



The Judiciary, State of Hawai‘i

Testimony to the Thirty-Third Legislature, 2025 Regular Session

House Committee on Finance
Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Tuesday, February 25, 2025, 12:00 p.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 308

by
Robert D. S. Kim
Chief Court Administrator
Third Circuit Court

Bill No. and Title: House Bill No. 727, H.D. 1, Relating to the Women’s Court.

Purpose: Establishes a temporary three-year women's court pilot program within the Second and Fifth Circuits. Requires the Third Circuit of the Judiciary and Big Island Drug Court to conduct an interim study to establish a blueprint for a women's court pilot program in the Third Circuit. Requires reports. Establishes temporary positions. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. Sunsets 6/30/2028. (HD1)

Judiciary's Position:

The Judiciary supports the intent of this measure to establish a Women’s Court pilot project in the Third Circuit. However, the Judiciary proposes amendments and modifications to this bill so that the pilot project can be successful in light of the unique structure of the Circuit Courts in the Third Circuit and the lack of availability of community-based mental health services on the Big Island.

In order to successfully implement a Big Island Women’s Court (BIWC) program, this bill would need to be modified to: (1) provide for sufficient funding and staff to operate the program in both the Hilo and Kona courthouses; (2) permit the program to operate as a separate program under the supervision of Big Island Drug Court (“BIDC”); and (3) establish direct-provider positions and funding for direct services, which are otherwise unavailable on the Big Island.



The Circuit Courts in the Third Circuit are structured very differently than those of the First Circuit. Due to the large size of Hawai'i Island, the Third Circuit has two main courthouses housing Circuit Courts—one in Hilo and one in Kona. These courthouses are located 100 miles apart. The Circuit Courts in the Third Circuit are also dual-docket courts, meaning Circuit Court judges are responsible for hearing all case types, including criminal, civil, agency appeals, environmental cases, and more. Due to this practical restriction on the courts' docket and the geography of the island, it has never been practical in the Third Circuit to have stand-alone specialty courts, as has been done successfully in the First Circuit. Nevertheless, the Third Circuit has a history of implementing successful treatment court programs, and the Judiciary now looks forward to the opportunity to build upon this history and establish a successful Women's Court program on the Big Island.

Our proposal calls for the establishment of a Women's Court program to operate in both Hilo and Kona, and to be supervised by B IDC. This structure is identical to the other successful treatment court programs currently offered in the Third Circuit. The drug court program operates out of both the Hilo and Kona courthouses to ensure that clients have access to the program regardless of where they reside on the island. Due to the success of the B IDC program, Veteran's Treatment Court and Juvenile Treatment Court programs have also been implemented in Hilo and Kona. These programs are not stand-alone courts, but rather operate as separate divisions of B IDC with their own programming, eligibility requirements, and procedures. The proposed B IWC would be the latest addition to these successful specialty court programs.

Accordingly, by situating B IWC under the supervision of B IDC with our other treatment court programs, the existing B IDC structure and staff can be leveraged at the outset, allowing us to supplement existing services with the additional resources to be provided by this bill. This structure will maximize existing resources and allow the program to focus its efforts on developing the programming and services that are at the heart of this pilot project. Additionally, to be an effective use of resources, the Women's Court program will require a critical mass of female probationers who may be eligible for the program. The highest-risk justice-involved women in the Third Circuit are already participating in the B IDC program. Thus, our proposal calls for all twenty-five (25) of the women currently participating in the B IDC program to be screened for eligibility for the B IWC program. This will allow the program to begin providing services to the target population immediately, instead of waiting for individual referrals to trickle in for a standalone program.

To be successful, the B IWC will require sufficient funding and positions, and a good prospect of recruiting qualified staff for those positions. The Judiciary's proposal contemplates a trauma-informed and gender-responsive program tailored to the unique needs of high-risk women, with robust mental health, therapeutic, and rehabilitative components. The proposal also calls for a cultural competency component and staff in peer support roles, with all programing to



be provided in an atmosphere that holds women accountable while providing court-supervised treatment, opportunities, and resources.

