



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education and Technology
Friday, February 3, 2023 at 2:00 p.m.

By

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And

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HB 877 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Aloha Chair Perruso, Vice Chair Kapela, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jonathan Osorio, the dean of the Hawai'inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge at the University of Hawai'i Mānoa and I am here to testify in ardent support of HB 877 establishing Ho'okaulike, a Criminal Legal System Institute for Restoration and Healing at the University of Hawai'i.

As a historian of modern and contemporary history in Hawai'i, I can testify that there is a long and ugly history of government oppression of our native people through penal systems enacted in the 1820s and 30s, extending through the 20th century and certainly into our own times, that has provided a pipeline for Hawaiians in marginalized communities that lead directly into prisons. On some notable occasions, violence between Hawaiians and police have resulted in injury and death, leading some sectors of the state demanding more security, better armed police and harsher penalties, none of which have been shown to actually create more law-abiding people or safer communities.

HB 877 provides a way to solicit and develop community input into reforming the criminal justice system in Hawai'i, one that involves the very people who are most at risk— those from poor neighborhoods with large communities of Pacific Islanders, Native Hawaiians and other people of color. Ho'okaulike, which means to create equity, assumes that people who do not share a standard of living similar to yours or mine nevertheless are capable of designing and implementing standards of behavior within their communities that allow its members to live in dignity and peace. This institute, Ho'okaulike, housed within the William S. Richardson School of Law, but in partnership with the School of Hawaiian Knowledge and the Thompson School of Social Work will conduct a continual outreach into neighborhoods that have historically struggled with law enforcement and the criminal courts to discover ways to change policing, to

advocate for better social services and to deal more personally and internally with marginalized members of their communities.

The problems that Ho'okaulike seeks to address are of statewide concern. The state government spends enormous sums of money on policing, prosecution and incarceration and there is no discernable improvement in the numbers. As the Prison Policy Initiative states, "Hawaii has an incarceration rate of 439 per 100,000 people (including prisons, jails, immigration detention, and juvenile justice facilities), meaning that it locks up a higher percentage of its people than almost any democracy on earth."

We have arrived at this point through a specific array of policies and it is possible to arrive at a different place only by changing our approaches and by dealing more respectfully and directly with communities that experience police activity and losses of young people, in particular, into the carceral system on at least a daily basis. This Institute will identify community leaders and resources, provide training and assistance in advocacy, with the intent of growing public interest and support for protection and security that comes with the support and participation of affected communities.

This institute belongs at UH Mānoa and especially at the School of Law, Hawai'inuiākea and the Thompson School, all of which have demonstrated a history of developing highly effective and community engaged institutes of research and community engagement such as Ka Huli Ao Center for Excellence in Native Hawaiian Law, the Environmental Law Program, the Dana Naone Hall Chair in Hawaiian Studies, Literature and Environment, the Gladys A Brandt Chair in Polynesian Studies.

The University of Hawai'i supports this measure, provided that its passage does not replace or impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents Approved Executive Biennium Budget.