

Good morning, Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commissioners, Oversight Coordinator and Reentry and Diversion Oversight Specialist.

My name again is Ronald Fujiyoshi. I have served as the treasurer of Ohana Ho`opakele since May, 2000. In my testimony last month, I quoted from the Bible. No one stopped me saying, "This is the United States of America where there is a separation of Church and State." So today, I want to quote from Luke 4:18-19. I view this passage as Jesus' declaration of his mission when he quoted from the prophet Isaiah as he entered the synagogue in Nazareth. He read: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

My simple plea this morning is not to lose sight of the forest by focusing on the trees. By this I mean, the Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission's stated goal is to transform Hawai'i's Correctional System from a punitive model to a rehabilitative and therapeutic model. If this is the goal, please don't get too caught up in making sure every regulation is being followed, but concentrate on transforming the system into a rehabilitative and therapeutic one.

I am sure you have all read the literature such as Michelle Alexander's The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, which became a best seller. She traces how U.S.A.'s original sin, racism morphed into the prison system. You read Ruth Gilmore-Wilson's The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California, the study of the prison system in California that shows the building of prisons came at a time when violent crimes were on the decrease. Some of you visited Norway and elsewhere where models of rehabilitation are being followed. Countless groups like the Vera Institute of Justice where Cara Compani last worked, have provided hundreds of documents that have shown that prisons based on punishment do not work.

At present the Hawaii Correctional System Oversight commissioners come with the best experience and are of the highest caliber. Your staff come with excellent qualifications. For example, your chair Mark Kawika Patterson has done what was unheard of—he has eliminated all female juveniles from the Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center. Two of you are retired judges with long service records. You can devise ways to divert those who will be further harmed by being incarcerated, into programs that will be more beneficial and rehabilitative. Three of you have had long careers in the Department of Public Safety; you know the prison system almost completely. The present director of the Department of Public Safety is quoted in the Hawaii Tribune-Herald as saying at the Going Home Reentry and Restoration Summit on August 23, 2023 "This is an ideal time for . . . us to embrace the paradigm shift needed to affect positive change in the criminal justice system. Our vision is to promote community safety while focusing on rehabilitation and ensure a successful reintegration back into the community." Now is a good time.

There are many good experimental projects that have called their programs Pu`uhonua modeled after the Hawaiian cities of refuge—in Waimanalo, in Waianae, at Pu`uhuluhulu on the slopes of Mauna Kea, Mark Patterson's program, the program of the Pu`a Foundation, etc.

I don't know why your meetings have stopped rotating to the different islands. Is it because of the budget cut? You have each been appointed by the top officials here in Hawai'i and have their support. I appeal to you to allow us, the public, to support you in your goal—to transform the prison system from a punitive model to a rehabilitative and therapeutic one. Almost every kama`aina family has had someone incarcerated at one time or another. I am sure all of these people would support your goal of transforming the correctional system.

Mahalo for allowing me to testify!