NICJR
National Institute for
Criminal Justice Reform

February 2025

BUILDING A CONTINUUM OF CARE:

An Assessment of Hawai'i's System of Care for Court-Involved Youth

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of youth incarcerated in the State of Hawai'i's juvenile justice system has plummeted over the past several years while youth crime has also remained low, making the state a model of reform. Government officials committed to improving the youth justice system and the outcomes of youth and families, an array of community-based service providers, and a strong indigenous culture and spirit among Native Hawaiians have all contributed to this achievement.

The State of Hawai'i wants to make further progress in improving the youth justice system and increasing public safety, so it has engaged the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) to conduct this assessment and provide a series of recommendations.

Hawai'i enjoys robust community services, much of which are culturally relevant and responsive. Youth justice system leaders are committed to youth development, community safety, and continual improvement. These are all incredible strengths to be built upon, but there are also challenges that remain.

The gap between existing resources and those in greatest need is still wide. There is an overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian youth and a growing number of Micronesian youth in the juvenile justice system. In spite of the current service provider network, juvenile justice system and court employees, service providers, and youth all shared concerns about the critical needs that remain unmet. While some gaps do vary by county and island, many are common across the state.

The majority of stakeholders that NICJR spoke with highlighted an urgent need for increased mental health services for court-involved youth. This spans from community-based individual and family counseling to residential services for youth with acute needs. Frustration with accessing services through the State's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division (CAMHD) was consistent throughout interviews and focus groups conducted on each island.

In interviews, one of the most prevalent sentiments from community members regarding why youth engage in delinquent behavior was the combination of low wages and high cost of living. Parents, especially single mothers or grandmothers, are forced to work two and even three jobs to make ends meet, which leaves children unattended and more likely to engage in antisocial behaviors. Relatedly, community service programs are short staffed due to low wages and difficult jobs. One group home staff member reported helping her youth resident get a job at the local Target and realizing the youth resident was making more money than her.

Community members and government workers on islands outside of Oʻahu asked for more well-funded, dedicated services on their islands that provide high quality mentoring, recreational, mental health, and residential programs that serve youth and transition-age youth (young adults). One local government official said, "The State of Hawaiʻi does not invest enough in its youth."

With considerable decreases in the number of youth held in custody in Hawaiʻi, and with the potential to make even further reductions, there is great opportunity to capture those cost savings and reinvest in the communities, families, and youth who are most in need.

II. INTRODUCTION

The progress that has been made in Hawai'i's youth justice system is remarkable. The number of youth incarcerated in the state is down 80% from its peak,[1] making it one of the lowest youth incarceration rates in the nation.[2] For a period of two months, there were zero girls incarcerated in the state's youth correctional facility —catapulting its commitment to reform into the national spotlight.[3]

This progress can be credited to a multitude of factors, including declining youth crime, a committed judiciary, strong leadership from the Department of Human Services' Office of Youth Services (OYS), and State legislative change. It can also be credited to the strong infrastructure of community-based organizations (CBOs) and networks, embodied by both formal nonprofits and volunteer community leaders, who have created a web of supports *outside* of the youth justice system for Hawai'i's most vulnerable youth. Often led by Native Hawaiians and committed to incorporating Native Hawaiian and indigenous cultural practices into their programming, this infrastructure has been supported through invaluable resources from both local foundations such as Lili'uokalani Trust and national philanthropy. Given this robust community-based infrastructure, there is a clear opportunity for the Hawai'i youth justice system to be a model for the United States on culturally grounded system transformation.

1. Juvenile Delinquency Trends in Hawaii: 2011-2020
2. Youth Justice By The Numbers
3. How Hawaii brought its population of girls in prison to zero

Recognizing this progress, the leaders of Hawai'i's youth justice system are now asking themselves the critical question of how they can further advance needed reforms throughout the state and deliver even greater outcomes for youth, families, and the people of Hawai'i. The first step is understanding the challenges that still remain. The overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian youth in the youth prison system, as well as other populations such as transgender and child welfare-involved youth; the disproportionate number of youth who come from the smaller islands outside of O'ahu, where they are flown in to serve their time in the State's care; and the increasing number of Pacific Islander youth, particularly Micronesian, who are coming into contact with the family court system all indicate that there is progress still to be made. The State's interest in addressing these challenges head-on is the impetus for this project.

The Office of Youth Services asked the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR) to conduct this analysis. NICJR, in partnership with OYS and with guidance from the University of Hawai'i, undertook an 18-month assessment project to evaluate the current strengths of the youth justice system, identify opportunities to deepen system transformation, and make recommendations for future reform. NICJR conducted a series of site visits to five islands, interviewed more than 100 government officials and community service providers, talked with youth in the system, analyzed data, and reviewed national best practices in youth justice. This report includes a series of findings and recommendations based on the comprehensive assessment undertaken.

III. BACKGROUND

Over the last decade, the State of Hawai'i has implemented monumental legislative and policy changes that have fundamentally altered the youth justice system. This change began in 2013, with the formation of the Hawai'i Juvenile Justice Working Group. An analysis by this group found that, at that time, the average annual cost for a bed at the Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility (HYCF), the state's only secure facility, was nearly $200,000,[4] and three out of four youth were being reincarcerated within three years.[5] In addition, a high number of youth were returning to HYCF for probation violations or revocations, which highlighted the need for stronger reentry planning and service implementation.

The working group developed a set of "research-based, fiscally sound policy proposals which included limiting placement in Hawai'i's secure facility to more serious offenders; reinvesting the resulting savings in effective community-based options; strengthening local supervision; and enhancing accountability in the juvenile justice system."[6] These recommendations became House Bill (HB) 2490, which was unanimously passed through the Legislature and became Act 201 when signed by Governor Neil Abercrombie in July 2014.

Act 201 created five key changes to the State's delinquency system:

1. Codified diversion processes for court-involved youth
2. Established the Behavioral Intervention and Support System and an Earned Discharge Credit through a graduated response system for youth on probation
3. Prohibited youth adjudicated on misdemeanor offenses from being placed at HYCF
4. Adopted a statewide risk and needs assessment for all adjudicated youth
5. Required the collecting and reporting of performance measures to monitor outcomes

The impact of these changes was dramatic. According to the Department of the Attorney General's Crime Prevention and Justice Assistance Division (CPJAD), from 2011 to 2020, the number of juvenile arrests across the state decreased 65.7%, petitions decreased by 62.6%, adjudications decreased by 76.3%, new probation sentences decreased by 69.7%, and commitments to HYCF decreased 81.7%.[7]

4. Hawaii Juvenile Justice Working Group Final Report
5. Implementing Comprehensive Juvenile Justice System Improvement in Hawaii'
6. Hawaii's 2014 Juvenile Justice Reform
7. Juvenile Delinquency Trends in Hawaii: 2011-2020

Alongside these changes, there has also been an important shift in OYS and HYCF toward more rehabilitative and healing-centered approaches, codified with the establishment of the Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center on the HYCF Campus in Kailua in 2018, through Act 208 and informed by important Native Hawaiian cultural perspectives and values, including visioning Kawailoa as a pu'uhonua, a place of healing for youth and family members. More than just a rebranding, this renaming is meant to inspire reform and positive change in the Hawaiian youth justice system, through promotion of healing and therapeutic services. Shortly after the passage of Act 208, spaces that were used to incarcerate youth were transformed into "community and family oriented programming spaces. This included a young adult homeless shelter, a residential vocational training program for youth and young adults, and an assessment center and shelter for young victims of sex trafficking."[8]

Continuing in the spirit of healing, Partners in Development Foundation (PIDF) has been instrumental in creating alternatives to incarceration through the establishment of the Kupa 'Aina Farm on the grounds of Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center. The Farm supports youth well-being not only by "developing sustainable food production models, but by culturally-based experiential education and workforce development [and] serves as a place for learning, healing and connection to 'āina."[9] Kupa 'Aina farm serves as the base for Ho'okanaka, a six-week cultural diversion program for youth referred to the family court.