A truly trauma-informed approach to this program will require extensive mental health counseling by trained psychologists, psychiatrists, and/or mental health counselors. These mental health services are severely deficient on Hawai'i Island, where a lack of community-based mental health providers often proves to be an insurmountable barrier to treatment. Moreover, our current BIDC staff are not equipped or sufficiently resourced to address these complex issues without comprehensive training. Thus, our proposal for a BIWC has a strong focus on the development of mental health services, with the hiring of full-time equivalent providers, funding for the creation of new services, and training for program staff.

Similar to other specialty court programs, a one-size-fits-all approach is not always best. Circumstances on the neighbor islands may warrant different implementation and different resource requirements. Accordingly, we respectfully request modifications to this measure that will allow the Judiciary's BIWC proposal to be put into action.

If the Legislature is supportive of the Judiciary's proposal for a BIWC program, we welcome continued discussions during this session. In the alternative, the Legislature could direct the Third Circuit and the BIDC to conduct an interim study to establish an updated proposal for the program, setting forth additional information regarding the resource requirements for the program, to be submitted for the next legislative session. However, as the largest challenges facing the implementation of a Women's Court program in the Third Circuit is the lack of community-based providers, a study may be of little benefit.

The Third Circuit and BIDC stand ready to assist the legislature in whatever policy decision is made, as long as we have the requested mental health professionals on contract or hired by the Judiciary, along with additional staff members to be hired by BIDC.

In addition, given the Third Circuit's willingness to pilot this modified Women's Court model, we would respectfully request that the Second and Fifth Circuits be deleted from consideration for this pilot project.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on this important bill.

PUBLIC DEFENDER

DEFENDER COUNCIL
1130 NORTH NIMITZ HIGHWAY
SUITE A-254
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817

HONOLULU OFFICE
1130 NORTH NIMITZ HIGHWAY
SUITE A-254
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96817

APPELLATE DIVISION
TEL. NO. (808) 586-2080

DISTRICT COURT DIVISION
TEL. NO. (808) 586-2100

FAMILY COURT DIVISION
TEL. NO. (808) 586-2300

FELONY DIVISION
TEL. NO. (808) 586-2200

FACSIMILE
(808) 586-2222



STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

February 24, 2025

ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER

HILO OFFICE
275 PONAHAHAWAI STREET
SUITE 201
HILO, HAWAII 96720
TEL. NO. (808) 974-4571
FAX NO. (808) 974-4574

KONA OFFICE
75-1000 HENRY STREET
SUITE #209
KAILUA-KONA HI 96740
TEL. NO. (808) 327-4650
FAX NO. (808) 327-4651

KAUAI OFFICE
3060 EIWA STREET
SUITE 206
LIHUE, HAWAII 96766
TEL. NO. (808) 241-7128
FAX NO. (808) 274-3422

MAUI OFFICE
81 N. MARKET STREET
WAILUKU, HAWAII 96793
TEL. NO. (808) 984-5018
FAX NO. (808) 984-5022

H.B. No. 727, HD1: RELATING TO THE WOMEN'S COURT

Chair Yamashita, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The Office of the Public Defender **supports HB 727, HD1**. This bill establishes a three-year women's court pilot program in the second and fifth circuits and requires the third circuit to conduct an interim study to establish a blueprint for a women's court pilot program. The Office of the Public Defender represents countless women in the criminal legal system and knows first-hand the unique needs and issues facing these clients. Often their involvement in the criminal legal system is directly related to trauma, abuse, or unhealthy relationships, and they would greatly benefit from gender-responsive programming.

The implementation of the women's court program in the first circuit, known as Mohala Wahine, has been thus far successful, with the Office of the Public Defender representing most of the participants in the program. The collaboration with the court, the prosecutor's office, probation department, and service providers has allowed the women to receive focused services with the support and resources necessary to obtain positive outcomes.

Expansion to the other circuits would allow the program to assist more women in need and divert them away from incarceration. We are mindful of the additional resources implementation of such programs will require and are supportive of any appropriations as deemed necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR OF HAWAII
KE KIA'ĀINA O KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII



KENNETH S. FINK, M.D., M.G.A, M.P.H
DIRECTOR OF HEALTH
KA LUNA HO'ŌKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO
P. O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB727 HD1
RELATING TO THE WOMEN'S COURT**

REPRESENTATIVE KYLE T. YAMASHITA, CHAIR
REPRESENTATIVE JENNA TAKENOUCI, VICE CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hearing Date and Time: February 25, 2025, 12:00 noon Location: Room 308 & Video

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The Department of Health ("Department") requests funding for this
2 measure be considered as a vehicle to expand services, including staff support, provided it does
3 not supplant the requests outlined in the Governor's executive budget request.

