



Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission

Monthly Oversight Coordinator Report – May 2025

Contents

Introduction..... 3

Deaths in Custody 3

Tours 4

Events Attended 4

Projects..... 5

Published Reports 5

Past Meetings 8

Expenses for the Preceding Month – May 9

General Office Information..... 10

Monthly Meetings..... 10

Introduction

In accordance with Chapter §353L-6, the Oversight Coordinator shall submit a monthly report to the Commission, the Governor, and the Legislature. The monthly report shall include actions taken by the Commission and expenses for the preceding month. In addition to the mandated parties this report must be shared with, the Oversight Coordinator publicly posts the monthly report to increase transparency and accountability. This report will also be shared with each individual who has the responsibility of appointing members of the Commission. This includes:

- 1) Governor of Hawaii
- 2) President of the Hawaii Senate
- 3) Speaker of the Hawaii House of Representatives
- 4) Hawaii Supreme Court Chief Justice
- 5) Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs

The Oversight Coordinator monthly reports are released on the first Thursday of each month, covering the previous month, and will be discussed on the second Thursday of each month at the monthly Commission meetings.

Deaths in Custody

- 1) **Late Notice:**¹ On April 12, 2025, at approximately 1:03am, a 24-year-old Hawaiian male in custody was found unresponsive at Halawa Correctional Facility. 911 Emergency Services was called and ACOs immediately administered CPR. At approximately 2:01am, EMS arrived and continued to administer CPR until approximately 2:28am when the individual was unfortunately pronounced deceased. The incident appears to be a suicide, which is the first apparent suicide this year. The medical examiner will determine the official cause of death following an autopsy, which includes toxicology testing.
- 2) On May 17, 2025, at approximately 6:50am, a 29-year-old Micronesian male in custody was found unresponsive at the Halawa Correctional Facility. The responding ACO immediately cut the noose and administered CPR while 911 Emergency Services was called. At approximately 7:17am, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel arrived at the facility. Unfortunately, at 7:54am, the individual was pronounced deceased. The incident appears to be a suicide, which is the second apparent suicide this year. The medical examiner will determine the official cause of death following an autopsy, which includes toxicology testing.
- 3) On May 29, 2025, at approximately 10:12 am, DCR was notified that a 37-year-old Hawaiian male in custody was pronounced deceased while hospitalized at Pali Momi Hospital in the ICU. The deceased was in the custody of the Halawa Correctional Facility and was hospitalized after staff found him in his cell on May 27, 2025, under the influence of an unknown substance. CPR was conducted until

¹ The Department notified the Commission in a timely manner, however, the Commission accidentally left the information out of last month's report.

EMS arrived and transported the individual to the hospital. The medical examiner will determine the official cause of death following an autopsy, which includes toxicology testing.

Tours

Hope Center Ministries Kailua

On May 20, 2025, Commission staff visited Hope Center Ministries in Kailua, a deeply spiritual and uplifting faith-based residential recovery program. The center offers a structured 12-month model that includes 24/7 peer-led support, vocational training, and court liaison services. It provides a supportive pathway for men transitioning from incarceration or homelessness and is soon expanding to welcome women. This visit highlighted the program's powerful role in helping individuals begin their healing journey and rebuild their lives with purpose and faith.

Hawaii State Hospital Resource Fair & Blessing of Kahua Ola

On May 30, 2025, Commission staff attended the Hawai'i State Hospital Resource Fair, which began with a cultural blessing at Kahua Ola – a transitional housing space on campus where residents live independently as they prepare to return to the community. The blessing included traditional Hawaiian practices using pa'akai and wai, setting the tone for the day. The fair featured community vendors like the Institute for Human Services (HIS) and Project Vision, music by patients, and activities such as sand art and plant medicine education. The event highlighted the healing environment at the Hawaii State Hospital and helped reduce stigma around mental health by showcasing patient talent, recovery, and community integration.



This is a photo of the sand art that everyone at the event participated in creating. It was a meaning opportunity for everyone – patients, volunteers, guests, and providers – to com together and work on a single project. The sand art was designed and run by the art teacher at the Hawaii State Hospital.

Events Attended

Halawa Correctional Facility Graduation Ceremony

On May 8, 2025, Commission staff attended a graduation ceremony at Halawa Correctional Facility, where nine incarcerated men received their Associate of Arts degrees in Business from Chaminade University. The event, filled with emotion and support from families, DCR, and Chaminade staff, highlighted the power of education. A special moment was held for a graduate in Protective Custody, who had to be separated from other graduates and people in custody, to ensure he was also celebrated. The day was a reminder that education can spark hope and transformation within a prison setting.

Hale Nani Resource Fair

On May 15, 2025, Commission staff attended a reintegration resource fair at Hale Nani Correctional Facility, where 26 justice-involved individuals prepared for reentry by connecting with community organizations offering services such as job training, DMV support, and housing resources. This was the first event of its kind held at Hale Nani. The event was well received, with participants expressing appreciation for the opportunity to learn about vocational training, financial literacy, and dental support. The fair created a positive environment for collaboration and highlighted the importance of continued efforts to bring meaningful, participant-centered reentry support to Hale Nani. DCR is also planning a resource fair to be held at HCCC (main) soon.

