

Future of the O'ahu Community Correctional Center

Vol. 62 - Hawai'i Refines Design Plans for New O'ahu Jail

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Hawai'i Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

Mission: The mission of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) is to provide a secure correctional environment for comprehensive rehabilitative, holistic and wraparound re-entry services, including culturally based approaches, to persons sentenced to our custody and care with professionalism, integrity, respect and fairness. Our goal is to reduce recidivism and enhance the safety and security of our communities.

What We Do: DCR carries out orders from the state courts to confine individuals in custody for a set period of time utilizing jails and prisons located within Hawai'i, at the Federal Detention Center in Honolulu and in private contracted facilities on the continent. Jails, known in Hawai'i as Community Correctional Centers (CCCs), are located on the islands of Kaua'i, Maui, Hawai'i and O'ahu and house pretrial detainees, misdemeanor offenders and others with a sentence of one year or less. CCCs also provide a pre-release transition function for prison inmates who are less than a year from their scheduled release. While some individuals in custody will remain confined for life, over 95% will serve their sentences and be released to the community.

Vision: DCR envisions a future when all its facilities provide safe, secure, healthy and humane environments for those in custody and staff. We are looking for a future based on a better understanding of the differing needs of offender populations, using therapeutic rather than punitive management techniques, ensuring racial equity and by promoting positive change so that fewer individuals are incarcerated in Hawai'i. However, aged and obsolete jails undermine DCR's ability to deliver such a vision and improving some facilities and replacing others are high priorities. Chief among those priorities is development of a new O'ahu jail on state-owned lands currently housing the Animal Quarantine Station in 'Aiea. Assisting DCR with O'ahu jail planning and development is the Department of Accounting and General Services (DAGS) and a team of experts and advisors (the "New O'ahu Jail Project" team).

The New O'ahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC) project: Also known as the "New O'ahu Jail" or "New O'ahu Jail Project" to make clear that DCR is planning for a new jail and not a prison as we move forward with our development efforts.

NEWS & UPDATES: FACILITIES

DCR Prioritizes Program Continuity and Community Input

Hawai'i officials have announced significant refinements to the design of the new O'ahu jail that will replace the aging O'ahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC), emphasizing that the updated plans will strengthen program delivery while responding to community feedback. The most notable design change removes the previously proposed Community Transition Center (CTC) from the new jail campus with the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) planning to expand the existing Laumaka Work Furlough Center in Kalihi to house the CTC's programs and residents. By expanding at the Laumaka site, proximity to public transportation and employment opportunities for those reentering the community are maximized. DCR officials say this shift streamlines the layout of the new jail and better aligns with community preferences gathered over the past two years.

Although the transition center component has been relocated, DCR planners say the core design of the new jail remains focused on improving conditions for rehabilitation, reentry and treatment programs. One of the primary limitations of the current OCCC facility is a lack of space to support these initiatives; the new design retains dedicated areas meant to address that shortfall. *"The programming objectives remain the same,"* said DCR Director Tommy Johnson. *"The new facility is being designed with adequate room to implement programs that reduce recidivism and prepare people for successful reentry."* The shift away from the CTC as part of the main jail complex will simplify the overall structure, allowing planners to focus more fully on housing, rehabilitative spaces and support services. While the jail's design has yet to be finalized, planners say the overarching goal remains unchanged: building a modern, humane correctional environment that better supports safety, treatment and successful reentry for people in custody.

This change in scope will not impact the timing of the completion of the new O'ahu jail. Cost assessments will be performed using updated construction cost escalation rates.

The new O'ahu jail is planned for delivery through a Public-Private Partnership (P3), which allows for design flexibility within the framework of performance standards. DCR officials say adaptability will be built into the P3 agreement so plans for the facility can adjust to changes in population levels and security classifications over time. Responsibility for operation of the new O'ahu jail will remain with DCR; privatizing jail operations is not part of the plan.



Rendering is subject to change

From the Director's Desk



DCR Director Tommy Johnson

Happy holidays! As we wind up this year, it's an excellent opportunity to see where we've come and where we're going.

Building a new O'ahu jail remains our highest priority. As we've mentioned before, the conditions at the current jail, O'ahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC), are beyond repair and unsafe for both those in our custody and our staff. A new jail will allow for safety and dignity, as well as room for programs that will focus on rehabilitation, re-entry, and reducing recidivism.

Our goal is to be transparent and to listen to the community. We've done just that. We learned that our future neighbors in 'Aiea had concerns about including a transition center at the future site in Hālawa. We also learned from our neighbors in Kalihi that they did not want the furlough transition center removed from their community.