4 **Department Position:** The Department supports this measure and offers comments.

5 **Department Testimony:** The Adult Mental Health Division provides the following testimony on
6 behalf of the Department.

7 The Department supports this measure which proposes to establish a three-year
8 Women's Court pilot program in the circuit court of the second and fifth circuits. The measure
9 also requires the third circuit of the Judiciary and Big Island Drug Court to conduct an interim
10 study to establish a blueprint for a women's court pilot program in the third circuit. The intent
11 of the project is to implement trauma informed and evidence-based practices, employ gender-
12 responsive programming, collaborate with stakeholders, and provide services to women in the
13 court system with the goal of diverting participants from incarceration, supporting their success
14 in the community, and reducing recidivism.

1 Mohala Wahine, which was established in the first circuit by Act 243, SLH 2022, has
2 been operational since January 2023. In 2024, through our collaborative partnership with the
3 Judiciary, the Department conducted 33 mental health screenings and 24 psychological
4 assessments of participants for the program. The services offered by the program are
5 comprehensive and provide an opportunity for participants to achieve meaningful and lasting
6 recovery. The Department defers to the Judiciary on the feasibility of a pilot project and study
7 implementation.

8 **Offered Amendments:** The Department requests a budget of \$801,802, which is based on the
9 Department's staffing requirements for the operation of the existing Women's Court pilot
10 project of the First Circuit. Each circuit would require the following:

- 11 1.0 FTE Clinical Psychologist [\$145,000] to conduct psychological assessments
- 12 1.0 FTE Social Worker/Human Services Professional IV [\$76,788] to conduct screenings
- 13 1.0 FTE Social Services Assistant V [\$45,216] to provide peer support

14 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

RICHARD T. BISSEN, JR.
Mayor

ANDREW H. MARTIN
Prosecuting Attorney

SHELLY C. MIYASHIRO
First Deputy Prosecuting Attorney



DEPARTMENT OF THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF MAUI
200 SOUTH HIGH STREET
WAILUKU, MAUI, HAWAII 96793
PHONE (808) 270-7777 • FAX (808) 270-7625

TESTIMONY ON
H.B. 727 HD1
RELATING TO THE WOMEN'S COURT

February 23, 2025

The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita
Chair
The Honorable Jenna Takenouchi
Vice Chair
and Members of the Committee on Finance

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Prosecuting Attorney, County of Maui respectfully submits the following comments **in support of H.B. 727 HD1, Relating to the Women's Court**. This bill would, *inter alia*, establish a three-year women's court pilot program in the second and fifth circuits.

The Department of the Prosecuting Attorney, County of Maui supports this bill because it would provide a needed alternative to incarceration for women within the second circuit, particularly women with a high risk of recidivism and in need of services in addition to the substance abuse treatment already provided by the Maui Drug Court. We also support the program's use of trauma-informed and evidence-based practices.

For these reasons, the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney, County of Maui **supports H.B. 727 HD1**. Please feel free to contact our office at (808) 270-7777 if you have any questions or inquiries.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill.



HB727 HD1 Women's Court

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Tuesday, Feb 25, 2025: 12:00: Room 308 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports HB727 HD1:

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 a 3 year pilot program and interim study for a gender responsive approach to women who are justice-involved.

Recovery can be complex because recovery involves a multitude of issues such as trauma, substance use disorder, mental illness, unhealthy relationships, domestic violence, sexual assault, and family law disputes. **Courts can ensure a collaboration with multiple providers** to implement evidenced-based behavioral health practices to support their full recovery and not return to incarceration.

Formal substance abuse with mental illness treatment, such as residential and intensive outpatient, is still the most effective approach to achieve functionality and lasting recovery for justice-involved women.