NACOLE's Quarterly Forum for Jail and Prison Oversight

On May 20, 2025, Commission staff attended the National Association for Civilian Oversight Law Enforcement's (NACOLE) Quarterly Forum for Jail and Prison Oversight. This virtual event focused on the future of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) in light of recent federal budget cuts. National Advocacy Director of Just Detention International, Julie Abate, was the primary speaker of the event. In addition to presenting on the uncertain future of federal funding for PREA, Julie provided PREA training resources and a blueprint for the vicarious trauma-informed organization.

Presentation to the Annual Office of the Public Defender Training Seminar

On May 23, 2025, the Commission's Chair and Oversight Coordinator presented to a large group of public defenders during the Annual Office of the Public Defender Training Seminar. The presentation covered an overview of oversight, a brief history of the Commission and the work the Commission prioritizes today, and the current state of the system to highlight the importance of the Office of the Public Defender and its work. Afterwards, the Chair and Oversight Coordinator took questions and shared insights from touring the correctional facilities. The Commission thanks the First Deputy Public Defender, Hayley Y.C. Cheng, for the warm invitation and opportunity to present.

Projects

Complaint Management

After completing a robust orientation to the Hawaii correctional system, Commission staff began the process of building a tracking system to track and monitor more than 200 backlogged letters received from people in custody, DCR staff, and various stakeholders. The tracking system has been optimized for resolving the backlog of letters and helping HCSOC reach operational capacity as quickly as possible. This will ensure people in custody, DCR staff, and stakeholders concerns are met with timely responses. The tracking system has also been designed to be easily integrated with a case management system, which the Commission received funding for fiscal year 2026. This will greatly improve HCSOC's ability to track, monitor, investigate, and respond to incoming complaints.

Published Reports

Hawaii Community Correctional Center (HCCC) Site Visit Observations

On May 8, 2025, the Commission released its Site Visit Observation Report on the April 10, 2025 tour of the Hawaii Community Correctional Center (HCCC). The tour included Chair Mark Patterson, Commissioner Martha Torney, Commissioner Ron Ibarra, Commissioner Mark Browning, and Commission staff.

Below are recommendations to be considered by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation which stemmed from the HCCC tour. The full report can be read at: <https://hcsoc.hawaii.gov/facility-specific-reports/>

Recommendations to be considered by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation:

The Commission restates and urges DCR to adopt the following prior recommendations:

1) Expand Furlough Utilization at HCCC

Currently, 12 men are in the HCCC furlough program despite the capacity to accommodate up to 50 participants. Identifying and addressing the roadblocks to furlough is crucial to allow more individuals to benefit from these programs and move through the correctional system. While the Commission acknowledges that custody status is not the only factor in furlough determinations, it is a significant one. Notably, 15 individuals at Kulani Correctional Facility have community status, which is required for furlough. It is important to note that this has improved from last year's count (34), however the Commission recognizes that it is important to examine why more people in custody in community status are not in furlough at HCCC or other sites.

2) Optimize New Housing Unit Utilization

The new housing unit, Kaumana, should be assessed and utilized to balance current housing priorities and serve the needs of different populations. This includes decreasing overcrowding, especially in Punahale, better serving vulnerable populations, including the mental health population, creating a proper space for women, and allowing for necessary facility maintenance. With the completion of the new housing unit, it's crucial to consider how it can support the largest issues within the facility.

During the Commission's talk stories with HCCC staff, many recommended moving the mental health population to the new unit, transforming it into a dedicated mental health housing unit. The new unit includes suicide-resistant features, group space, and recreational areas suitable for this population. This move would help decrease overcrowding in Punahale, create more space for women in the main facility, and relocate others from inadequate spaces, significantly improving living conditions.

It should be noted that even with the addition of these 24 new cells, accommodating up to 48 more people, the true jail population will still exceed capacity, necessitating continued population reduction efforts.

3) Reduce Overcrowding through System-wide Population Reduction Efforts

The most significant issue at HCCC remains overcrowding, particularly in Punahale, where vulnerable populations, such as those with acute mental illness and severe health issues, as well as new admissions, are housed. Even with the opening of the new unit, the facility will remain overcrowded. Addressing this requires a State and Third Circuit-wide priority on safely reducing the jail population. DCR alone cannot resolve this issue; instead, it must involve a coordinated system-wide effort.

All justice partners, including the Judiciary, Office of the Public Defender, Office of the Prosecuting Attorney, Probation, the Department of Health, and Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, must work both individually and collectively to safely reduce the jail population. On Hawaii Island, a coordinated approach is essential.

A. Further Diversion Initiatives. The Commission supports ongoing and new diversion initiatives on Hawaii Island to address the needs of justice-involved individuals. The Commission is aware that this is in process and supports the furtherance of these and other diversion initiatives.