Our solution was quite simple. The Laumaka Furlough Center in Kalihi will be expanded to handle the transition population as a separate project from the new jail, with its own funding. This will not change the size of the new jail at Hālawa, which will have the same number of beds as the current OCCC, but with humane conditions and the programming that we at the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) find critical to helping those in our custody and care successfully return to their communities.

With the generosity and goodwill of community groups, we're seeing a renewed commitment to incarcerated individuals. All have been collaborating with DCR to provide resources and services to inmates to better prepare them for reentry upon their release.

We appreciate your diligence and compassion. Thank you for your continued support this past year and moving forward into 2026.

O'ahu Jail Team Presents to Metropolitan Honolulu Rotary Club

Bettina Mehnert, president and CEO of AHL, attended a meeting of the Metropolitan Honolulu Rotary Club to present and discuss plans for replacing the obsolete and deteriorating OCCC. During the meeting held on November 13, 2025, Mehnert emphasized that development of the new jail is a vital element of the DCR's paradigm shift, moving Hawaii's correctional system away from a punitive model to one that is holistic, restorative and focused on successful reentry into the community.

Mehnert detailed how the design of the new O'ahu jail is critical to DCR's mission. The facility will be equipped to better address detainees with special needs, including medical and mental health care and will allow those individuals requiring protective or maximum custody to be housed separately from the general population. The design will also provide a more secure and efficient work environment for corrections staff while greatly improving living conditions for those in custody, creating an environment focused on better preparation for reintegration.

She added that beyond the therapeutic environment, the new jail will be operationally efficient, reducing repair and maintenance needs while aligning with current best practices. With the new facility, DCR is aiming to increase community partnerships for programs and volunteer organizations. Mehnert ended the presentation with an overview of the project's long history and its planning, current status and the proposed Public-Private Partnership project delivery and finance model.

A copy of the presentation is available at: <https://newoahujail.hawaii.gov/>



Bettina Mehnert, president and CEO of AHL, presents to the Metropolitan Honolulu Rotary Club

WCCC Hosts 'Ohana Day for Incarcerated Women and Families

Incarcerated women embraced their family members as they reunited at the Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC) Maunawili Cottage courtyard for a Christmas-themed gathering. The WCCC hosted the "Star Light, Star Bright" 'Ohana Day event for approximately 40 inmates and more than 70 family members and loved ones on December 6, 2025. The Pu'a Foundation and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Honolulu's Prison Ministry sponsored the three-hour event thanks to donations, which also helped support travel expenses to O'ahu for more than a dozen families from the neighbor islands. The organizations have been working with DCR for more than 20 years to help incarcerated mothers reconnect and maintain bonds with their keiki.

For the event, the organizations helped reunite incarcerated women with their 'ohana. *"It's all about family,"* said Pu'a Foundation Executive Director Toni Bissen. *"It's important to have this opportunity to eat together, to have fun together in this festive time,"* she added. WCCC staff and volunteers decked the Maunawili Cottage courtyard with a Christmas tree, festive garland, balloons and streamers while holiday music filled the air as inmates played with their children and spent quality time with their loved ones.



Santa Claus joined participants at the WCCC event.

Approximately 50 adults and more than 20 children attended the event where they enjoyed a visit by Santa Claus, a puppet show, arts and crafts and wholesome family activities. Inmates and their 'ohana also enjoyed a catered lunch of glazed ham, rice, macaroni and cheese with small smoked sausages and salad. Shave ice, popcorn and cupcakes were also served to families.

DCR Director Tommy Johnson thanked facility staff, community partners and volunteers for their hard work organizing the event. *"'Ohana Day reminds those in our custody and care about what's important — family connections and reunification,"* Johnson said. Studies show that family support is a key factor in reducing recidivism for justice-involved individuals. WCCC Warden Ione "Noni" Guillonta said, *"Events like 'Ohana Day promote positive interactions and boosts morale."*

Bishop Larry Silva of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Honolulu also visited inmates and their families, bringing blessings to the event. *"Christmas is a very special time of year and we want it to be special for them, so we bring their families and have a little gathering and celebration so they too can have some joy at Christmas time,"* Silva said. Families and children left WCCC with holiday gifts and framed family photos with Santa.



WCCC Hosts Mental Health Day Event

The Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC) hosted a Mental Health Day event on November 10, 2025, to bring about awareness, healing and empowerment for incarcerated women with mental health disorders. Organized by the Mental Health Unit team, the event included a talent show, giving individuals a creative outlet where they performed songs and recited personally written poetry for honored guests. Over 60 inmates treated by the WCCC Mental Health Unit participated in the event.

