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**HAWAII CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM OVERSIGHT COMMISSION**  
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**Halawa Correctional Facility (HCF)**  
**December 2024 Site Tour Observations**  
**Date of Report: December 19, 2024**

On Thursday, December 5, 2024, the Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission (the Commission, HCSOC) toured the Halawa Correctional Facility (HCF) collectively as a group. The tour included four of the five Commissioners – Mark Patterson (Chair), Martha Torney, Ron Ibarra, Mark Browning, in addition to Commission staff.

This report encompasses notes from the Commissioners and will be discussed at a public meeting held on December 19, 2024.

General Findings

During the tour, the Commission's largest concerns revolved around the general restrictiveness of the facility and how the environment impacts the mental health of those in custody and staff. The Commission does want to thank Warden Cluney for notably changing more restrictive practices in the facility by:

- changing the uniforms of those in custody from black and white stripes to solid tans,
- opening and continuously running all available programs/classes in the education building,
- running graduations and inviting family members to those graduations, and
- adding grass to the sides of Mainstreet

However, there is still much improvement to be made. The facility is encased in concrete, and there is very little, if any, color in the housing units and recreation areas. The recreation yards are all concrete with an opening to the sky for sunlight and fresh air. The recreation yards in the Special Holding Unit only allow one individual out at a time, leaving little to do outside of walking around in a circle for fresh air. There is a massive outdoor recreation yard at the back of the facility, however it has not been used in at least 30 years. The yard has a baseball field but was clearly overgrown.

Overall, the facility has a very restrictive feel, and this is particularly concerning given the rate of suicides in Halawa. Of the four suicides that occurred in 2024, two have occurred at HCF – both individuals were considered close custody (more restrictive custody class). Relatedly, there was a surprisingly large vacancy rate in mental health – 9 total vacancies including five Clinical Psychologists, two Psych Social Workers, and two Office Assistants. Not having Office Assistants forced the current Psych Social Workers to be bogged down with paperwork instead of meeting their clients' needs. Currently, the facility is doing the best it can with one Clinical Psychologist and two Psych Social Workers.

The Commission also toured a basement area of the facility underneath the current medical and mental health unit. This space was cleared out in preparation for construction to expand the medical and mental health areas to the basement. Staff were unsure of the specific plans, and after being questioned by Commissioners, mental health staff made it clear they had not been included in any construction planning or asked about their needs for managing the population. The space was large, but extremely dark and dreary due to lack of windows and lighting. It is unclear how this space could possibly be transformed into a rehabilitative space for those struggling with medical or mental health issues.

Given the Commission's findings, the following is being recommended:

## **Recommendations**

### **1) Incorporate Therapeutic and Rehabilitative Practices Throughout the Facility**

Consider reopening and staffing the large yard so individuals can enjoy grass, fresh air, and sunlight and have an opportunity to look away from concrete. Additionally, consider incorporating murals throughout the housing units and on Main Street for a less restrictive feel. Lastly, consider planting native plants throughout Main Street for additional color and connection to 'āina.

### **2) Include Medical and Mental Health Staff in Future Construction Plans**

Include the medical and mental health team in any plans for construction to ensure a more therapeutic and rehabilitative space. If the mental or medical spaces are extended to the basement, ensure ample natural lighting by adding as many windows as possible and consider bright paint for a less restrictive space.

### Follow Up on Previous Recommendations

On October 19, 2023, the Commission toured HCF and released a detailed public report on November 16, 2023, outlining findings from the visit. Below are the recommendations that stemmed from the 2023 report in addition to updated findings based on December 5, 2024, site observations.

### **3) Increasing non-security staffing must be a priority for transitioning to a rehabilitative and therapeutic system.**

Last year, the two main staffing shortages that the Commission learned about were in the Learning Center and social work. At the time, education was down three full-time teachers, one secretary, and two workline positions leaving one full-time employee to run all educational programs. Additionally, the facility had eight (8) social work vacancies which resulted in high caseloads (80+ people per social worker) for the existing social workers.

