Legal Aid Society of Hawaii, America Job Center, Lifeline Cell Service, the Department of Human Services and others, we look forward to the passage of this legislation in order to continue this essential work.

The judiciary strongly supports passage of HB280. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of HB280.

LATE *Testimony submitted late may not be considered by the Committee for decision making purposes.

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January 27, 2025

Committee on Human Services & Homelessness
Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair
Rep. Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair
415 South Beretania Street, Conf. Rm. 329
State Capital
Honolulu, HI 96813

LATE

Re: Testimony in Support of H.B. 280
Hearing: January 28, 2025, 9:00 AM

Dear Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds and Committee Members:

This letter is in support of H.B. 280 which would permanently establish and appropriate moneys for the Community Outreach Court ("COC") as a division of the District Court of the First Circuit.

Since 2017, the Office of the Public Defender ("OPD"), the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney and the Judiciary have worked in concert to assist nonviolent offenders resolve pending and adjudicated offenses through alternative sentencing, including community service. COC has been instrumental in recalling and reducing the amount of outstanding and stagnant bench warrants and resolving thousands of pending cases with positive outcomes for both the offender and the community. The burden on law enforcement has been reduced through recalled bench warrants and penal summons that previously languished unserved. Participants who were previously unable to attend court due to financial and/or the inability to travel have attended court to address their cases. And both the community and offender benefitted greatly from completed community service.

COC provides a vital service to the community. Not only is the court able to clear thousands of unresolved cases that would have otherwise remained pending, but social service providers also assist COC participants at no cost to the taxpayer. By the time the participants graduate from COC, the graduates are entrenched in or one step closer to stable housing, employment and have had their legal matters resolved. These milestones are necessary to end the cycle of homelessness which COC is tackling, one participant at a time. The permanent establishment of COC is integral and necessary for our community.

Thank you for taking these comments into consideration.

Sincerely,
/s/ Taryn Tomasa
Deputy Public Defender



HB280 Outreach Court
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS

Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair

Rep. Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair

Tuesday, Jan 28, 2025: 9:00: Room 329 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports HB280:

ALOHA CHAIR, VICE CHAIR, AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. My name is Alan Johnson. I am the current chair of the Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition (HSAC), a statewide organization for substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health disorder treatment and prevention agencies and recovery-oriented services.

HSAC supports Alternative sentencing of offenders for established needs for substance abuse treatment and mental health services following shelter or other social services.

Formal substance abuse treatment such as residential and intensive outpatient is still the most effective approach to achieve functionality and lasting recovery for offenders and community people.

Substance use disorder treatment coupled with mental health services is essential for offenders because it addresses the underlying issues that often contribute to criminal behavior and helps break the cycle of addiction and recidivism. Here's why this is important:

1. **High Rates of Substance Abuse Among Offenders:** Many offenders struggle with substance use disorders. Studies show that a significant proportion of crimes, including theft, assault, and drug-related offenses, are committed under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
2. **Reduces Recidivism:** Treating substance abuse can lower the likelihood of reoffending. Offenders who receive effective treatment are more likely to develop coping skills and lead crime-free lives after release.
3. **Addresses Root Causes of Criminal Behavior:** Substance abuse often coexists with mental health issues, trauma, or socioeconomic challenges.

Treatment programs can provide a comprehensive approach to addressing these interconnected factors.

4. **Improves Public Safety:** By helping offenders overcome addiction, substance abuse treatment reduces the risk of substance-fueled criminal activity, thereby improving community safety.

5. **Economic Benefits:** Providing treatment is often less expensive than incarceration. It also reduces the costs associated with repeated arrests, court proceedings, and imprisonment.

6. **Promotes Rehabilitation:** Substance abuse treatment supports offenders in reintegrating into society, securing employment, and rebuilding relationships, which are crucial for long-term success.

7. **Legal Mandates and Support:** Courts increasingly mandate substance abuse treatment as part of sentencing or probation, recognizing its importance in addressing criminal behavior effectively.

By addressing addiction, offenders are given an opportunity to rebuild their lives, contributing positively to society rather than being trapped in cycles of crime and incarceration.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and are available for questions.

HB-280

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 10:10:23 PM

Testimony for HSH on 1/28/2025 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raelyn Reyno Yeomans	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of HB 280.

Thank you