Substance use disorder coupled with mental health treatment 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. Gender-responsive women's courts are effective because they address the unique needs and challenges women face:

1. **Trauma-Informed Approach.** Women's courts often adopt trauma-informed practices, ensuring that the court process is sensitive to the emotional, psychological, and physical impact of trauma on survivors. This fosters an environment where women feel safe, heard, and respected.

2. **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.
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. 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.
4. **Specialized Training for Judges and Staff:** Judges, attorneys, and court staff in women's courts typically receive specialized training in gender dynamics, domestic violence, and trauma. This equips them to make informed, fair decisions and avoid perpetuating biases or re-traumatizing survivors.
5. **Integrated Social Services:** Women's courts often partner with social services, offering survivors access to counseling, housing assistance, legal aid, childcare, and job training. This holistic approach addresses the underlying issues that women face, helping them rebuild their lives.
6. **Empowering Women:** By creating a supportive and understanding environment, women's courts help survivors regain confidence, independence, and control over their lives, encouraging long-term recovery and stability while simultaneously holding perpetrators accountable while ensuring victim safety.

This focused approach ensures that justice-involved women 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.

COMMUNITY ALLIANCE ON PRISONS

P.O. Box 37158, Honolulu, HI 96837-0158

Phone/E-Mail: (808) 927-1214 / kat.caphi@gmail.com

Today's Inmate; Tomorrow's Neighbor



COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Kyle Yamashita, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Tuesday, February 25, 2025

Room 308 & VIDEOCONFERENCE

12:00 NOON

STRONG SUPPORT FOR HB 727 HD1 - WOMEN'S COURT

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi 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 3,700 Hawai`i individuals living behind bars¹ and under the "care and custody" of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation as of February 17, 2025. We are always mindful that 936 - 49.6% of Hawai`i's male prison population 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 appreciates the opportunity to **strongly support HB 727 HD1** establishes a temporary three-year women's court pilot program within the Second and Fifth Circuits. Requires the Third Circuit of the Judiciary and Big Island Drug Court to conduct an interim study to establish a blueprint for a women's court pilot program in the Third Circuit. Requires reports. Establishes temporary positions and funding.

¹ DCR Weekly Population Report, February 17, 2025

<https://dcr.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Pop-Reports-Weekly-2025-02-17.pdf>

We are so happy that Judge Kim from Hawai`i Island participated in the hearings on this proposal and educated the committees and policymakers on the needs of our neighbor islands. We know that Hawai`i does not have all the services needed to address the issues facing some of our most vulnerable people, especially those living on neighbor islands, who have fewer resources than O`ahu.

The prior committee discussions has empowered the Third Circuit to conduct an interim study to develop a blueprint for the establishment of a Women's Court program there. This is a great start for a program praised by Chief Justice Recktenwald in his 2025 State of the Judiciary speech.

Community Alliance on Prisons hopes that the committee sees the value in improving the quality of justice in Hawai`i nei.

Mahalo nui!

HB-727-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/21/2025 10:26:53 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jackson Roy Harrington	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB727 HD1

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB727. This bill is important because it is a step toward giving supportive services to women in the justice system. This is important because many of these women face unique challenges related to trauma, mental health, and substance abuse. By supporting this bill I think that we can help to address the specific and special needs of women and help them reintegrate into society. I SUPPORT THIS BILL.

Thank you,

Jackson Roy

University of Hawai'i at Manoa (Senior)

HB-727-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/21/2025 10:29:26 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Katrina Fenner	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe and Committee Members

I am a current undergrad student at UH Manoa studying criminology and I strongly support bill HB727 relating to Women's Court that establishes a temporary three-year woman's court pilot program within the second, third and fifth circuits.

It is important that we divert women from entering the carceral system which perpetuates violence. Providing programs geared towards the health and well being of our wahine ensures they re-integrate into their communities: reducing recidivism. It is essential these women have access to the necessary resources to ensure they can re-integrate into society, considering that should be the purpose of our prison system! It is important we provide women with the help they need to become productive and caring members of society.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony

HB-727-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 9:11:47 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carolyn Eaton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Carolyn Eaton and I strongly support the extension of the Women's Court program to the women of our neighbor islands. The success of the program on Oahu is extremely exciting.