Among the guests that attended the event at Olomana Cottage were DCR Director Tommy Johnson, Deputy Director Sanna Muñoz of the Rehabilitation Services and Programs Division, DCR Mental Health Branch Administrator Dr. Erin Wilkinson, Reentry Oversight Specialist Kimberly Takata of the Hawai'i Correctional System Oversight Commission and WCCC Warden Ione "Noni" Guillonta. Women from both the jail and prison populations participated in the event in separate sessions. Organizers say the Mental Health Day event highlighted the importance of mental health support and personal growth within the correctional community, celebrating resilience, creativity and hope.



The event also included educational presentations from inmates on mental health conditions including anxiety and depression and other topics that piqued the inmates' interests. During the event, some inmates shared powerful emotional testimonies on their mental health disorder and how support from the Mental Health Unit staff helped restore their hope for a better future when they reenter the community upon release. DCR Director Tommy Johnson said, "Events like this represents DCR's mission to provide rehabilitative support to those in our custody and care." The Mental Health Day event also included sport activities like a free throw competition, relay races and bag toss. The fun-filled day ended with both inmates and staff doing the "Electric Slide" line dance together and enjoying a meal of burgers and hot dogs.

WCCC Warden Ione "Noni" Guillonta thanked the mental health team for their unwavering commitment, dedication and support to the inmates. "They work very hard," Guillonta said. "I'm very proud of what the Mental Health staff do here."

DCR Mental Health Branch Administrator Dr. Erin Wilkinson said, "We take the mental health of our residents very seriously. This was a wonderful example of the mental health team supporting the inmates' commitment to their own well-being and personal growth through this event."



Attendees at the Mental Health Day event at WCCC included Deputy Director Sanna Muñoz of the Rehabilitation Services and Programs Division, DCR Mental Health Branch Administrator Dr. Erin Wilkinson, and DCR Director Tommy Johnson.

Laumaka Work Furlough Inmates Join Hawai'i Laborers' Apprenticeship Program

Nine work furlough inmates of the OCCC Laumaka Work Furlough Center successfully completed a four-day pre-apprenticeship evaluation course for the Hawai'i Laborers' Apprenticeship and Training Program. After passing the course, all became apprentices of the program on October 31, 2025. DCR played a critical role in the inmates' success through its partnership with the Hawai'i Laborers' Apprenticeship and Training (HLAT) Fund which provides opportunities and a pathway for inmates to learn marketable skills. The pre-apprenticeship evaluation course tests participants' strength, endurance and technical skills in five areas: concrete block moving and stacking, gravel wheeling and trenching, scaffold building and dismantling, lumber stacking and site safety, and digging with proper techniques using a pick and shovel. While participating in the course, DCR paid their wages.

Laumaka work furlough inmate Brandon Nau said, *"I feel I accomplished something great on passing the test. And I look forward to prospering and making something of myself."* DCR Director Tommy Johnson said, *"The apprenticeship program will help those in our custody and care rebuild their lives. It will also set them on a pathway toward successful reintegration into the community and access to rewarding career paths."*

OCCC's Laumaka Work Furlough Center, DCR Corrections Program Services – Education Services Branch, Reentry Coordination Office, Hawai'i Correctional Industries (HCI) and the Laborers' Union all collaborated on this effort. In addition to becoming apprentices, all nine men joined the Hawai'i Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), Local 368. *"We thank Hawai'i Laborers' Apprenticeship and Training Fund for its dedication and providing this invaluable opportunity for our program participants to join the Laborers' Union Local 368,"* Johnson said.

DCR is currently working on additional reentry initiatives for inmates to learn valuable skills that will prepare them for reentry into the community and provide meaningful career paths. This reflects the department's goal to reduce recidivism. Laumaka work furlough inmate Joseph Po'omaihealani said he has a renewed focus after passing the pre-apprenticeship evaluation course. *"I am determined to move forward to a better and brighter future and life for me and my family,"* Po'omaihealani said.

The apprenticeship program is 4,000 hours of on-the-job training and 290 hours of related training that includes Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards, first aid and CPR. HLAT Training Director Peter Lee said, *"Everybody deserves a second chance."* One of the program's training instructors was a former inmate who turned his life around after graduating from the Laborers' apprenticeship program Lee said. He became a journeyman and worked his way up to a foreman. *"It kind of shows how this program can give you a new life,"* he added.



OCCC Warden John Schnell joins in congratulating work furlough participants.

