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BIG TURN OUT FOR TOWN HALL MEETING TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF THE OAHU COMMUNITY CORRECTIONAL CENTER

HONOLULU – People from all over Oahu attended a public meeting at the Aloha Stadium Hospitality Room tonight to be updated on plans for the future of the Oahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC) and offer feedback to the Department of Public Safety (PSD) and the consultant team leading the project.

The public meeting provided information on the process leading up to and going forward for the project, information on the top four sites, and sought community input regarding issues and concerns that should be considered regarding the replacement of the outdated and outmoded facility, located at the corner of Kamehameha Highway/Dillingham Boulevard and Puuhale Road in Kalihi.

"It is widely known that OCCC is drastically outdated and overcrowded and – in its present condition – puts the public, corrections staff and inmates at risk," said Nolan Espinda, Director of the Department of Public Safety. "We appreciate all those who took the time out of their busy schedules to come to our OCCC Town Hall meeting tonight. The constructive comments and questions we received from the public will help us as we move forward towards a new OCCC."

He added, "There are many points of view and many things to consider, but we need to go forward with the attitude of how we can make this work. This is not something we can put off any longer and we will need everyone's support for a better, improved OCCC."

"This meeting is part of the process to redevelop the overcrowded, aging and outdated jail," said Roderick Becker, State Comptroller and Director of the Department of Accounting and General Services (DAGS). "This was an informative meeting and provided the public the opportunity to express their concerns and support for this much needed effort to replace OCCC."

During the well-attended meeting, valuable feedback was provided by interested stakeholders that will be considered as the effort moves forward to identify a site for a new OCCC.

Some of the issues and concerns voiced by community members included the capacity of area roads and water and sewer systems as well as social and economic impacts to the potential host community. The community dialogue also included legislative policy recommendations

which advocate for long-term job and skills development programs to ease inmate transition into the community and to reduce rates of recidivism.

The legislature provided funding to develop the best options for replacing this facility and PSD is working to achieve the directives of the legislature. PSD anticipates the final site selection to be made no sooner than early 2019. Once the site has been selected and the EIS design, and permitting processes are accomplished, groundbreaking can occur several years later assuming funds have been approved by the legislature.

The broader discussion about the many issues facing the State of Hawaii and the Department of Public Safety (PSD), such as returning prison inmates currently in Arizona to Hawaii, highlights the serious challenges the state faces with respect to criminal justice reform. While that discussion is critically important, the task of planning for the replacement of the OCCC is urgent and immediate.

“OCCC must be replaced now,” said Nolan Espinda, Director of PSD. “The original structure was built in 1914 and has been modified several times since to accommodate 924 inmates, but currently houses approximately 1,200 inmates. Besides overcrowding, OCCC was not designed to separate inmates with mental health issues from the general inmate population, thus increasing the risk for both groups and corrections staff.”

OCCC was originally built as a prison for a long-term stable inmate population. Today, it functions as a jail with a population of inmates serving sentences with less than a year before release and for individuals awaiting trial.

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