Mahalo for your service.

HB-727-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 9:22:55 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Colleen Rost-Banik	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs,

My name is Colleen Rost-Banik. I am a Sociology instructor at University of Hawaii, Manoa, and I facilitate a creative writing class at the Women's Community Correctional Center. I strongly support HB727, which establishes a pilot program of the Women's Court, with the expansion to neighbor islands. Having worked with numerous women at WCCC, I have heard countless stories about the challenging situations that they have had to navigate as victims/survivors of abuse while also trying to care for their children. Sometimes all of this is on top of substance addiction, often used as a coping strategy for the trauma they've experienced. Suffice it to say that many of the women who are incarcerated have lives that are extremely complicated. A Women's Court is designed to take these complexities into consideration. Please support HB727. It will be a step toward ensuring the betterment of Hawaii's women and their families.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Colleen Rost-Banik, Ph.D.

HB-727-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2025 9:09:52 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michelle Manalo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am in support of HB727.

Services for women in the judicial system are essential. Support, education, and awareness lead to a positive impact and success in the community, and prevents recidivism.

HB-727-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2025 11:04:34 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Heather McVay	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support.

Aloha my name is Genesis Kepo'o. I am writing in support of HB 727, relating to the importance of a Women's Court, here on the island of Hawai'i.

I am originally from the island of Kaua'i and moved to Hawaii island in 2002. I am the oldest of 3 and as such the burden of taking care of my younger siblings fell to me at a young age. Having to "grow up" at a young age, I got caught up with experimentation during middle & high school.

For most of my adult life I used off and on, until I couldn't. I found myself being arrested and having to navigate my way through the judicial system. I attempted to comply with regular probationary rules but found I just couldn't stay clean. During a revocation that had me spend 30 days in jail, I heard about Drug Court. Of course, it was "don't do it," "you'll never be able to get out of it," and so on.

I was ready to be done and move on with my life so when my probation officer brought up Drug Court, I jumped at the chance. I needed someone to hold me accountable and keep me on the right track. I graduated in May 2023 and have been able to remain clean. Drug Court helps to get you the tools you need to lead an honest & productive life. Since then, I have worked in a treatment center and currently work in the mental health field.

HB 727 is important to bring awareness to individual needs and how to lower recidivism. Women are hard wired to take on others' problems, stress, feelings, you name it, we want to fix it for you. With that mentality, anyone would crack. Women require more support whether we know it or not. By creating a Women's court, it would reduce the number of women in jail, keeping families together. Having Women's Mental & Behavioral Health available to help with SUD and mental health issues will help destigmatize getting help. There's nothing wrong with needing help, having it available would make it easier to get. It would create a safe place to find help.

There is nothing better than being able to talk with someone you know has come from similar situations as you and made it through the dark tunnel, back into the sun. Peer support and getting back to your roots are by far some of the best therapy there can be. Someone who can help you through those dark times by showing you the way. Recentering and getting back into cultural practices with a knowledgeable teacher can do more for mind, body, & spirit. For both women and men!

Please support HB 727, relating to Women's Court.

Mahalo,

Genesis L E Kepo'o

HB-727-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2025 11:31:04 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shelbie	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha and good afternoon.

My name is Shelbie Keka. I am writing a testimony in support of HB727. Relating to a women’s court, on the big island.

Growing up I was raised with 3 older brothers and with both parents that battled with the disease of addiction. My father was addicted to meth and my mother addicted to meth/herion. My brothers and I never had a stable home but by the grace of god my aunty who was a single mother opened her home to us. We resided with her for about 5 years until my dad had called and wanted us back because he was clean.

My mother left to Oahu during that time to regain control of her life again and entered treatment there. Unfortunately the addiction is so strong that it ripped my dad away from us for the second time but it also took my two brothers as well. Having no adult supervision or family to take us in again my brother and I were forced to move to Oahu to live with my mom, who at the time had just graduated treatment and had her own place. We were there for about a year and a half before my brother decided to leave and go back to the big island.

