



## NEWS RELEASE

**NEIL ABERCROMBIE**  
GOVERNOR

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** January 17, 2012

### **State of Hawai'i Develops Comprehensive Plan to Improve Criminal Justice System**

*Recommendations strive to reduce costly inefficiencies, increase accountability  
and reduce recidivism*

HONOLULU – After nearly eight months of working on the Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI), Governor Neil Abercrombie today endorsed the JRI Working Group's policy recommendations to improve the state's criminal justice system. The series of policy recommendations aim to reduce recidivism, ensure accountability for people convicted of crimes and make the criminal justice system more efficient.

"In addition to making improvements at various levels, this comprehensive plan helps us to reach our goal of bringing home Hawai'i inmates," said Governor Abercrombie. "In the last 10 years, crime, arrests and convictions have all gone down yet the number of people in costly mainland prisons has not declined."

With more than 6,000 people behind bars in Hawai'i, the state's prison system is over capacity and requires anywhere from one quarter to one third of prisoners to be housed in mainland prisons. But, the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center projects that the policy changes recommended in the plan would drastically reduce the need for costly out-of-state prison beds, saving the state as much as \$150 million over five years.

The policy proposals have inter-branch support and draws on exhaustive research of Hawai'i's criminal justice system conducted by the CSG Justice Center, in partnership with the Pew Center on the States and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. Governor Abercrombie and legislative leaders established the 24-member JRI Working Group in mid-2011. The JRI Working Group is co-chaired by Senate President Shan Tsutsui, Director of the Department of Public Safety Jodie Maesaka-Hirata, and First Circuit Judge Steven S. Alm.

Senate President Tsutsui said, "This is a very well-developed package of common-sense policies. We have an opportunity to bring our prison population in line with numbers last seen nearly a decade ago, which reduces the tens of millions of dollars that are going to mainland prisons. More importantly, we can do this while making Hawai'i safer through more targeted programs, treatment and supervision."

-MORE-

The comprehensive plan suggests that a portion of state dollars that would have otherwise been spent on mainland prison contracts should instead be reinvested in strategies that the research demonstrates are most likely to make the state safer. The proposed reinvestment consists of \$7 million annually to go toward key unfilled positions, training in best practices, treatment programs in the community and more supervision officers.

"This data-driven, justice reinvestment approach allows a state to utilize the most up-to-date strategies in criminal justice while using existing funding and resources. That is a critical element in any collaborative effort of this scale," said Denise O'Donnell, Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance in the US Department of Justice.

The policy proposals address a number of gaps highlighted in the comprehensive analyses, including recommendations to:

- *Optimize the pretrial process through more timely assessment of risk for flight and re-offense and earlier determination of suitability for pretrial release.* Procedural delays in this process make Hawai'i among the slowest in the nation.
- *Base programming requirements on knowledge about what works and focus resources on high-risk offenders.* Before they can be released, many low-risk offenders are being forced to complete programs that are proven to have little impact on their behavior. This clogs the system and delays access to programs for high-risk offenders who would benefit greatly.
- *Use swift, certain and proportionate responses to supervision violations.* Parole officers have limited options for responding to violations leaving them few suitable outlets for minor infractions.
- *Mandate supervision for all felons following their prison sentences.* Currently, 41 percent of people who max out their prison sentence are high risk for re-offense and they are almost twice as likely to be re-arrested following release than those on parole.
- *Improve accountability and consistency of restitution collection and enhance reentry through victim safety planning.* Court-imposed restitution orders are frequently left unpaid and resources are inadequate for a coordinated safety plan when people are released from prison.

"We in Hawai'i can do a better job of rehabilitating people and bringing them back as productive members of society," added House Speaker Calvin Say. "When people are working on bettering themselves, it's important to have family close along with proper supervision that will help them stay crime and drug free."

Director Maesaka-Hirata explained the importance of supervision for those leaving prison: "The transition period from being in prison back to the community is a critical time to ensure people are able to commit to a life free from drugs and crime. That's very difficult to do without someone holding them accountable. These policies options would change that." Despite the fact that fewer people are going in to jail and prison, the numbers haven't budged because of a backlog in the jailing process.

-MORE-

"The violent and dangerous and those who won't stop stealing need to be in prison. Unfortunately, the greater majority of others are in prison or jail longer than what is shown to be effective for ensuring public safety because of inefficiencies and bottlenecks in the system," stated Judge Alm. "Through the Justice Reinvestment process, we are developing ways to make the entire system - courts, defense, prosecution, corrections - work more swiftly and efficiently, without risking public safety."

Senator Will Espero, chairman of the Public Safety, Military and Intergovernmental Affairs committee expressed his hope for the coming legislative process: "This is an incredible set of policy ideas that will improve our corrections and judicial system. The work done by the Justice Center staff will provide efficiencies and savings for our state."

"Hawaii's research-based, inter-branch effort is demonstrating to states everywhere how to bring together stakeholders and generate effective solutions," said Richard Jerome, manager, Pew Center on the States' Public Safety Performance Project. "State leaders have come together to produce policies that will protect public safety, hold offenders accountable and cut corrections costs."

The full report can be accessed: <http://justicereinvestment.org/states/Hawaii/pubmaps-hi>.

#### About the Council of State Governments Justice Center:

The Council of State Governments Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus-driven strategies—informed by available evidence—to increase public safety and strengthen communities.

The [CSG Justice Center's Justice Reinvestment Initiative](#) addresses corrections spending and public safety is a partnership with the [Public Safety Performance Project of The Pew Center on the States](#), with additional support to CSG from the [Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice](#). These efforts have provided similar data-driven analyses and policy options to state leaders in 14 other states.

For more information about CSG Justice Center's Justice Reinvestment Initiative, contact Robert Coombs at 917-743-6069.

# # #

For more information, contact: Donalyn Dela Cruz, Deputy Director of Communications, (808) 586-0012  
<http://hawaii.gov/gov>