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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 2287, Relating to Peer Support Counseling
Hearing: Wednesday, February 11, 2026; 8:40 a.m.
State Capitol, Room 411

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

The Hawai'i Correctional System Oversight Commission (HCSOC) submits testimony in **support** of House Bill 2287, relating to peer support counseling, which includes correctional workers as protected participants in peer support counseling sessions, giving them the same confidentiality protections provided to law enforcement officers and emergency services personnel.

This measure directly addresses urgent wellness concerns identified in the Commission's [Correctional Staff Survey Findings and Recommendations Report \(2025\)](#), which documented widespread emotional exhaustion, trauma exposure, depression, PTSD symptoms, substance use concerns, and suicidal ideation among correctional employees across the state. The Commission's survey revealed that correctional staff routinely experience high levels of stress and trauma, including exposure to violence, medical emergencies, and suicide incidents, while lacking sufficient mental health resources and safe avenues to process these experiences. Many respondents expressed reluctance to seek help due to fear of stigma, retaliation, or negative professional consequences. As a result, burnout, absenteeism, turnover, and staffing shortages that compromise both employee safety and institutional stability are exasperated.

HB2287 responds directly to these documented needs by ensuring that peer support counseling conversations remain confidential. This protection will encourage correctional workers to seek mental health assistance earlier, reduce barriers to care, and foster a healthier and more resilient workforce. Expanding confidential peer support aligns with the Commission's recommendations to strengthen trauma-informed practices, improve staff wellness infrastructure, and promote retention in a system facing ongoing recruitment and morale challenges.

By advancing this bill, the Legislature would take a meaningful and cost-effective step toward protecting the mental health of correctional workers. For these reasons, the Hawai'i Correctional System Oversight Commission urges the Legislature to pass HB2287.

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.