I was unhappy and began to go downhill with my life, I ditched school causing me to repeat the 9th and 10th grade then I began to drink pop pills and smoke weed. My relationship with my mom at the time became rocky and she kicked me out. I was able to return to the big island and stay with my active using dad. When I returned home I started cruising the streets on Ali drive. I met the wrong crowd and decided to take my first hit with them. I was only 17 years old. I battled the disease of addiction for the next 4-5 years. A few months into smoking meth I began to steal from innocent people or even from my family. I sold drugs, stole people cars and mopeds. Lied and cheated. Even after being incarcerated many times, I came back out to the streets and did it all again!

No one really understands until you’ve actually been there. Being homeless for so long and an active user in the streets, I’ve seen so many things. It’s not easy for women to be out there, I’ve seen many women get abused verbally physically and mentally. I’ve seen them get taken advantage of as well as manipulated into doing things that they would have not done before. When I had my last arrest I was in regular probation and knew I wouldn’t get out for a while.

Being incarcerated I had time to gain clarity on my life, I knew that I wanted better and to do better. I called my lawyer to submit an application to big island drug court. A few weeks go by and I got approved, I was released my very next court hearing. I met with my new po as well as my old one and the deal was I had to go to Hilo BISAC the next day.

Because I was blessed with that opportunity I graduated treatment. I came back to Kona got a job, got my license and my very first legal car. Then I moved out to our very first house with my significant other who is also a graduate of big island drug court. I obtained my GED and lastly, I

successfully completed the drug court program. All these things were possible because of the staff that runs these programs and the rules that are placed to keep us sober.

That's why this proposal is very important to me because not only does it come from people who care about the suffering addicts but because it works! After graduation I still continued to strive now I am a home owner and a co owner to a cleaning business. So it shows that it's also a long term success for the recovering addict. This program should be in high demand because women don't have much, BISAC treatment only had one house for 8 girls and two houses for the men for double occupancy! Women also value their mental health and being on drugs damages that for us. We loose who we are and who we are meant to become, it breaks us to the point where we loose value for life. That's why this program should pass because we need to help our native people to become positive members of society, to allow the kids to have their parents present in their lives and to break these generational curses.

I know this program will have the power to do all of that and save our native people! These women and men need our help, YOUR help. If not this vicious cycle will continue to degrade our culture and our people. So I ask to please support HB727 relating to women's court just as I do. Mahalo for your time.

In Support of HB 727

Aloha Commitee,

I am Jessicamae Carvalho, LSW and I am honored to submit this testimony in strong support of the establishment of a Women's Court in the Second and Fifth Circuits, which will provide a specialized judicial process to address issues unique to women.

As a Big Island Drug Court graduate, I am familiar with the benefits of specialized courts. Drug courts provide tailored interventions, and I have experienced how these courts create pathways to rehabilitation and recovery. Today, I am beyond grateful to hold a Master in Social Work degree – soon to sit for clinical examination, while being of service to my community. Similarly, a Women's Court would offer targeted solutions for gender-specific issues, ensuring that women receive fair and equitable treatment within the justice system.

HB 727 proposes to offer a safe space for women, ensuring that they are heard without bias or fear of intimidation. The legal process can be daunting, and many women hesitate to seek assistance due to societal pressures, stigma, or lack of proper legal support. Research indicates that women's involvement in criminal behavior is often influenced by histories of abuse, trauma, poverty, mental illness, substance use disorders, and unhealthy relationships. Traditional legal structures often fail to adequately address complex trauma. A dedicated Women's Court would ensure that such cases receive the specialized attention they require, with trained staff who understand the nuances of gender-based issues.

HB 727 seeks to implement trauma-informed practices, offering legal, psychological, and social services in a coordinated manner. These services include trauma and mental health treatment; family support, including parenting, education, and relationship improvement; life-skills training; education and vocational training; domestic violence prevention; medical services and health education; substance abuse detection, prevention, and treatment, mentoring and housing support.

Women's Court is specifically designed to cater to complex needs by bridging the gap in the justice system and ensuring that women receive equitable treatment.

I, respectfully, ask that you stand in support of this measure.

Mahalo,

Jessicamae Carvalho, LSW

Jessicamae Carvalho, LSW

HB-727-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2025 1:47:25 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/25/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Frank Schultz	Individual	Oppose	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Little to no info on what is the purpose of this women's court.