Despite these vast strides in youth justice reform, there have been ongoing challenges. Of the population that remains in the family court system and in HYCF there is an over-representation of Native Hawaiian youth, youth from neighbor islands, transgender youth, and youth that are involved in the child welfare system, as well as a growing population of Micronesians. Moreover, as the population of youth committed to HYCF has decreased, the per person cost of these commitments has only increased. In 2024, the operational budget for HYCF was $10,614,621–only $300,000 less than it was when juvenile justice reform began a decade ago, underscoring the inherent inefficiency of operating correctional facilities, which must maintain minimum staffing and security levels even amid dramatic population declines.[10]

This assessment seeks to build upon the enormous juvenile justice reform work undertaken in the past decade and to provide a pathway for further progress.

8. A Correctional Center Becomes a Pu'uhonua; Note: some of these programs have since closed.
9. Kupa 'Aina
10. See Department of Human Services 2023-2025 budget for HYCF FY 2023-2024 operating costs and Department of Human Services FY 15 Budget for FY 2014-2015 costs.

IV. DATA & METHODS

To the extent possible, NICJR conducted a mixed-methods analysis that triangulated quantitative data on youth involved in the family court system; qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and other conversations with stakeholders from across the youth-serving system of care; and documentary data such as contracts, internal reports, and other materials from OYS and partners. Each data source is described in greater detail below.

Quantitative Data

NICJR was unable to access raw quantitative data for this analysis, instead relying on existing reports with quantitative data, namely the Department of the Attorney General's *Juvenile Delinquency Trends in Hawai'i: Data Book for 2011-2020* and OYS's triennial Juvenile Justice System Crime Analysis for 2021-2023. While both reports are voluminous, both are undermined by high levels of missing data, along with clear contradictions between what is reported within ostensibly connected events in the juvenile justice process.[11] In addition, neither report examines patterns at the intersection of multiple youth characteristics or youth and offense characteristics. For example, while the overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian youth is well established in these and other reports, these reports do not examine what offenses drive this disproportionality, nor how it varies by gender or age, limiting our ability to identify opportunities to intervene. These and other challenges with the quality and usability of quantitative data in Hawai'i's delinquency system are discussed further in Findings, below.

11. For example, Juvenile Delinquency Trends in Hawaii reports on p. 76 that 279 youth in Hawai'i County were arrested in 2020. It then reports that 202 had petitions filed (p. 80), 58 were adjudicated (p. 82), and 65 received new probation sentences (p. 88). There is no accounting for how more youth were placed on probation than adjudicated, nor is there any information about what happened to the 144 youth who were petitioned but not adjudicated.

Qualitative Data

Much of the data collected for this assessment was qualitative. Qualitative data collection included site visits to and field observations of custodial facilities, residential programs, and community services across the state. These site visits were combined with interviews, focus groups, and talk story with stakeholders from across the youth-serving system, including OYS leadership and staff; family court judges, administrators, and probation officers; prosecutors, public defenders, and local law enforcement officers; leadership and staff in community and faith-based organizations; school counselors; and currently and formerly court-involved youth. All qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured approach whereby the research team asked about key issues while also allowing participants to direct the conversation based on their own experience and expertise. Appendix A details sites observed and stakeholder groups engaged for this analysis.

Documentary Data

NICJR also reviewed an array of other documentation, including but not limited to OYS service contract matrices with annual contract budgets, referral processes, target populations, and more, as well as prior State and County reports. To the extent possible, NICJR cross-referenced qualitative and documentary data sources. For example, when interview or focus group participants discussed assets and gaps in the service delivery process, NICJR cross-checked this information with the contract matrices and vice versa.

Limitations

As noted above, issues with the quality and reliability of administrative data about the young people who interact with each juncture of the delinquency system are a key limitation in this report. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that the State's juvenile justice system is nested within a multiplicity of other youth-serving public systems, including the child welfare system, the Department of Education, and youth health and mental health systems. While the research team did collect qualitative data from representatives of the majority of these systems, other data from these systems was limited. In particular, we did not have access to data on services funded by the county-level family courts or the State child welfare system, although these agencies do constitute critical pieces of the youth-serving system of care.

V. FINDINGS

The following summary of findings is drawn from the research activities described above. The findings presented below are relevant across the state, although county-, island-, or other geographically specific findings are discussed throughout. For brief but more specific discussions of county-level findings, please see Appendix B.

Strengths in the Hawai‘i Juvenile Justice Continuum

Commitment to Positive Youth Development

As noted above, stakeholders across Hawai‘i’s youth justice system demonstrate a strong commitment to minimizing the use of punishment and confinement, in favor of trauma-informed and asset-based approaches that minimize formal delinquency system involvement. Family courts across the state have shifted their focus to addressing complex trauma among youth, particularly through programs like Girls Court, which provides gender-responsive programming and trauma-informed care for system-involved girls. As one senior probation staff member noted, “We’re understanding better than ever before about trauma, the impact of trauma on youths’ behavior. So, we’re much less likely to lock them up. Staff are starting to understand that, the judges understand that.” Judges, too, spoke of the importance of avoiding incarceration, with one judge complementing the work of her probation team in doing so: “[The] team has done a good job to go with the movement not to incarcerate and see what we can do to keep youth out of the facilities, see how we can service them without having to incarcerate them.”

