



Future of the Oahu Community Correctional Center

What is the difference between a Prison and a Jail?

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Many people use the terms “jail” and “prison” interchangeably; however, in purpose and operation the two types of facilities are substantially different. On the most basic level, a jail is a facility where individuals (detainees) are held for trial. These may be persons who either could not meet their bail or may not have qualified for bail according to the courts. In certain cases, a jail may also house individuals who have been to court, convicted, and sentenced to short term incarceration – usually less than a year. On the other hand, a prison or correctional facility is exclusively populated by individuals (inmates) who have been convicted of a crime and are serving an extended sentence – typically a year or more.

The difference between a jail and a prison may seem minor on the surface, but there is a significant impact on the types of services the facilities must provide and how they are operated. With a jail, because much of the population has not been convicted of an offense, they are not classified in the same way that they would be in a prison. For example, there may be a detainee who is incarcerated on a relatively minor charge located in the same unit with another detainee accused of a serious crime. This situation creates challenges for the staff to maintain the safety and security for all detainees. It is also important that pre-trial detainees are kept separate from sentenced inmates as well. For these reasons, a jail is usually operated on a ‘distributed services’ model where detainees or inmates remain in their housing units and meals, drug treatment, counseling, and even minor medical treatments are delivered to them.

Another challenge for the operation of a jail is the unknown. Many of the detainees may have a chemical dependency or suffer from an as yet undiagnosed mental health issue. In both cases, the detainee is not yet receiving treatment for their particular problem and it is the burden of the jail to provide diagnosis and recommend the appropriate treatment program.

The jail population is under the jurisdiction of the Judiciary (courts) and not the Department of Public Safety. Detainees in jail can only be released, placed in outside programs or assigned to other alternatives to incarceration by the Judiciary (courts).

In contrast, a prison facility houses inmates that have been convicted and classified. Upon their arrival at the facility, inmates are housed with the appropriate populations. By this time, inmates have also been diagnosed and likely have begun a treatment program. Because of the longer term of the sentences in a prison, the operation of the facility will have a particular focus on rehabilitation. Programs offered may include training in a trade and education programs for helping inmates to acquire their GED or secondary degrees. You will also find programs that utilize inmate skills and labor and more outdoor recreation accommodations. Accordingly, many prisons will operate on a ‘centralized services’ model where inmates will be allowed to move within the facility to a dining area, infirmary or classroom buildings.

Interested in Learning More?

For additional information, visit <http://dps.hawaii.gov/occc-future-plans> or contact:

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Oahu Chain of Custody Flow



Oahu Community Correctional Center



Halawa Correctional Facility

