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Waiawa Correctional Facility (WCF)
December 2023 Site Tour Observations
Date of Report: January 18, 2024

On Thursday, December 21, 2023, the Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission (the Commission, HCSOC) toured the Waiawa Correctional Facility (WCF) collectively as a group. The tour included all Commissioners – Mark Patterson (Chair), Ron Ibarra, Martha Torney, and Mike Town – in addition to all Commission staff.

This report encompasses notes from the Commissioners and will be discussed at a public meeting held on January 18, 2024.

General Observations

Waiawa is home to Hawaii's most intensive substance abuse treatment with a continuum of six different programs:

- Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, Habits, Behaviors, Opinions, and the X (Unknown) – Factor (KASHBOX) – 12-15 month long intensive program
- Intensive Out Patient (IOP) – 8 months intensive program
- Out Patient (OP) – 4 months intensive program
- Continuing Care – 4 months
- Relapse Intervention Program – 4 months
- Cognitive Skills/Lifestyles Program – 4 months

Commissioners observed discussions between staff and individuals in custody while visiting the facility. The Warden and staff appear to interact well with the people in custody and the facility has an overall feel of rehabilitation and therapeutic practices. Additionally, the Warden and his staff have been creative in running the facility programs and maintaining the facility overall.

Waiawa has an operational capacity of 334. On the date of the Commission's visit, 170 individuals were housed at the facility (51% capacity). The Commission continues to be concerned about the underutilization of minimum beds in the correctional system (Kulani Correctional Facility and Waiawa Correctional Facility). According to a recent review completed after the tour of the Kulani Correctional Facility, there were over 200 males classified as minimum assigned to Halawa and Saguaro in December, 2023 that should have been housed at Kulani or Waiawa where there is more than adequate space.

Commissioners heard from both the Kulani and Waiawa Wardens that people in custody are routinely returned to Halawa because they refuse to participate in required work, treatment, and educational programs. The Medical Unit also reported that some individuals transferred from Halawa are not healthy enough to work and, therefore, returned. The Parole Board is less likely to release a person from medium security than minimum or furlough, which means that those returned to Halawa will most likely prolong their stay in corrections and be less prepared to succeed on parole.

Medical Unit

The Medical Unit is a spacious and private standalone medical and dental facility. It was well equipped with separate individual rooms for the medical exams, dentist, and optometrist appointments. The dentist and doctor make weekly visits.

Electronic records are up to date, yet the staff continues to maintain hard copies in case the electronic system goes down again. Medical staff are available 24 hours a day during the week, and the medical unit closes at 7:30pm on weekends and holidays. Nine nursing positions are authorized of which only three are filled. Three agency nurses augmented the shortfall. The Commission recognizes that these are difficult positions to fill.

Medical staff informed the Commission that another exam room would be helpful in providing care to people in custody and complying with HIPPA. If the population increases to its rated capacity, medical staff will also need to expand the nursing staff further and add another exam room to meet the needs of the population properly.

There is no infirmary at the facility. Yet, during the COVID-19 crisis, the facility created an isolation unit within Building 4 for those possibly exposed to COVID. The isolation unit is a dorm-like setting with a washer and dryer inside the space. After potential exposure, people in custody would be isolated in the space for at least five days. However, if a new individual was admitted, all others in the space had to extend their stay until all isolated people in custody had been there for at least five days. Overall, the facility reported that individuals did not mind being in the space since it was spacious and had everything they needed.

Waiawa's COVID medical isolation is in shipping containers situated near the Medical Unit. There were four single wet cells, with a shared single shower. The work put into this area was impressive—a roof was created above the shipping containers to keep the direct sun off, a plumbing chase added behind the containers, and an ACO station directly opposite. The extensive work in this area changed the image from ordinary shipping containers to a therapeutic space with high ceilings.

The facility leadership did not have to use the shipping container for housing as there has been no positive COVID cases. Also of note until the containers were properly retrofitted and until a post is made to assign an officer specifically to the containers. Additionally, the facility was fortunate to only have two small outbreaks before the container arrived and did not need the containers during that timeframe. The Commission appreciates the facility's innovative solution to creating a separate covid-exposure placement within Building 4 until the shipping containers can be properly

staffed by an ACO. WCF is a clear example of a facility that strives to follow local and federal standards of corrections.

Food Service

The kitchen was large, clean, well ventilated, and well equipped, with everything in working order. The refrigerator and freezer temperatures were appropriately maintained (gauges were operational). The kitchen was being cleaned by the workline during the Commission's visit. There was no food left out and no broken tiles, as seen in many other facilities. Additionally, Commissioners heard from a few people in custody who expressed their content with the food quality.

While touring the kitchen, Commissioners heard from an individual in custody who was concerned that the 25 cents per hour for kitchen worklines was not adequate to purchase much through store order. Prices for store orders have risen and are comparable to regular prices in the outside world. However, the wages of those incarcerated have not been raised. The rising cost of commissary items has been cited as a problem in many states' correctional systems.

Additionally, Commissioners heard that individuals assigned to the kitchen workline live in Building 6 yet are not allowed to return to the dorm between meals. Rather, they are posted to the outdoor pavilion second level from 8:00 to 10:30 AM and 12:30 to 2:30 PM, with little to do except watch TV or play board games. A number of people in custody complained about lack of access to education, library, or other programs during this downtime between kitchen shifts. The Commission recognizes that this is due to staffing shortages at the facility.

Library

Currently, there is no Librarian at Waiawa, although on occasion, the Halawa Librarian will come to help. Therefore, the law library is run by Adult Correctional Officers (ACO) four days a week who cannot assist or advise people in custody. Instead, individuals in custody use online programs to research legal issues. The Commission does not agree with this practice but recognizes that a prison-based Librarian position is difficult to fill.