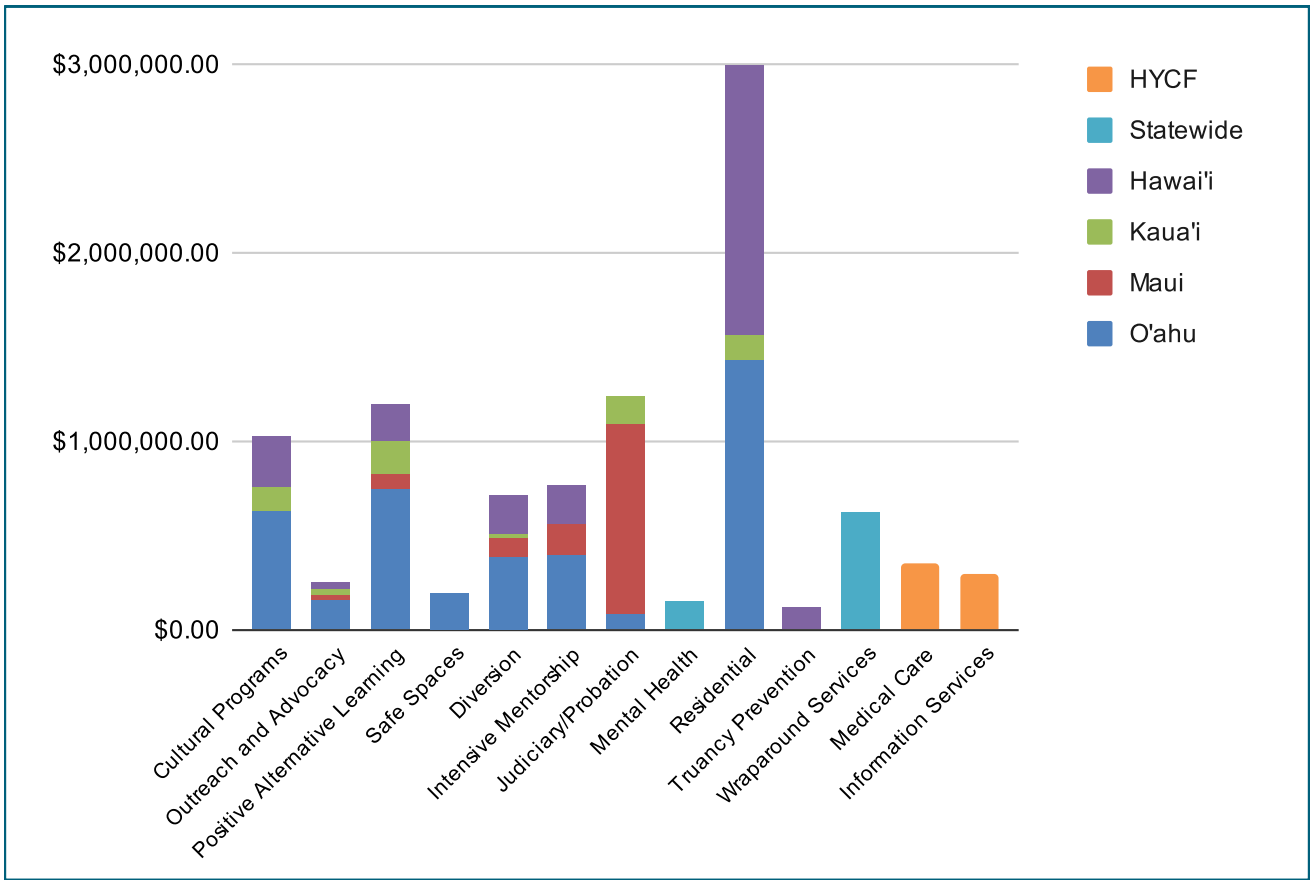
“[The] team has done a good job to go with the movement not to incarcerate and see what we can do to keep youth out of the facilities, see **how we can service them without having to incarcerate them**.”

OYS and HYCF leadership echoed this sentiment, discussing efforts to transition toward a model rooted in youth well-being. "Youth development, adolescent development—those are super important. [HYCF] staff need to understand the development of the youth, their cognitive behavior, the entire process. We want to reduce the numbers of youth in custody, transition to the campus, then transition to the community… Every conversation [we have at OYS] should come back to the mission: 'Does it serve the youth? Will the youth be successful?'"

Today, OYS funds more than $5 million of community-based services and almost $4 million of community-based residential services, in addition to community-based services inside HYCF.

In addition, as noted previously, the state has seen a massive reduction in the use of confinement. Notably, while the entire juvenile justice system shrunk dramatically from 2011–2020, reductions in the number of youth placed at HYCF outpaced all other reductions. Thus, while juvenile arrests and petitions decreased by 65.7% and 62.6%, respectively, during this time, total confinements to HYCF decreased by an astounding 81.7%.

Figure 1. OYS Funding by Program Type and Location



"We have to provide appropriate therapeutic care with cultural sensitivity in mind...People need to learn the stories of the 'Aina so they can **connect and heal**."

Strong Foundation of Service Providers

As both the family courts and OYS have transitioned away from confinement and toward a greater emphasis on serving youth in the community, they have benefited from the presence of a robust and dedicated system of service providers. Although the types of services available and the density of those services varies by county and by island, there is nonetheless an array of both community-based and residential services among all four counties.[12] Across counties and service types, providers consistently demonstrated a commitment to the principles of positive youth development and trauma-informed care, both of which were regularly braided with Native Hawaiian culture and values. As one provider noted, "We have to provide appropriate therapeutic care with cultural sensitivity in mind...People need to learn the stories of the 'Aina so they can connect and heal."

Young people spoke of the value of these services in their healing process. As one young man who had successfully transitioned to school and employment after years in and out of the court system explained, "I believe that my success was upheld by keeping busy, doing these projects, working with programs, all those things in the community. Really what helped is me having these structured activities in the community show youth that you can have fun, you can get these good feelings in a positive way."

One of the most striking aspects of Hawai'i's service provider community is the willingness of both independent community members and community-based organizations to proactively create programs and services where they see gaps. While the most ambitious example of this is the Partners in Development Foundation (PIDF) Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i (OYAH) hui at the Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center, there are many other examples. On Maui, two retired civilian employees from Maui Police Department's Juvenile Division were in the process of establishing a support program for parents whose children had been arrested, having seen for themselves a lack of information and support for families

12. It is important to note that although Maui County does have one community-based residential service program currently operating and a second preparing to open, both of these are on Maui Island, and there are no residential services on Moloka'i.

Additionally, while Hale Kipa already operates a number of community and residential programs across Oʻahu, Kauaʻi, and the Island of Hawaiʻi, it has developed conceptual plans for additional residential options steeped in Native Hawaiian customs and traditions that will address gaps in the continuum.

Partnerships with Philanthropic Organizations to Address Youth Needs

In addition to the strong foundation of community-based support and leadership, Hawaiʻi's juvenile justice system benefits from an established network of philanthropic organizations with an investment in Hawaiʻi's youth, foremost among them the Queen Liliʻuokalani Trust (LT). In accordance with its commitment to building upon the Queen's legacy and supporting Hawaiian youth, LT has worked closely with government and community juvenile justice stakeholders to develop and support programs such as Lydia House, a drop-in and residential services program for Native Hawaiian youth ages 16–26. As one LT staff member stated, "Our core philosophy is to put youth at the center... any one of us on our own cannot provide everything that a kid needs." This highlights the importance of such partnerships in supporting justice-involved youth.

Beyond LT, Hawaiʻi has benefited from local and national philanthropic investments from entities such as the Teran James Young Foundation, which established the Hale Pona Youth Shelter on Maui, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which has committed $20 million to the OYAH campus at the Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center, as part of a racial equity challenge whose mission is to help end youth incarceration.[13] The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Pew Foundation, and the Vera Institute for Justice have also dedicated time and resources into supporting Hawai'i's juvenile justice reforms for several decades.

13. Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi: Kawailoa

"Our core philosophy is to **put youth at the center**... any one of us on our own cannot provide everything that a kid needs."

