



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Public Safety, Government Operations, and Military Affairs
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By

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And

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SCR 72/SR 45 - Requesting the Department of Public Safety to Return Hawai'i Prisoners held in Mainland Facilities and to Construct a New Correctional Facility at Pana'ewa Near Hilo

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SCR 72/SR 45, Requesting the Department of Public Safety to return Hawai'i prisoners held in mainland facilities and to construct a new correctional facility at Pana'ewa near Hilo. I am Sylvia Yuen, Interim Dean and Director of the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR). The Center on the Family, mentioned in the resolution, is a unit within CTAHR, and I served as its former Director.

SCR 72/SR 45 calls for the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, and University of Hawai'i Center on the Family to collaborate with and assist, as appropriate, the Department of Public Safety in making plans to return Hawai'i inmates from the Mainland and in planning for the construction of a new correctional facility at Pana'ewa.

According to Bureau of Justice statistics, there has been tremendous growth in the number of children with parents in state and federal prison between 1991 and 2007: 77% growth in the number of children with a father in prison and 131% with a mother in prison. This is concerning, as parental incarceration frequently creates instability in family structure and relationships, and affected families and children often experience financial difficulties and economic strain. Moreover, children with parents in prison tend to experience more behavioral and school problems. Intervening in the lives of these parents and children to preserve and strengthen positive family connections can yield positive social benefits, such as promoting healthy child development and academic achievement, and reducing the odds of intergenerational involvement in the criminal justice system.

SCR 72/SR 45 calls for the involvement of family specialists in planning for a new correctional facility. This will ensure that there is thought to the requirements of family

programs in the design and construction of the facility—at the front-end, rather than the back-end after the prison is built and there is no or inadequate space for programs that foster positive family relationships, teach prisoners how to nurture their children, and impart work skills that help prisoners to be successful in the larger society. We believe this proactive and holistic view of incarceration will alleviate the difficulties that children and families experience when parents are incarcerated and will provide conditions that lead to reduced recidivism and successful integration with families and the community.

We support the adoption of SCR 72/SR 45.