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Oahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC)
September 2025 Site Tour Observations
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On Wednesday, September 17, 2025, the Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission (the Commission, HCSOC) toured the Oahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC) collectively as a group. The tour included three of the five Commissioners – Chair Patterson, Commissioner Torney, and Commissioner Browning– in addition to the Oversight Coordinator, staff, and State House Representatives Della Au Belatti and Kim Coco Iwamoto. Commissioner Town was present for a meeting with Warden John Schell prior to the tour.

Meeting with Warden John Schell

The Commission and Representatives had the opportunity to meet with the OCCC Warden at the beginning of the tour which took the majority of the visit. One of the largest concerns noted by the Commission was consistent complaints received by people in custody at OCCC regarding lack of out-of-cell time. It is the Commission's understanding that this issue is specifically caused by restrictive overtime requirements that have been set at the Department level. The Warden explained that OCCC is required to close a minimum of 21 posts on any given watch before overtime can be authorized. The requirement to close 21 posts has resulted in consistent 23-hour lockdowns for general population custody levels. This prevents OCCC from providing regular access to out-of-cell time, including time out of cell for meals, showers, outdoor recreation, visits, phone or tablet time, and programming. The short and long-term impacts of trauma experienced by people in custody are also a concern given the conditions of confinement created by extended lockdowns.

The Warden and OCCC staff expressed serious concern regarding the potential liability generated from closing that many posts on a consistent basis as it creates terrible conditions of confinement. It is the Commission's opinion that **the cost of liability would likely outweigh any of the savings from reducing overtime costs.**

The Commission is deeply concerned regarding the lack of out-of-cell time for those in custody and views the relationship between restricting overtime and population management as a serious management failure on the Department level. Many of the solutions and recommendations that the Commission has put forward previously cannot be implemented at the facility level but must be implemented at the Department level.

Facility Highlights:

The Commission wishes to highlight several significant improvements OCCC has made, and key issues addressed over the past year:

1) Relocation of Women to the Women's Community Correctional Center

Women in custody have been relocated to the Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC). This movement has significantly reduced overcrowding, reduced the opportunity for women in custody to be placed in compromising situations, and has provided the opportunity to expand medical and mental health programs for the male population at OCCC. Last year, OCCC had tentative plans to use Module 3 (30 cells) as the Health Care Infirmary and Module 2 (24 cells) as the step-down unit from Module 1 suicide watch and critical care for mentally ill people in custody. However, it does not appear that previous plans have been implemented.

Medical Unit/Infirmary

The Medical Unit was orderly and well-staffed, however, many staff vacancies exist and services are augmented by contract nurses. The physical space lacks privacy for medical practitioners who interview and examine people in custody, preventing what should be confidential medical communications. The infirmary is inadequate for a facility the size of OCCC, and the area completely lacks privacy.

Holding Unit

The Holding Unit was built in 1936 and, while functional, was clearly archaic. It is three stories with 12 cells on each floor. The front of the cells is made up of metal bars, not walls. Given the openness, there was no excessive noise detected. Thirty-nine (39) people in custody were housed in the Holding Unit with some double bunked whereas there are 36 cells. The unit was cold with some people in custody wrapped in their blankets to keep warm.

The outside recreation yard is made up of "cages" for a single individual. These cages, about double the size of a cell, do not have shaded areas to block the sun. It was reported by staff that about half the population in the holding unit take advantage of outdoor recreation time.





Module 17

During the Commission's visit, Module 17 housed approximately 49 people which was designed with a capacity of 48. The unit was under extremely high tension where nearly all people in custody, from behind their locked cells, were yelling complaints regarding not having daily access to showers, out-of-cell time, phone calls, programs, and outdoor recreation. This further highlights the importance of ensuring the population is managed to ensure appropriate conditions of confinement. High tensions such as these further the risk of inmate assaults, fights, suicides, staff assaults, use of force and other dangerous potentially avoidable situations for staff and people in custody.

Annex II

Annex II is a three-story concrete building divided into open bays on each floor, with dormitory-style housing that utilizes bunk beds. On the day of the Commission's visit, 134 men were housed in this area, which was designed with a capacity of 114. People in custody progress through the unit, moving from the first to the second, and then to the third floor. No complaints were expressed from staff or people in custody in this unit.

Visitation:

The visiting area allows for only non-contact visits, preventing any physical contact between people in custody and their loved ones.

Follow-up on Previous Commission Recommendations

The Commission made the following recommendations following the HCSOC February 2023 tour, which have not yet been implemented. The Commission continues to recommend the following:

1) Access to Confidential Policies

During the Commission's prior visit in August 2024, the Commission was surprised to learn that the Warden did not have access to DCR's "confidential" policies and procedures. Wardens are responsible for managing the facilities and upholding policies and procedures. Since August 2024, DCR has made confidential policies accessible to Wardens, as recommended by the Commission.

2) Allow for Natural Light by Removing Wood Covering from all Cell Windows

Replace wood-covered windows in housing units to allow natural light, in line with American Correctional Association (ACA) standards. Although some wood coverings have been removed over the past year, wood coverings do remain on some cell windows. According to ACA Standard 4-ALDF-1A-16, *all inmate rooms/cells must provide occupants with access to natural light through at least three square feet of transparent glazing, plus two additional square feet per inmate in rooms/cells housing three or more individuals*. Therefore, the Commission recommends OCCC continue replacing wood coverings to ensure all cell windows in all modules allow natural light. Compliance with ACA standards is of particular importance with OCCC moving toward ACA accreditation.