Incorporation of Hawaiian Cultural Practices

A major strength of Hawai'i's current system of care is the integration of Hawaiian cultural practices. Programs like the Kupa 'Aina Farm, situated on the Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center, exemplify this by combining job training with land-based practices rooted in ancient Hawaiian traditions. Youth participating in the program gain workforce readiness skills and reconnect with cultural practices such as planting crops in accordance with the moon cycle. On the same grounds, the Residential Youth Services and Empowerment (RYSE) program operates a 24/7 center where youth can access essential services, including medical care, hot meals, and job training.[14] Another key presence at the Wellness Center is Kinai 'Eha, an organization that offers an alternative education pathway for youth by combining Hawaiian cultural identity, workforce training in construction and trades, and leadership development.[15]

One community advocate emphasized the impact of these practices, stating, "Native Hawaiians have been criminalized since the Queen was imprisoned.... Cultural understanding and addressing the roots of why people are in an environment are crucial." At 'Aina University in Hilo, staff described it by saying, "The land is the one doing the healing; all that we are doing is opening the gate." Amid the persistent overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian youth in the family court system and entrenched harms of colonialism, these culturally based initiatives are critical for youth healing and well-being.

Rural Communities' Close-Knit Support Systems

As noted above, both government and community-based stakeholders across the state demonstrate a deep-seated commitment to meeting the needs of Hawai'i's youth through culturally situated responses outside of incarceration. In rural communities, which are often cut off from the larger networks of services in more urban regions, the sense of mutual responsibility is particularly pronounced. On Moloka'i, a provider noted that in the absence of an on-site government-funded service system, "We get very creative and tap on the strengths of our community." Providers from other rural areas echoed these sentiments: "Because we are isolated, 'ohana is huge—extended family really steps up and steps in for youth." They feel that their communities still hold a sense of cohesion that allows them to wrap around their youth even with limited resources.

14. RYSE: About
15. Kinai 'Eha

Challenges in the Hawai‘i Juvenile Justice System

Higher Level of Need Among Court-Involved Youth

As the number of young people involved in Hawai‘i's family courts has decreased, those youth who are involved in the State's delinquency system are more likely to have complex and high-level needs. Many of the remaining youth face severe challenges, including trauma, behavioral health disorders, and poverty. Youth are also affected by intergenerational trauma linked to the history of colonialism in the state and the related persistence of poverty. In addition, there is an overrepresentation of youth who are Native Hawaiian, Micronesian, LGBTQI, and child welfare-involved.

Probation officers and service providers spoke regularly of the prevalence of trauma among both youth and families. One provider summarized, "I would say 100% of our population has experienced some sort of severe trauma." Another provider described the effect of this higher-need population on their organization's service delivery model: "As the size of the system has shrunk, the needs of the young people are more complex. Many of the youth and families who we work with don't have basic communication, conflict, and problem-solving skills. We had to reduce the size of our caseloads so that we can work more intensively with the families we do work with."

"I would say **100%** of our population has experienced some sort of **severe trauma**."

"As the size of the system has shrunk, the **needs of the young people are more complex**."

Gaps in Community-Based Services

In spite of the robust provider network described above, juvenile justice system and court employees, service providers, and youth all identified a number of critical needs that remain unmet and suggested that both more services and more targeted services are required to meet the particular needs of different youth. While some gaps do vary by county and island, many are common across the state. Below, we describe the most commonly identified gaps across Hawai‘i.

Mental Health Services

The majority of stakeholders that NICJR spoke with highlighted an urgent need for increased mental health services for court-involved youth, from community-based individual and family counseling to residential services for youth with acute needs. One CBO representative estimated that while about 80% of the youth they were serving needed mental health services, only about 2% were receiving them.

Although some providers who contract with OYS do offer mental health services, OYS does not contract directly for these services, instead relying primarily on the Department of Health's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division, which provides public mental health services for youth in Hawai'i. Unfortunately, probation officers and service providers both spoke of difficulties accessing services through CAMHD.

There appears to be a lack of common understanding regarding service access pathways for youth depending on whether they are Medicaid eligible, whether they have private health insurance that will cover service costs, and whether they meet the clinical criteria for serious emotional or behavioral disturbance. According to probation officers in multiple counties, the process of determining Medicaid eligibility is unclear and bureaucratic, as is the process of seeking approval for private health insurers to cover the cost of mental health services. These funding approval processes create critical delays in service access for youth with immediate needs. This is exacerbated by the clinical assessment process, which determines whether a young person meets the clinical criteria threshold for certain types of services. Confusion and frustration with accessing services through CAMHD were expressed consistently throughout interviews and focus groups conducted on each island.

Notably, an agreement between OYS and CAMHD does allow all family court-involved youth to access CAMHD-funded services regardless of Medicaid eligibility and private insurance coverage, with OYS covering the cost of mental health services for court-involved youth who are neither Medicaid eligible nor covered by private insurance. In addition, CAMHD does fund both clinically indicated treatment for youth with serious mental health needs and Multisystemic Therapy (MST), which is an evidence-based, in-home family counseling treatment for delinquency-involved youth.

Both CAMHD representatives and providers funded by CAMHD expressed a commitment to serving court-involved youth, with some providers even reporting open treatment slots that could be used by these youth. Nonetheless, the multi-step—and often slow and bureaucratic—process of determining Medicaid eligibility and enrollment; determining private insurance access and coverage; and then, if neither of these options are available, seeking permission for OYS to cover the cost instead delays service receipt and deters probation officers and CBOs from referring youth to needed mental health services. This is further exacerbated by significant delays in clinical evaluations at the Family Guidance Centers in each county. One CBO representative in Honolulu reported that, under the current processes, it can take up to a year for a youth to be connected to a provider. In Maui, a probation officer noted, "If you're lucky your wait looks about four months right now." On more rural islands, the problem is worse.

While there may be available but underutilized mental health services, there does appear to be a true gap in the availability of mental health services beyond MST or treatment for youth with serious emotional or behavioral disturbances. Stakeholders report a lack of family and individual counseling services, which are generally outside CAMHD's charge. Moreover, given the overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian youth in the family court system and the well-documented relationship between that overrepresentation and historical and cultural trauma, the lack of Native Hawaiian providers limits the ability of the system of care to respond effectively to youths' needs.[16] This issue, too, is magnified in more rural areas. As a provider from Hana noted, "In areas like Hana where we are predominantly Native Hawaiian, Native Hawaiian practitioners, we don't have any."

There are also very limited inpatient mental health services for youth. Stakeholders on islands other than Oʻahu expressed that they do not have facilities for youth who are in crisis, with one stakeholder in Hawaiʻi County specifically noting, "we don't have anything" to send youth to on the Big Island. Parole staff explained that there were three inpatient mental health facilities that served youth in the entire state, but one closed and another was absorbed by a hospital with a difficult history of contracting with OYS. As one mental health provider who works with court-involved youth put it, "It is almost impossible to get someone signed off for [assisted community treatment], or guardianship, like serious care."