The recreational library, open three days a week, was well stocked. Commissioners were impressed that the Warden worked with the local United States Postal Service who agreed to donate undeliverable magazines to the library for the people in custody. The volume donated is remarkable, providing reading material on a wide variety of subjects. This benefits USPS as they do not need to store the old magazines and benefits the facility by providing people in custody and staff access to a plethora of magazines.

Education

The Education Building was a large building with five classrooms open five days per week. Most education was computer-based, with GED preparation and testing commonly used. A variety of other online courses could be accessed, although there were no college courses available.

The Commission had the opportunity to speak with a person in custody on the education workline. He shared a monthly newsletter designed, written, and illustrated by people in custody at WCF. November's newsletter was ten pages with a theme of gratitude incorporated throughout.

Individuals who worked on the newsletter were extremely proud of their work and grateful for their opportunity to put it together.

There was a six-week carpentry program operating in conjunction with the University of Hawaii. Commissioners were told that upon completion, participants are granted direct entry to the Hawaii Carpenters Union as apprentices. Ten individuals are admitted to each cycle of the program. The Commission agrees that this is a fantastic program for successful reentry efforts.

Workline

There are numerous worklines at WCF including food service, education, farming, hydroponics, aquaponics, auto mechanics, culinary arts, community service, and more. Pay for work is determined through a tiered system and depends on the work location. Pay ranges from \$.25 to \$1.00 per hour.

Farm Program

Waiawa has a large farm program – the farm facility is 8 acres and includes produce, aquaponics, and hydroponics – in operation, but the Commission did not have time to visit the site. However, the staff had noted that they would appreciate having more people at WCF so they could have more workers on the farm.

The farming program used to be significantly more robust than it is now. It is currently operating at 20% for a few main reasons:

1. There are vacancies in the farm supervisor and manager positions because the pay is too low, considering the necessary qualifications, particularly for the manager, and the comparable salary in the community. DHRD reports to DCR that there have been no applicants.
2. Any produce beyond 20% would be wasteful because it will not be used at WCF or other facilities and cannot currently be donated/sell. The facility needs a Correctional Industries (CI) as a vessel to donate/sell food. Also, the farm looks to grow produce that procurement doesn't have a contract for, limiting what they can produce, and farm-to-table stopped during the pandemic.

KASHBOX

In 1998, two new buildings (Buildings 9 and 10) opened at Waiawa to house the Department's KASHBOX treatment program. The buildings are surrounded by a chain link fence and separated from the other housing areas. The fence gates are not locked, at least during the day, but make it clear the area is restricted to program participants. Building 10 is designated for the 12-month residential treatment program, the other for day treatment programs and mixed-use housing. Those in the residential program have limited contact with other people in custody.

Upon completion of the residential portion of their care, individuals are mainstreamed into the general population and attend day treatment in the afternoons. The Commission was informed that the program is seriously understaffed at this time with only two employees. It is not for the lack of trying to fill positions, but rather qualified substance abuse counselors are difficult to find, especially for a correctional setting and especially for the pay that is offered by the state.

At the time of the Commission's visit, those recently transferred to Waiawa were housed in Building 9. It was unclear if this was for general orientation or for those entering KASHBOX. Individuals in that unit were not yet assigned a work detail to earn money.

Building 4

Building 4 was the only housing unit the Commission visited. The space could use some modernization and updates as there were multiple missing louvers in the windows and overall conditions were sparse.

As noted at the beginning of this report, there were far too many empty beds. It appeared that transfers from Halawa Correctional Facility are minimal. The 27 individuals assigned to Building 4 were awaiting transfer to the Oahu Bridge continuing care program, furlough programs statewide, or nearing parole release. The Commission met various people who had been waiting three months at that point to transfer to OCCC furlough. The transfer packets had been submitted to downtown, but the individuals were stuck in a holding pattern. Many were assigned to community services work lines at \$1.00/hour.

Building 4 had many video stations available for contacting family and others authorized. WCF is also one of the few facilities that has in-person contact visits (since March, 2022). The Commission appreciates WCF successful efforts to reinstate in-person contact visits post-COVID.

Recommendations:

1) Increase the Population at Waiawa as Waiawa is One of the Most Rehabilitative Facilities in Hawaii

Commissioners heard from both the Kulani and Waiawa Wardens that people in custody are routinely returned to Halawa because they refuse to participate in required work programs. The Parole Board is less likely to release a person from medium security than minimum or furlough, which means that those returned to Halawa will most likely prolong their stay in corrections and be less prepared to succeed on parole. The Department should determine factors that contribute to this problem and how to resolve it, perhaps through technical assistance at the national level or from private foundations.

2) Expand the Opportunity to be Housed at a Minimum-Security Facility to Those who are Medically Frail

The Medical Unit reported that some individuals transferred from Halawa are not healthy enough to work and, therefore, returned. This is an area the Department should carefully review. Substance abuse treatment is often a requirement to be eligible for parole, yet minimum custody individuals with medical problems that preclude them from work details do not have the opportunity to participate. In general, those with medical conditions that impact their ability to work should not be deprived of living in less restrictive environments and stepping down in preparation for release.

3) Identify a Vessel to Donate Excess Produce to the Community

One factor limiting farm production at WCF is the facility's inability to donate excess produce. The Commission recommends DCR leadership work with WCF to find an avenue

for produce donation in a timely manner. There are many people and communities in need of food in Hawaii. Providing produce to these groups will benefit the recipients with fresh, healthy produce and offer a sense of pride and purpose for people in custody.