3) Restoration of Contact Visits

OCCC has not offered in-person contact visits for five years, initially due to COVID-19. Extensive research underscores the importance and rehabilitative benefits of contact visits for those in custody, as these visits allow individuals to maintain closer connections with their loved ones and communities. The Commission therefore continues to recommend OCCC reinstate contact visits.

4) Expand Programming Opportunities

People in custody at OCCC have too much idle time and limited access to programming, including cultural, education, and reentry preparation. The Commission recommends expanding programming opportunities and community partnerships to reduce idle time and increase programming opportunities. While the facility has made some progress in this area, it is essential to continue and be innovative (even within limited space) to support people in custody and gain community support and trust.

5) Prioritize Kitchen Upgrades, Including Dishwasher Repair and Mold-Free Trays

The kitchen at OCCC is in dire need of updates to ensure sanitary conditions for staff and the kitchen workline, and to provide safe food for the entire facility. Urgent repairs are needed for the dishwasher, along with replacement of ceiling and floor tiles, rusted appliances, and food service trays. Although there are plans for a new facility, these conditions cannot wait until then and must be addressed immediately.

6) Expand Furlough Utilization at OCCC

Although OCCC has the highest furlough participation and occupancy rate in comparison to the other three jails, there is still opportunity to increase furlough participation at OCCC. Identifying and addressing the roadblocks to furlough is crucial to allow more individuals to benefit from these programs and move through the correctional system. The Commission recommends that DCR assess, identify, and resolve systemic issues around furlough participation. The Commission would like to see furlough occupancy rates near 100% as it significantly increases the chances of success post-release.

7) Install Shade for Recreation Cages in the Holding Unit

The recreation area outside the Holding Unit consists of individual cages, which currently lack shaded areas to protect people in custody from the sun. The Commission recommends installing shade structures, even tarps, to provide protection from sun exposure.

8) Investigate and Address Concerns from People in Custody at OCCC

The Commission has received multiple complaints regarding the following issues at OCCC:

- **Roaches in Cells:** Roaches are present in the cells. This poses a health and sanitation concern. **The Commission recommends implementing a pest control plan that effectively and safely eliminates the roach population.**
- **Difficulties in Accessing Bail Calls:** The Commission learned that some individuals have experienced delays of several weeks in accessing bail calls, which has prevented those who could make bail from being released. This delay not only impacts individual rights but also contributes to overcrowding. The Commission urges the facility to establish and confirm a reliable system that allows timely access to bail calls for all eligible individuals and **ensures all people in custody have prompt access to bail calls.**

9) Ensure Regular Access to Books and Reading Material, Legal Calls, Mail, and Recreation for Those in Holding Unit, including those in Disciplinary Segregation

People in custody in the holding unit at OCCC reported irregular access to legal calls, daily recreation, and inconsistent mail service, along with no books or reading material. ACA standards require the following access for people in disciplinary segregation:

Mail: Inmates in Restrictive Housing can write and receive letters on the same basis as inmates in the general population.

Source: American Correctional Association (ACA) Performance-Based Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions, 5th ed., March 2021, 4B Restrictive Housing, 5-ACI-4B-20, p. 128.

Access to Legal and Reading Materials: Inmates in Restrictive Housing have access to reading materials.

Source: American Correctional Association (ACA) Performance-Based Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions, 5th ed., March 2021, 4B Restrictive Housing, 5-ACI-4B-23, p. 129.

Exercise Out of Cell: Inmates in Restrictive Housing receive a minimum of one hour of exercise outside their cells, five days per week, unless security or safety considerations dictate otherwise."

Source: American Correctional Association (ACA) Performance-Based Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions, 5th ed., March 2021, 4B Restrictive Housing, 5-ACI-4B-24, p. 129.

Telephone Privileges: Inmates in Restrictive Housing are allowed at minimum telephone privileges to access the judicial process and family emergencies as determined by the facility administrator or designee unless security or safety considerations dictate otherwise.

Source: American Correctional Association (ACA) Performance-Based Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions, 5th ed., March 2021, 4B Restrictive Housing, 5-ACI-4B-25, p. 129.

Access to Programs: Inmates in Extended Restrictive Housing have access to programs and services that include but are not limited to the following: educational services, commissary services, library services, social services, behavioral health and treatment services, religious guidance, and recreational programs.

Source: American Correctional Association (ACA) Performance-Based Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions, 5th ed., March 2021, 4B Restrictive Housing, 5-ACI-4B-26, p. 130.

Additional Recommendations to be Considered by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation:

1) Evaluate the Impacts of Requiring Post Closures to Limit Overtime Costs

The Department needs to seriously consider how requiring post closures to limit overtime impacts daily access to showers, out-of-cell time, outdoor recreation, programming and general conditions of confinement. The Department should allow Wardens to make these decisions as they should know the needs of their facilities the best. Additionally, the Department should consider holding regular inter-divisional meetings between Division Administrators to evaluate the fiscal and humanitarian impacts of requiring post closures before authorizing overtime.

The Commission extends special thanks to the OCCC staff for their time, professionalism, and expertise during the tour.