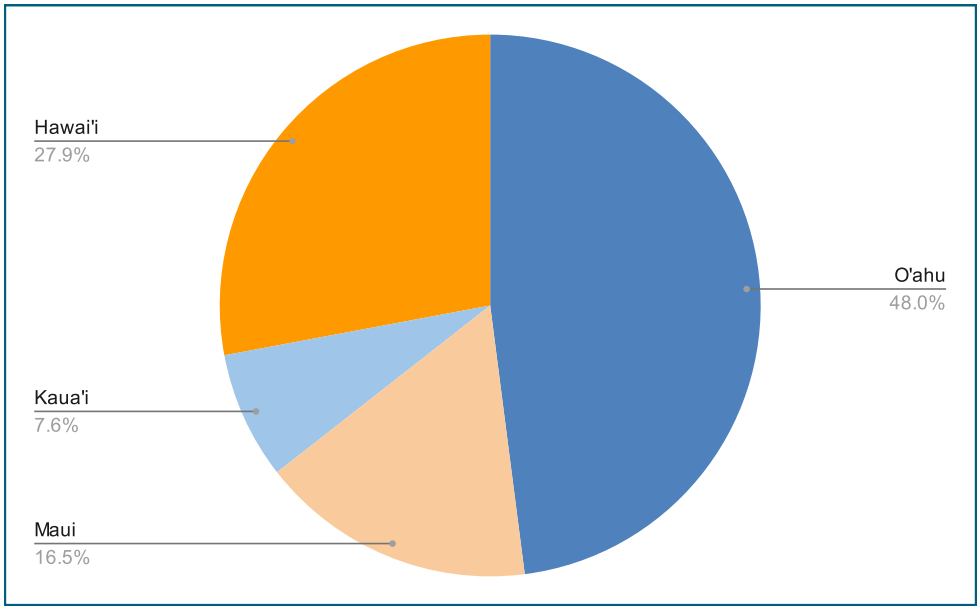
16. There is a large and growing body of research on the relationship between historical trauma, colonialism, and Native Hawaiian overrepresentation in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, as well as on the importance of Hawaiian practices, values, and practitioners in leading healing services. See, for example, Ke ala i ka Mauliola: Native Hawaiian Youth Experiences with Historical Trauma, The Native Hawaiian Justice Task Force Report, and Conceptualizing a New System of Care in Hawaiʻi for Native Hawaiians and Substance Use.

Services Outside of Oʻahu

The vast majority of both OYS and non-OYS-funded services for youth and families in Hawaiʻi are based in Oʻahu, especially in the Honolulu area.[17] One OYS staff noted, "We are Oʻahu-centric. The trouble is that we [Oʻahu] have the greatest population and needs, so when we have limited resources, we want the biggest bang for our buck, so we focus them on Oʻahu." This service concentration on Oʻahu includes secure custodial facilities such as HYCF and the Detention Home, residential treatment centers such as Bobby Benson and Pearl Haven, and many community-based services. Data from OYS show that approximately half of all OYS-funded services are located in Honolulu County. (According to the Hawai'i Juvenile Justice System Crime Analysis for FY 2021-2023, slightly more than 60% of youth arrests occurred in Honolulu County.)

Staff from Oʻahu-based residential centers and stakeholders across Neighbor Islands noted the myriad challenges associated with sending youth to Oʻahu for both placements and treatment. In addition to limiting access to youths' families and communities, sending youth away from their homes limits integration of the community and residential services they receive, making it more difficult to plan for their reentry, and making the reentry experience more difficult for returning youth. As one Neighbor Island stakeholder put it, "When we reach out to get our students to the other side, or Oʻahu, that's breaking up one of our strengths, which is family." A key stakeholder on the Big Island said, "We send our girls to HYCF not because they are any danger to the community, but there is a wall there and they can not run. If we had a local option, we would not have to send them to HYCF on Oahu."

Figure 2. OYS Service Contracts by County, 2023 [18]



17. As acknowledged in the Limitations section of this report, this analysis only includes OYS-funded delinquency services. Services funded though other State and County agencies also constitute a large component of the youth-service system. Qualitative data indicate that these programs have a comparable geographic distribution.
18. This includes community-based and community-provided residential services. It does not include CBO-provided services at HYCF.

Staff from Oʻahu-based residential centers and stakeholders across Neighbor Islands noted the myriad challenges associated with sending youth to Oʻahu for both placements and treatment. In addition to limiting access to youths' families and communities, sending youth away from their homes limits integration of the community and residential services they receive, making it more difficult to plan for their reentry, and making the reentry experience more difficult for returning youth. As one Neighbor Island stakeholder put it, "When we reach out to get our students to the other side, or Oʻahu, that's breaking up one of our strengths, which is family." A key stakeholder on the Big Island said, "We send our girls to HYCF not because they are any danger to the community, but there is a wall there and they can not run. If we had a local option, we would not have to send them to HYCF on O'ahu."

The concentration of community-based services on Oʻahu is also a challenge. On one Neighbor Island, a provider recalled relying on virtual family counseling services: "If you want drug treatment, you have to go to Oʻahu. If our kids or families need any intensive in-home services, that has to be on Zoom, which is not ideal." On another island, a judge noted that the limited availability of services forces them to use a "cookie-cutter approach" that is not tailored to the specific needs of youth.

While it is true that the Hawaiian population is concentrated on the Island of Oʻahu, which therefore requires a greater number of service investments, when youth from Neighbor Islands have to be sent to Oʻahu to receive services, the State is not getting the best return on its investment. The State is spending a lot of money transporting and housing Neighbor Island youth on Oʻahu when they run out of services in their home communities. According to data from the Oʻahu Probation Administration, which runs the Hale Hoʻomalu Juvenile Detention Facility, there were 39 admissions of youth from Kauaʻi, Maui, or Hawaiʻi Counties in fiscal year (FY) 2022 and in FY 2023. There were 27 youth admissions from the same counties in FY 2024. More than half of these admissions were youth from Hawaiʻi County. In FY 2023, there were 33 total youth confined to HYCF of whom 16 were from Neighbor Islands, including 4 from Maui County and 12 from Hawai'i County. It is worth noting that Hawai'i County accounts for over one-third of all HYCF confinements, despite accounting for fewer than 20% of youth arrests and 28% of all petitions.

"We send our girls to HYCF not because they are any danger to the community, but there is a wall there and they can not run. **If we had a local option, we would not have to send them to HYCF on O'ahu**."

Mentorship Programs

Probation officers and judicial officials from all islands expressed a desire for more mentorship programs. Hale Kipa is highly regarded and was cited by various stakeholders as having great mentorship programs that go above and beyond to meet the needs of youth and families. One judge shared that the organization would do more than just check in on the kids: "[The Hale Kipa mentor] was great, they picked kids up from school and took them to surfing lessons or wherever they needed to be." However, this service no longer exists on their island as the increasing cost of living made it difficult to maintain necessary staffing levels with limited funds.

Currently and formerly system-involved youth whom NICJR met with spoke openly about the value of mentors. One young man, who is now attending college after years in both the juvenile and criminal justice systems, said, "All I wanted as a kid was somebody who could understand me and had been through what I had been through. A role model that had been in my shoes."

It should be noted that many individuals and organizations step into the gap to provide that type of support for young people. However, for the hardest-to-reach young people, particularly those who have not had success in other programs, the level of mentorship required might be more intensive than what is available. There is a need for capacity building and training for intensive mentors, as well as compensation to recognize the value of this work and the time commitment required to carry it out effectively.

