



February 13, 2025

Aloha Hawai'i Correctional System Oversight Commission Members,

The Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition would like to thank the Commission for your advocacy on the conditions in Hawai'i jails and prisons, and for creating recommendations to reduce the number of people held in our prisons.

However, we write to express concerns about recent statements made on behalf of the Commission before the House Committee on Public Safety on February 5th. **The primary concern is misrepresentation of the Commission's position on the proposed new OCCC jail.**

The official position of the Commission from 2022 onwards has been the necessity of a pause, which was most recently confirmed in the January 3rd, 2025 letter to the Governor. The letter unambiguously calls for a strategic pause in jail planning due to the Commission's profound concerns regarding DCR's continued failure to, among other things, address systematic gaps in rehabilitative practices or to develop a holistic approach to corrections and justice system reform. This letter is publicly available, and was submitted by the Commission as part of written testimony for HB 1263 heard by the Committee on Public Safety.

Despite this clearly articulated position, when providing verbal testimony on the bill during the February 5th hearing, Commissioner Torney stated only that the Commission supported replacing OCCC and it would be impossible to renovate. Commissioner Torney mentioned concerns about the large pretrial population and with projected prison populations, **but did not make clear the explicit request for a strategic pause that the entire Commission adopted as a body. Her testimony on behalf of the Commission did not in any way represent the written testimony submitted by the Commission, including the letter to the Governor outlining concerns that underpin the call for a strategic pause.**

I encourage you to review video of Commissioner Torney's testimony which begins around 1 hr 37min into the hearing: <https://www.youtube.com/live/NIK47FfjHV4?feature=shared>

It was not expected that the Commission would endorse HB1263 as it had taken the position of “comments only”. However, omitting that the Commission’s position is to enact a strategic pause is particularly troubling given that the discussion of HB 1263 at the hearing centered on calling for a pause on planning for the new jail for reasons closely aligning with those articulated in the letter to the Governor. This misrepresentation could, and may have, impressed upon both the community and legislators that the Commission is in favor of immediately moving forward with the current DCR proposal to replace OCCC.

As discussions and debates regarding the current \$1 billion DCR proposal to replace OCCC will continue, it is critical that Commissioners accurately convey the official position and key reasons underlying it when speaking on behalf of the Commission, without regard to their personal opinion.

We appreciate your consideration of these concerns, and look forward to continuing to work with the Commission to transform Hawaii’s corrections and justice system.

Mahalo,

Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai’i Coalition