Incarcerated Mothers Reunite with their Keiki to Celebrate Halloween

Incarcerated mothers showered their children with hugs and kisses when they reunited at the Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC) Maunawili Cottage courtyard for a spooktacular Kids' Day event. The WCCC, in collaboration with Wellspring Covenant Church, hosted a Halloween-themed Kids' Day for eight mothers, 12 children and 10 caregivers on October 11, 2025. Music from a portable stereo system filled the air in the courtyard which volunteers decorated with cobwebs and plastic spiders as mothers and their keiki spent quality time together playing volleyball and Halloween-themed games. Families also enjoyed face painting and arts and crafts during the event.

Several inmates who are currently students of the Kapi'olani Community College (KCC) Culinary Arts Program prepared and served families a Halloween-themed lunch with mummified franks with chili and rice, mini pizzas and smash teriyaki burgers. KCC Culinary Arts Program Instructor Chef Lee Shinsato, who teaches the fundamentals of culinary arts to inmates at the facility, assisted the students with food preparation with fellow KCC chef instructors.

Mothers and their keiki also enjoyed pumpkin muffins, chocolate croissants, mango cream cheese and blueberry cream cheese

scones, whole wheat almond croissants, coconut macaroons, apple turnovers and snickerdoodles prepared by the students. Volunteers also served families shave ice during the event.

DCR Director Tommy Johnson attended Kids' Day where he greeted mothers and their children. He also thanked facility staff, church volunteers and inmates assisting with family activities for their hard work organizing Kids' Day. *"Events like this are successful because of our dedicated staff at WCCC and*

community partners," Johnson said. *"Kids' Day helps mothers maintain bonds with their children. It also serves as a reminder on what's important and what to strive for — reunification with their families when they reenter the community upon their release."*

Wellspring Covenant Church sponsored the event with donations from the community. WCCC has partnered with Wellspring for more than 20 years for Kids'

Day. WCCC Warden Ione "Noni" Guillonta said, *"These types of special events are crucial in strengthening bonds between mothers and their children."* Pastor Cheryl Takabayashi of Wellspring Covenant Church said *"It's a blessing to be part of Kids' Day and see the joy and love between mothers and their children."*



DCR Director Johnson joins with WCCC staff and community partners at Kids' Day event



WCCC staff and community partners at Kids' Day event.



Graduation Ceremonies for New Adult Corrections Officers

The Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) welcomed 34 new Adult Corrections Officers (ACO) at three graduation ceremonies held on October 10, 2025, at the State Capitol auditorium, on October 17, 2025, at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo – Performing Arts Center, and on December 5, 2025, at the State Capitol auditorium.

The graduates from Basic Corrections Recruit Classes (BCRC) 25-04 and 25-05 completed training and will begin their careers as ACOs at facilities across the state. Since it was redesignated as DCR in January 2024, the department compressed its recruit training course to eight weeks from 11 weeks, while still covering critical training to ensure ACOs are well-prepared for their jobs. Last year, DCR also doubled its recruit classes to six from three to address the staffing shortage at its facilities. DCR aims to have eight classes by the end of 2025 with the December 5th class being the eighth to graduate from recruit training. There are approximately 1,150 filled ACO positions and an estimated 370 vacant ACO positions at correctional facilities in Hawai'i.

DCR Director Tommy Johnson said, *"We are proud of every graduate in this class. Serving as an adult corrections officer is an honorable position that takes grit, integrity and dedication. All of you represent the next generation of corrections officers and potentially future leaders in corrections field."*

Recruit training comprises of more than 300 hours of classroom instruction and physical training. Recruits learn a variety of subjects that include standards of conduct, ethics and professionalism, report writing, interpersonal communications, maintaining security, crisis intervention, security threat groups (gangs), mental health, first aid, use of firearms and self-defense tactics. All incoming classes receive Recruit Field Training along with Basic Corrections Training.

During the final weeks of training, they go into the facility where they begin their jobs with guidance from their training sergeants. The 34 graduates have been assigned to the Hālawā Correctional Facility, O'ahu Community Correctional Center, Waiawa Correctional Facility, Women's Community Correctional Center, Hawai'i Community Correctional Center and Kulani Correctional Facility.



New ACOs at graduation ceremony on October 10, 2025.



DCR Director Tommy Johnson addressing ACO graduates.



New ACOs at graduation ceremony on October 17, 2025.



New ACOs at graduation ceremony on December 5, 2025.