Services for Transition-Age Youth

Probation officers and service providers both regularly noted the gap in services for young people who had aged out of the family court system but lacked the preparedness or resources to live as independent adults. The vast majority of residential services are only funded to serve young people until they turn 18, in theory requiring providers to kick them out on their 18th birthdays (although many providers report allowing transition-age youth to stay longer and, often, covering the cost of housing these young people on their own). The same is true for most community-based services, whose contracts permit them to serve youth only as long as they are under the jurisdiction of the family court or OYS, in spite of the fact that the majority of these young people still need support after they turn 18. Staff from one CBO recounted dropping a young person off at a park because he had turned 18 and had nowhere else to go. Another stakeholder noted, "Unfortunately transition-age youth will not get a lot of services unless they reoffend and get directed to services from the adult system."

"Unfortunately **transition-age youth** will not get a lot of services unless they reoffend and get directed to services from the adult system."

Limited services for transition-age youth is a particularly acute problem for young people returning home from HYCF. Because young people who are placed at HYCF often remain there until they turn 18, they are frequently cut off from community-based services and supports upon reentry, despite this being one of the most critical times for those supports.

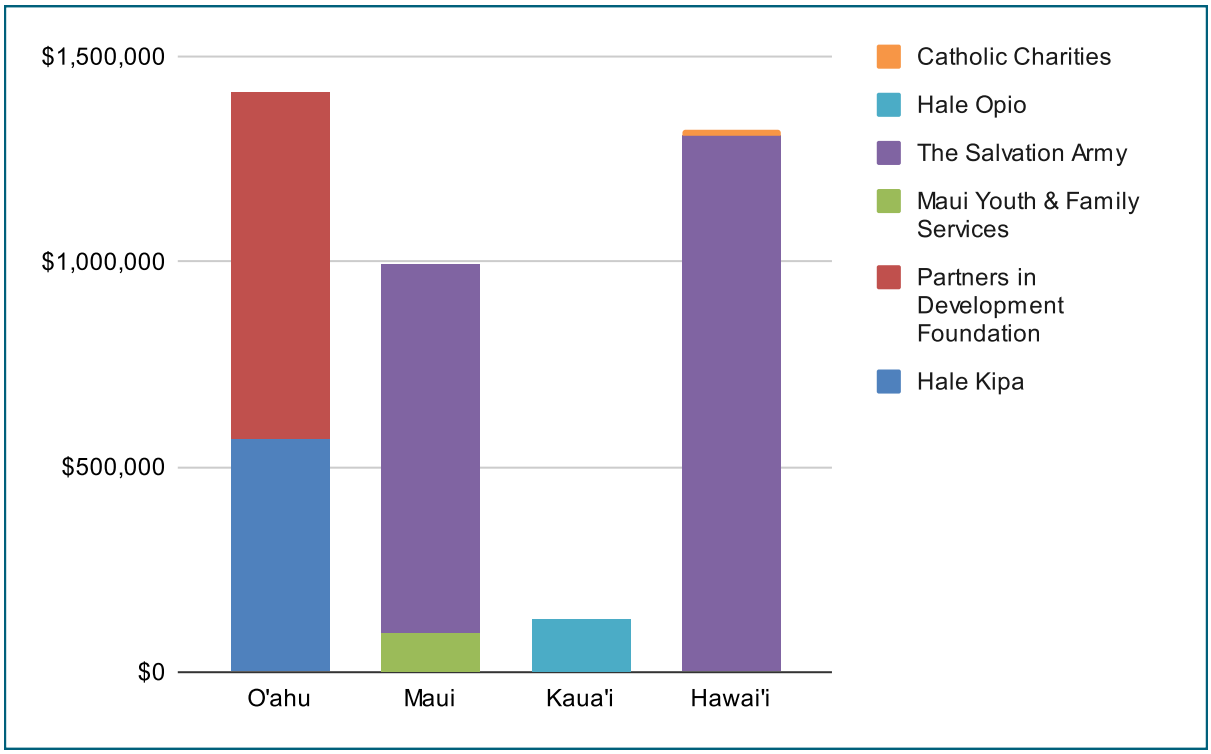
Housing Services for Youth

While there are several shelters available across the islands, many are not equipped to handle high-need youth. Probation officers on all islands say they sometimes have a hard time placing young people with mental health needs in shelters or residential services because they had previously run away or had behavioral issues that made them unwelcome. The inability or unwillingness of shelter and residential providers to house some higher-need youth also indicates a need for training and additional resources to increase their capacity to serve these youth. This is discussed further below, under Staff Training.

Housing needs are also particularly dire for transition-age youth, who have aged out of most State-funded services but are not financially prepared or mature enough to live on their own.

OYS contracts with shelter and independent residential living programs in every county, funding more than $1 million of residential services in all counties except Kauaʻi. However, many providers report difficulties retaining staff amid the high cost of living. Moreover, providers indicate that while OYS funding for these services may be high on a per youth basis, it does not fully account for the cost of staffing and insuring residential programs.

Figure 3. OYS Annual Funding for Community Residential Services, 2023



"A lot of our **'ohana live** way below the poverty line. **It's hard to be the best parent you should be when you are just trying to stay afloat**."

Family Support

Judges, probation officers, and community providers all expressed the need for a variety of supports for families, including assistance navigating family court and other systems, family counseling, and resources to meet basic needs. Judges and probation officers across the state described parents' difficulty understanding the court and supervision process as well as associated expectations for their children, thus making it harder for their children to successfully engage and maintain compliance. Financial constraints were also cited as a barrier to parent and child engagement, particularly in poor families in which parents work multiple jobs in addition to caring for several children. Finally, numerous providers noted parents' own inheritance of trauma and poverty, and their consequent challenges. As one stakeholder put it, "If the parents don't have the coping skills, then the 'ohana can be a detriment. I think that is from poverty. A lot of our 'ohana live way below the poverty line. It's hard to be the best parent you should be when you are just trying to stay afloat."

Transportation

Lack of transportation affects youth and families across islands. Youth often have a difficult time getting to services, programming, and court dates, and parents themselves often lack reliable transportation. Even adults who do have decent transportation struggle to bring youth to court dates, probation meetings, or services when, as noted above, they must work multiple jobs while also caring for children. School staff and probation officers also identified transportation as a contributing factor in truancy—a big issue with court-involved youth. This issue, like others, is exacerbated in rural areas, with some islands and some regions on all islands almost totally lacking usable public transportation. Locations with public transportation also face challenges in reliability; in 2024, for example, a shortage of school bus drivers caused temporary cuts in already limited bus lines, further exacerbating the transportation problem, especially on O'ahu and the Big Island.[19]

19. DOE suspends over 100 school bus routes amid driver shortage

Services for Youth from Small but Overrepresented Communities

In addition to the overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian youth, both Micronesian youth and transgender youth were repeatedly identified as being overrepresented in the delinquency system and as needing services tailored to their specific needs and experiences. While there are no reliable quantitative data on the representation of either group in the delinquency system, government and community stakeholders repeatedly spoke of both. The overrepresentation of Micronesian youth appears especially high in Honolulu County.

