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TO: The Honorable Della Au Belatti, Chair
The Honorable Kim Coco Iwamoto, Vice Chair
House Committee on Public Safety

FROM: Mark Patterson, Chair
Hawai‘i Correctional System Oversight Commission

SUBJECT: House Bill 1518, House Draft 1, Relating to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
Hearing: Friday, February 13, 2026; 10:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Room 411

Chair Belatti, Vice Chair Iwamoto, and Members of the Committee:

The Hawai‘i Correctional System Oversight Commission (HCSOC) **supports** House Bill 1518, House Draft 1, relating to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which requires the Department of Human Services, upon obtaining a federal waiver, to establish a pre-release SNAP application process for individuals nearing release.

One of the most consistent findings in reentry research is that access to basic necessities like food, housing, and income reduces the likelihood of recidivism. Individuals leaving correctional facilities face an immediate period of vulnerability, often with limited financial resources, unstable housing, and barriers to employment. Ensuring timely access to SNAP benefits at the point of release provides a critical stabilizing resource that supports lawful reintegration and reduces the pressure to return to survival-based criminal activity.

When returning citizens are able to meet their basic needs, they are more likely to comply with supervision conditions, engage in treatment or employment programs, and maintain stable family connections. This bill strengthens the reentry pipeline by allowing individuals to begin SNAP eligibility processing before release, eliminating unnecessary gaps in support during a high-risk transition period.

HB1518 also corrects an outdated policy that restricts SNAP eligibility based on drug convictions, even when individuals have completed their sentence. Restoring access to nutritional assistance promotes fairness, reintegration, and health outcomes, while aligning Hawai‘i with evidence-based reentry best practices.

Finally, this measure leverages an existing federal USDA SNAP waiver framework, allowing Hawai‘i to draw down federal funds rather than relying solely on state resources. By improving post-release stability and reducing reincarceration, HB1518 has the potential to lower long-term correctional costs, making it both a humane and fiscally prudent investment.

Should you have additional questions, the Oversight Coordinator, Christin Johnson, can be reached at 808-849-3580 or at christin.m.johnson@hawaii.gov. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.