



STATE OF HAWAII
HAWAII CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM OVERSIGHT COMMISSION
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Halawa Correctional Facility (HCF)
October 2025 Site Tour Observations
Date of Report: November 13, 2025

On Thursday, October 9, 2025, the Hawaii Correctional System Oversight Commission (the Commission, HCSOC) toured the Halawa Correctional Facility (HCF) collectively as a group. The tour included two of the five Commissioners – Mark Patterson (Chair) and Martha Torney, in addition to Commission staff.

This report encompasses notes from the Commissioners and will be discussed at the Commission's monthly public meeting held on November 13, 2025.

General Findings

The Commission found that the facility is demonstrating best efforts to maintain programming despite staffing shortages and ongoing renovations. Additionally, the Commission found that the facility has several Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) underway intended to improve the safety and wellbeing of both staff and people in custody including:

- *Upgraded Perimeter Fence:* A portion of the perimeter fence has been replaced with a double-fence design to improve security. The facility is awaiting approval for additional funding to replace the remainder of the perimeter fence.
- *Updated Plumbing in all Housing Units:* Light fixtures and plumbing are being systematically replaced for all 496 cells. The Warden explained that when old plastic pipes running from the main water line failed, water seeped into the light fixtures causing extensive damage to infrastructure and safety hazards. The Commission applauds the Warden's efforts to prioritize updating the plumbing to prevent further deterioration of infrastructure, and replacing old, inoperable light fixtures with new LED lights. Additionally, rusted and deteriorating cell window screens, some of which have developed large holes that created security vulnerabilities, are being replaced by more durable punch plates.
- *Air Conditioning in Education Center:* The education center is currently closed because the air conditioner system is being upgraded. During this time, the Warden and his staff have resourcefully utilized other areas of the facility to continue education and programming as follows:
 - *Correctional Industries:* An air-conditioned space in the Correctional Industries building is being utilized for Substance Abuse (or 2.5) programming. Commissioners were able to witness a class in session and observed that the participants were engaged and happy to have the opportunity to continue programming in an air-conditioned space.

- Indoor Basketball Gym: The gym's large, indoor floor space was furnished with tables and chairs to accommodate Cognitive Skills, Geography 101, Counseling, and court-mandated classes. People in custody who the Commission spoke with expressed enthusiastic gratitude and appreciation for how alternative spaces are being utilized to continue programming while the education building is under construction.
- Visitation Area: People in custody reported that the visitation area is also being used to accommodate court-mandated classes.
- *Incorporated New Staff Gym*: A space located near intake is being renovated as a new staff gym. The gym, approximately 800sf, will include a variety of exercise equipment to cater to a variety of workout styles and preferences. This is a much-needed improvement for staff health and wellness.

Housing Units

HCF has four main housing modules, each with 124 cells. Each of the four modules are divided into two blocks, Block A and Block B. The Commission toured Module 4B which was undergoing renovations. For security purposes, each module block is completely emptied while renovations are underway.

Medical Unit

The Commission toured the medical unit which included the mental health unit and infirmary. The Commission found that it was overcrowded with patients who do not receive regular access to programming. The Commission also found that Halawa's ability to serve the needs of its mental health population are limited, however they are better equipped than other facilities. The Department is currently reviewing a recent assessment led by experts to identify recommendations that can be implemented to better serve the mental health population. The assessment resulted from a lawsuit (*Opulento, et al. v. State of Hawaii, et. al.*) and can be found in a report drafted by Jeffrey L. Metzner, M.D., University of Colorado School of Medicine and Bhushan S. Ahgarkar, M.D., D.F.A.P.A., Distinguished Fellow, American Psychiatric Association. The report is dated June 23, 2025 and can found publicly at:

<https://psychrights.org/States/Hawaii/250623OpulentoExpertsReport.pdf>.

The facility faces other challenges such as finding a way to accommodate 19 people in custody who require CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machines without safe and secure access to an adequate number of electrical outlets.

Programming and Correctional Industries

Although the facility's industrial area is currently being utilized to hold various classes while the air conditioning is fixed in the education building, the Commission has found that overall, the industrial area for vocational training is underutilized. The Commission was informed that the facility will be receiving stadium seats, donated by Aloha Stadium, which may be repurposed for programming and recreational spaces.

Prior recommendations to be considered by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation:

1) Permanently close the Special Needs Facility.

The Special Needs Facility has been permanently closed. This recommendation is resolved.

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

Two years ago, 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 in 2024, 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 continue to place a strong focus on the need for mental health staff – particularly Psych Social Workers and Clinical Psychologists.

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

There has been significant progress on this as both projects have been funded and are currently in progress. The Commission emphasizes the need to complete these projects promptly to relocate people in custody currently at Saguaro Correctional Center back to Hawaii, preventing these transfers from becoming long-term out-of-state placements.

4) 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. There has been no progress on this recommendation.

5) Include Medical and Mental Health Staff in Future Construction Plans *Unclear

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.

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

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. There has been no progress on this recommendation.

7) Increase training and support for uniformed staff.

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. Although there has not been progress on focus on training HCF staff in house, the DCR is currently updating its training academy curriculum for new recruits.

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

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.

Although it is unclear if national best practices are being implemented, the Commission is aware that the reentry office in DCR has been having consistent meetings with case managers to keep staff aligned with DCR's reentry efforts and initiatives. Additionally, the reentry office has been updating case managers on policy and procedure changes to ensure consistent implementation of reentry efforts statewide. Each of these meetings take several hours depending on the specific facilities needs and questions. The Commission does view this as important progress.

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

The Department, in collaboration with the Hawaii Paroling Authority and the Commission, has drafted a compassionate release bill to be introduced during the 2026 legislative session. The Commission applauds the Department on their collaborative efforts towards this legislation.