Young people and service providers both spoke of the need for culturally specific mentors who could provide positive adult role models for these youth. In addition, providers, judges, and probation officers noted that Micronesian youth and their families often need translation services, so that youth who are being processed in the family court or supervised by probation are not expected to serve as translators to explain the American delinquency system and process for their caregivers. These youth and families would also benefit from system navigation services delivered by staff who are fluent in Chuukese, Marshallese, and Pohnpeian. Further, stakeholders noted the limited number of community-based organizations operated by and serving the Micronesian population, despite their overrepresentation among the court-involved population.

Transgender youth are particularly overrepresented among young people who run away, as well as those who become commercially sexually exploited, which appears to fuel their disproportionate confinement in juvenile facilities.[20]

Disturbingly, even as many participants in this assessment spoke urgently of the need to better serve Micronesian and transgender youth, others casually used demeaning language to describe them, indicating the need for greater bias awareness, cultural competency, and training for staff at all levels.

Procurement of Services

OYS contract specialists, like almost everyone involved in Hawai'i's youth service delivery system, conveyed a strong commitment to their work supporting young people across the state. Moreover, despite the seemingly bureaucratic nature of contracting and procurement, they understood the unique value of their work in supporting the youth system of care.

As one OYS staff person explained, "I want our office to be really innovative, especially filling the service gaps by thinking about what services fill those gaps and expand the service delivery availability. We try to focus on idea generation and having an innovative mindset… I really see things moving upstream—we can contribute to that continuum as it relates to prevention of juvenile justice involvement, family court involvement, incarceration." Despite this approach, there are challenges with the procurement process, including in service planning, contracting, and service delivery.

20. When NICJR visited HYCF in September 2023, two out of the six girls were transgender.

Limited County-Level Input in Service Planning

County-level stakeholders, including family court employees and community-based providers, expressed their desire to provide more input into the services that are being procured through OYS. One judge asked, "Why don't we have a connection with the Office of Youth Services, when we are with these kids all the time? And who knows even more so is our probation officers. What we should do is get together and say, 'Hey, what are the needs on [your island]?'"

OYS staff also recognized the opportunity for better communication and coordination, noting that their own capacity issues limit their ability to engage locally as much as they want to: "There are so many different program areas that we're responsible for. We need time to research, go out and see what they do. We need time to talk to these providers so we can understand their services…We need to build in more sustainability—having the time to sit down with our providers and make sure they have a plan to build up their capacity, hire staff, etc." Notably, OYS has 30% fewer Program Specialists and half as many clerical staff compared to 15 years ago, even as the Office has shifted much of its work towards community-based service delivery and taken on additional contract-related responsibilities.[21]

Burdensome Contracting Process

As with many government procurement processes and limited by procurement law and administrative rules, the process for contracting with OYS is bureaucratic and complex. Organizations that have worked with OYS described challenges with contracting, reporting, and compliance. One provider noted that limited contract durations and uncertainty regarding extensions made it hard to hire and retain staff, saying, "It's scary to bring on staff if you don't know if you can keep them long term. If I can only fund the position for a year, can I afford to hire them, train them, all that stuff?" Another spoke of the amount of time staff spend managing contracts, noting this time "stops [our] ability to serve youth. [With] 175 contracts, directors have 28 reports due every month. It costs money to maintain a data system."

Smaller organizations with fewer staff struggle even more with complex applications and, if they are awarded contracts, strict compliance management requirements. This disproportionately affects rural organizations, organizations on Neighbor Islands, and organizations run by Native Hawaiians—all areas in which stakeholders reported service gaps.

---

21. Since 2007, OYS' responsibilities have increased to include additional contract services for a full continuum of care for at-risk youth and Grant-In-Aid (GIA) assignments, implement diversion programs (Act 201, SLH 2014), the Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center (SLH 2018), Youth Commission (SLH 2020), Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program (Act 130, SLH 2022), Develop a Pacific Islander Youth Program List (HCR 71, SLH 2023), Collaborate with the Family Court to identity strategies for partnering with community partners (HCR 72, SLH 2023), and other initiatives to improve collaboration, partnerships, and promote system changes for positive outcomes for youth.

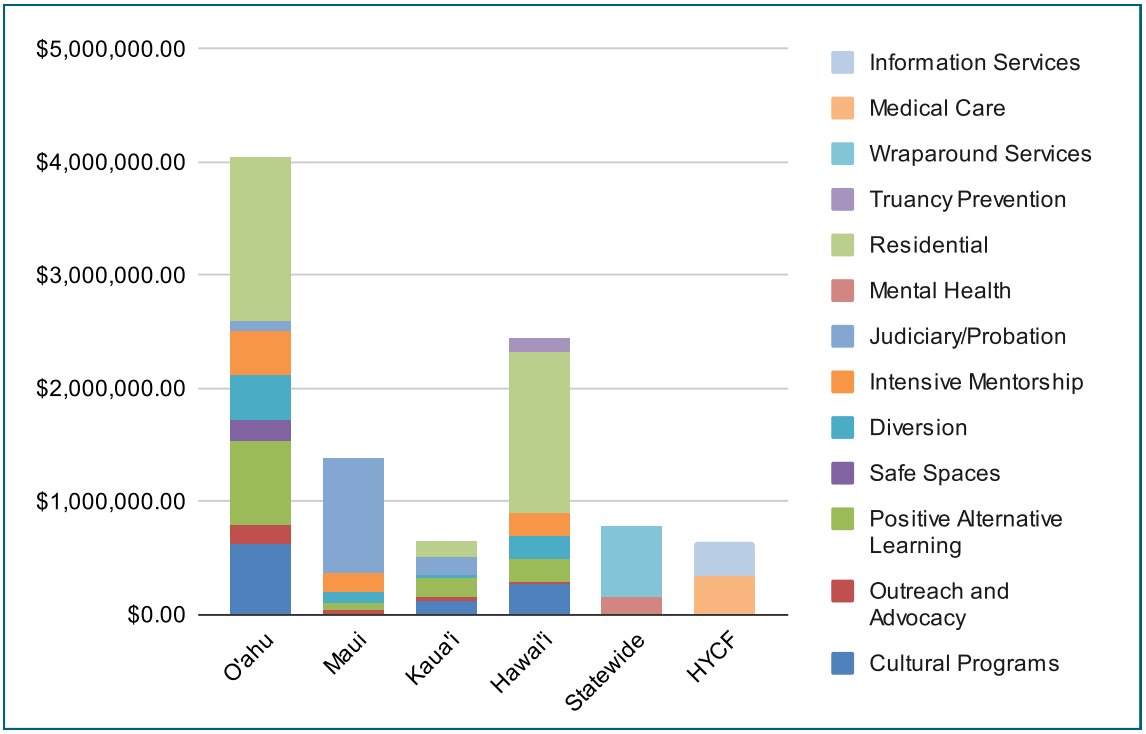
Insufficient Funding

Given the increasingly high cost of living across Hawai'i, CBOs struggle to hire, train, and retain staff at the salaries they can afford, as noted by the Hawai'i True Cost Coalition, a group of more than 70 nonprofits (including many youth-serving agencies) working to address the inadequacy of State funding for nonprofits tasked with providing services to residents across the islands.[22,23]

As discussed under Housing Services for Youth, above, in many cases the cost of services per youth may seem reasonable, but it fails to account for the larger infrastructure necessary to run an organization providing those services. These challenges are exacerbated for residential programs, which need to maintain minimum staffing around the clock in addition to paying for insurance and other requirements. Site visits to community and residential programming showed that many rely on run down equipment and materials, running from decrepit furniture to old, unreliable vehicles that break down regularly.