B. Work Together to Reduce Pretrial Time. Consider a Third Circuit-wide goal – Judiciary, Prosecutor, Public Defender, and criminal defense attorney – to reduce timelines for all cases, aiming to expedite both felony and misdemeanor proceedings and reduce the time people spend in HCCC pretrial.

C. Population Analysis. To safely divert people and support successful transitions post-incarceration, it is essential to understand individual needs. The Commission asks the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to consider a population analysis with the following information in a confidential, non-identifying manner: *demographic data, mental health and substance use data, key health indicators, housing data, employment, and income status*. This information will be used to determine what services and support are needed, what is currently provided and available within the community, and where the gaps are. There is a strong community network, including providers, throughout Hawaii Island, but more data is needed to link people to services and support these efforts effectively.

4) Enhance Programming Opportunities and Reduce Idle Time

In addition to facility overcrowding, people in custody have too much idle time and limited access to programming. The Commission witnessed this idle time and recommended the following:

A. Re-establish and Expand Programming Opportunities. Re-establish programming opportunities at pre-COVID levels and then expand opportunities. Bring more programs back into the facility from community service providers. Community partnerships and programs are essential to enhance the facility's ability to manage operational issues.

B. Increase VolinCore Training Opportunities. Offer regularly scheduled continuous VolinCore training opportunities for community service and program providers.

The Commission urges DCR to consider and adopt the following new recommendations based on observations that were made on April 10, 2025.

1) Ensure Access to Grievances

The Commission noted the significant lack of access to the grievance process for individuals housed at Hale Nani and for those housed in Wainuenue. Staff should be retrained on proper grievance procedures, along with the implementation of ongoing monitoring to ensure consistent and equitable access to the grievance system.

2) Reevaluate and Monitor Staff Posts

People in Punahale reported being on 23-hour lockdown and are not given the opportunity to go outside for recreation. Additionally, staff reported that accommodating outdoor recreation in Komohana more than once a week is challenging with short staff. The Commission has observed on more than one visit what appears to be an excess number of staff posted at the temporary gate. At times, the Commission has observed four to five staff at the gate. The Commission strongly recommends that HCCC reevaluates how staff are posted and utilized throughout the facility to ensure that recreational time can be accommodated as frequently as possible.

Past Meetings

On May 8, 2025, the Commission hosted its monthly public meeting. All past meeting agendas, video recordings, meeting minutes, and testimonies can be found on our website here: <https://hcsoc.hawaii.gov/2025-meetings>. All meetings are live streamed on our [Facebook](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

Expenses for the Preceding Month – May

Item	Cost	Qty	Total	Description
Operating Expenses			\$885.00	
General Office Supplies				
Telephone				
Other Current Expenditures	\$885.00	1	\$885.00	autopsy reports
Inter-Island Travel			\$564.02	
Airfare				
Car Rental				
Per Diem	\$20.00	17	\$340.00	multiple travel dates
Lodging				
Transportation - Uber	\$28.02	1	\$28.02	5/8-GC
Airport Parking	\$25.00	5	\$125.00	multiple travel dates
Airport Parking	\$24.00	2	\$48.00	2/13, 3/13-RI
Airport Parking	\$23.00	1	\$23.00	5/8-GC
Baggage Fee				
Miscellaneous				
Mainland Travel			\$0.00	
Airfare				
Car Rental				
Per Diem				
Lodging				
Transportation				
Airport Parking				
Baggage Fee				
Toll Fee				
Miscellaneous				
Conferences			\$3,420.76	
Airfare	\$942.00	1	\$942.00	11/12-11/16/2024-CMJ
Car Rental	\$674.00	1	\$674.00	11/12-11/16/2024-CMJ
Per Diem	\$1,543.15	1	\$1,543.15	11/12-11/16/2024-CMJ
Lodging				
Transportation - Uber	\$21.55	1	\$21.55	11/12-11/16/2024-CMJ
Airport Parking	\$155.00	1	\$155.00	11/12-11/16/2024-CMJ
Baggage Fee	\$70.00	1	\$70.00	11/12-11/16/2024-CMJ
Toll Fee	\$15.06	1	\$15.06	11/12-11/16/2024-CMJ
Miscellaneous				
TOTAL			\$4,869.78	

** All expenses reflect posted transactions procured*

General Office Information

Mailing Address: Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission
235 S Beretania Street, 16th floor
Honolulu, HI 96813

Website: <https://hcsoc.hawaii.gov>

Submit Testimony: <https://hcsoc.hawaii.gov/submit-testimony>

Email: hcsoc@hawaii.gov

Social Media: [YouTube](#)
[LinkedIn](#)
[Facebook](#)
[Instagram](#)

Monthly Meetings

This report will be discussed at the monthly Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission meeting held on June 12, 2025. The next monthly meeting is scheduled to occur on July 10, 2025, at the Leiopapa A. Kamehameha Building, 235 S Beretania St., Room 204, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813 and online via Microsoft Teams. More information can be found on the Commission's webpage here: <https://hcsoc.hawaii.gov/information>.