During the Commission's visit, it was confirmed that there are no social work vacancies, and that education vacancies had gone down from four vacancies to two (education supervisor and office assistant). The Commission congratulates the Department on its success with aggressive recruitment tactics for filling these imperative positions; however, the Commission hopes the Department will place a strong focus on the need for mental health staff – particularly Psych Social Workers and Clinical Psychologists.

**4) Permanently close the Special Needs Facility.**

Although the Special Needs Facility is closed now, it is unclear if that is a permanent decision.

**5) Prioritize and expedite Capital Improvement Projects to repair electricity and the perimeter fence.**

Both projects have been funded and are currently being executed.

In early 2024, the Department began transferring people in custody from Halawa Correctional Facility (HCF) to Saguaro Correctional Center (AZSC) in Arizona to facilitate timely Halawa facility repairs. This was communicated as a short-term measure, but almost a year later, the roster numbers indicate the additional out of state transfer is still active.

Population at HCF and AZSC

<b>Facility</b>	<b>December 2024</b>	<b>October 2023</b> (previous Commission Tour of HCF)
<b>HCF</b>	725	878
<b>AZSC</b>	939	836

As of December 3, 2024, HCF remains under capacity, with 725 people in custody in a facility designed for 992 (excluding the capacity of the High Needs Facility). Despite assurances that the transfers were temporary, the extended timeline raises concerns about the progress and prioritization of repairs. The HCSOC emphasizes the need to complete these projects promptly and ensure all necessary permits are obtained to relocate people in custody currently at AZSC back to Hawaii, preventing these transfers from becoming long-term out-of-state placements.

**6) Expand the Correctional Industries worklines to include specific training in skilled trades that would lead to gainful employment after incarceration.**

This recommendation has not been fulfilled.

At some point, there used to be an electrical and plumbing workline that helped keep the facility maintained. The electrician union previously came to the facility and trained people in custody, and then people leaving prison would have an income-generating trade and connections to the unions and jobs in high demand. However, that program has not existed for some time. It would benefit the Department to work with skilled trade unions to train individuals in plumbing, electrical, welding, HVAC, etc. This would not only create opportunities for individuals to earn gainful employment upon release, but also help the facility with desperately needed maintenance concerns. Correctional Industry worklines can assist in upkeeping the facilities while learning skills that are at the core of the Hawaii Correctional Industry work.

**7) Increase training and support for uniformed staff.**

This recommendation has not been fulfilled.

To expedite and stay current on uniformed staff training, consider placing or training certified instructors to be onsite full-time at Halawa. This would allow the facility to train staff more efficiently in a way that corresponds to the facility's schedule and specific needs. Also, consider updating the training academy curriculum to better prepare staff for their actual roles onsite at facilities.

**8) Increase training and support for case/unit managers to better meet the population's needs upon release.**

This recommendation has not been fulfilled.

Related to recommendation one above, the role of social workers and unit managers is vital to successful rehabilitation and reentry for people in custody. The Commission is aware that many people in custody are released directly to the community from Halawa. Here, it would be helpful to identify and offer additional training to support the critical role these staff members assume. Staff should stay current on local and national best practices in their field. The crucial role of these staff members and the importance of a mindset dedicated to supporting people in custody and their success should be included in the training.

**9) The Department should support legislative efforts toward Compassionate Release or transfer to a more appropriate medical setting for the severely ill.**

The DCR has refused to support or stay neutral on compassionate release. Instead, the DCR has testified against compassionate release legislation.

People housed in the infirmary need intensive medical and/or psychiatric services and would be better served in a different setting other than a prison. Most individuals on the medical side are not in a physical state to potentially cause harm to another and do not appear to cause a risk to public safety. Additionally, the care for these individuals is particularly expensive for the Department, staff-intensive, and causes strain on the facility overall.