Difference Between Jails and Prisons

While the terms “jail” and “prison” are often used interchangeably, they actually refer to two very different types of facilities that serve different purposes and function in different ways. When someone is accused of a crime and arrested, jail is usually the first stop in the criminal justice system, serving as the booking and holding location. Jails provide the secure environment needed for the temporary detention of individuals accused of a crime but who have not completed the trial process.

Persons may also remain in jail if they could not meet conditions for bail or may not have qualified for bail. While some individuals remain in jail for a short while, minutes or hours, before being released, others may be held longer before they are released or transferred to another facility.

Jails are also used to house individuals who have been convicted of a low-level crime and received a short sentence (typically less than one year). Individuals convicted of a serious crime and who received an extended sentence (more than one year) are incarcerated in a prison. Think “short-term” and “long-term” with jail applying to short-term misdemeanor convictions and prison applying to long-term felony convictions.

In Hawai‘i, the jail population is under the jurisdiction of the courts and individuals in jail can only be released, placed in outside programs or assigned to other alternatives to incarceration by the courts. In contrast, a prison facility houses inmates that have been convicted and classified. Jails may oversee work release programs and some offer services designed to help the individuals change their behavior so they stand a better chance of avoiding a return stay. The difference between a jail and a prison may seem relatively minor on the surface, but there is a significant impact on the types of services that must be provided and how they are operated.



Length of Stay: Jails are used primarily for short-term detention.



Jurisdiction: Jails are typically operated by local law enforcement agencies.



Type of Offense: Jails are commonly used to hold individuals who have been arrested and are awaiting trial or have been sentenced for minor crimes.



Programs and Services: Jails offer some programs and services aimed at helping individuals successfully re-enter society upon release.

We Want to Hear From You

DCR continually seeks input from community leaders and members about plans for the new O‘ahu jail and in response Project Team representatives attend meetings of the ‘Aiea Neighborhood Board #20, the ‘Aiea Community Association, and the Hawai‘i Correctional Systems Oversight Commission, as well as engaging with state and local officials, the media and others. In addition to reporting progress and accomplishments in advancing plans for the new O‘ahu jail, these forums are opportunities for DCR to seek input, advice and guidance from officials, stakeholders and the public. Contact the City and County of Honolulu, Neighborhood Commission Office for information about how to participate at an upcoming ‘Aiea Neighborhood Board meeting (Tel: 808-768-3710/email: nco@honolulu.gov). For information about upcoming meetings of the ‘Aiea Community Association and how to participate, visit <http://www.aieacommunity.org>.

In addition to distributing newsletters to over 1,800 elected and appointed officials, government agencies, media outlets, volunteer groups and members of the public, DCR maintains the new O‘ahu jail website, **NewOahuJail.hawaii.gov**, which provides access to project-related materials, documents outreach efforts, and facilitates the public’s ability to offer ideas and suggestions or ask questions. Interested parties can also request to receive future announcements and notifications by submitting your contact information (name, affiliation if any, and email address) to: robert.nardi@wsp.com.





New O'ahu Jail team participate at 'Aiea Community Association Christmas Parade and Fun Fair (December 13, 2025)

Upcoming Activities

The following activities are anticipated in the months ahead.

<p>December 2025</p>	<p>Construction of a new housing unit continues at Maui CCC.</p> <p>Public outreach and engagement continue with attendance at 'Aiea Neighborhood Board, 'Aiea Community Association, and Hawai'i Correctional Systems Oversight Commission meetings.</p>
<p>January 2026</p>	<p>Opening of Hawai'i State Legislative Session (January 21, 2026)</p> <p>Construction of a new housing unit continues at Maui CCC.</p> <p>Public outreach and engagement continue with attendance at 'Aiea Neighborhood Board, 'Aiea Community Association and Hawai'i Correctional Systems Oversight Commission meetings.</p>
<p>February 2026</p>	<p>O'ahu Jail team attends American Correctional Association conference (February 5-8, 2026)</p> <p>Construction of a new housing unit continues at Maui CCC.</p> <p>Public outreach and engagement continue with attendance at 'Aiea Neighborhood Board, 'Aiea Community Association and Hawai'i Correctional Systems Oversight Commission meetings.</p>

Interested in Learning More?

DCR distributes newsletters to more than 1,800 elected and appointed officials, government agencies, media outlets, volunteer groups and members of the public. For the latest information about the new O'ahu jail project, including project-related materials and FAQs, go to: dcr.hawaii.gov/occc-future-plans/. To receive (via email) future announcements, newsletters, and other notifications, please submit your contact information (name, affiliation if any, and email address) to: robert.nardi@wsp.com.

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