According to the contract matrix provided by OYS, the Office does fund a wide variety of services across the state, as well as at varying levels of support. On the low end, programs providing outreach and advocacy services in Hawai'i, Kaua'i, and Maui receive $27,500 to $33,000 per year, while funding for positive alternative learning services in Hawai'i County totals $200,000 per year, and in Honolulu County funding for these services totals $745,000 per year.

Figure 4. Annual Funding per Jurisdiction and Service Area, 2023



22. Hawai'i True Cost Coalition: About
23. As discussed below, this is also a challenge experienced by OYS and other public agencies across Hawai'i, which also struggle to hire and retain sufficient staff to provide needed services across the state.

Custodial Facilities

As Oʻahu is the only island in Hawaiʻi with juvenile detention facilities for youth, young people from Neighbor Islands must leave their families and communities when they are detained. This separation removes youth from their support systems, causing them to feel isolated.

Reform-Oriented Staff in Physical Buildings with a Traditionally Punitive Correctional Model

OYS contract specialists, like almost everyone involved in Hawaiʻi's youth service delivery sWhile meaningful strides have been made in transforming the Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center on the HYCF Campus, the facility where youth are held is still custodial and constrained by the physical characteristics of the building, which opened as a youth correctional facility in 1962. Nonetheless, there are a number of dedicated individual staff who are committed to working with young people and prioritizing programming, and who demonstrate competency in working with special populations, particularly girls and LGBTQI youth. When interviewed, young people spoke highly about their experiences with individual staff members, as well as the benefits of the incentive program and vocational training. However, young people also reported that there are times when they are unable to participate in programming, often due to staffing challenges.

HYCF facility leadership is committed and open to reform, with an interest in establishing external partnerships with community organizations; seeking input from national organizations; and incorporating standards of correctional practice such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a behavior management system focused on providing intensive supports and preventing challenging behaviors, over the more reactive, restrictive, and punitive behavior management systems that have historically dominated juvenile correctional practice. However, there is some inconsistency between the reform orientation that exists at the leadership level and within individual staff at all levels of the organization, and a need for more cross-training on trauma and youth development.

The relatively newly constructed Hale Hoʻomalu Juvenile Detention Center (aka, the Detention Home), integrated into the juvenile courts in Kapolei on Oʻahu, is another facility that has a reform-oriented leadership in a physical environment that looks more consistent with an adult correctional model.

Inefficiency of Housing a Small Number of Youth, Particularly from Neighbor Islands, in Detention and Prison

The dramatic reduction in custodial populations in both HYCF and the Detention Home has led to a highly inefficient staffing situation, where there are more staff on site than there are youth, as noted by multiple stakeholders: "Our facilities are overstaffed compared to the number of kids.... We can't cut [employees] based on the [youth] population, so we have three times as many staff as kids." While HYCF staff positions have decreased more than 20% in the last five years, from 118 in FY2019 to 93 full-time equivalents in FY2024,[24,25] there are still far more staff than there are youth, highlighting the inefficiency of the facility model.

At the same time, the profile of the youth incarcerated at HYCF suggests opportunities for further population reductions and underscores the need for comprehensive and effective community-based programs in Hawai'i, particularly on Neighbor Islands. Even as the custodial population has reduced, few youth confined at HYCF are there for serious or violent offenses. From FY 2021-2023, only 20 out of 84 youth confined to HYCF—or fewer than a quarter—were there for violent offenses. Several youth come from islands outside of O'ahu, have mental health needs, or have been sent to HYCF because they failed out of other programs, indicating an opportunity to further reduce the number of youth held in the correctional system, *assuming appropriate alternatives* (both residential and community based) existed. As noted above, of the 33 youth placed at HYCF in FY 2023, half were from Neighbor Islands, the vast majority of whom were from Hawai'i County.

Likewise, while the number of youth housed at the Detention Home has also been reduced over time as a result of statewide reform and concerted efforts on the part of Honolulu County's Family Court, interviews with stakeholders—including some of those working inside the Detention Home—indicate that these numbers could be further reduced with more robust community-based services in place.

> "Our facilities are overstaffed compared to the number of kids.... We can't cut [employees] based on the [youth] population, **so we have three times as many staff as kids**."

24. Hawaii Department of Human Services 2019 Supplemental Budget
25. Hawaii Department of Human Services 2023-2025 Budget

Staff Recruitment, Retention, and Training

Reform-Oriented Staff in Physical Buildings with a Traditionally Punitive Correctional Model

As noted above, staffing challenges have a significant impact on Hawai'i's system of care for youth. Salaries are often not commensurate with the high cost of living in Hawai'i, which leads to issues with staff recruitment and retention. There are a number of unfilled positions across OYS and the judiciary as well as within CBOs, limiting each entity's ability to operate critical programming for youth. At the time of this analysis, OYS had no accountant or finance manager on staff due to difficulty hiring for those roles in the State's salary range. Numerous government and community stakeholders spoke of challenges created by the staffing gaps in State and County youth-serving agencies, including social workers, case managers, and other essential roles. As one stakeholder noted, "There's such a shortage of mental health and substance abuse providers… we can't keep staff because the wages don't match the work or the cost of living."

Amid the declining population of youth in HYCF and the changing staffing needs of the facility, OYS's staffing structure and funded positions would benefit from evolving in response to a reconstituted youth-serving system that has increasingly shifted away from facilities and into communities. In this context, positions like accountants, contracts and procurement, social workers, and others are of increasing importance. The ability to recruit and retain talent for these roles is critically important.

Staff Training

There is no coordinated, cross-system training in Hawai'i's system of care for court-involved youth. While staff across the system expressed views that aligned with the principles of positive youth development, few reported receiving training in these principles or associated practices.[26] At HYCF and in many probation departments, training requirements focus on security and compliance issues, while staff must proactively seek out (and sometimes seek funding for) training on youth development topics. As one senior probation staff noted, "Any trainings or education [probation officers] have is because we've just picked it up along the way. There are no standards—we require a few trainings but no ongoing education. And trauma training is not required."

Multiple stakeholders spoke of the need for more training within and across practitioners, both to build their own capacity to work with youth and to ensure a common body of knowledge and practice. The absence of cross training means that practitioners with different types of expertise often do not understand the expertise of their colleagues in other areas, leading to frustration

26. One notable exception to this was family court judges, many of whom referenced trainings about youth development and juvenile justice reform that have affected their approach to family court.

that ultimately limits collaboration. For example, probation officers and judges expressed frustration with mental health providers who resisted serving high-needs youth, while mental health providers reported concerns with family court actors who assume that all of their youth have clinical mental health needs.

Insufficient Coordination Across System Actors

The lack of coordination, including cross-agency case management, among stakeholders, including community-based organizations, public agencies like OYS, and youth and families, has resulted in disjointed service delivery and missed chances to address the needs of young people.

Despite a renewed HYCF focus on reentry planning, both they and other stakeholders highlighted ongoing challenges coordinating sufficient services for youth leaving the facility, often due to coordination issues between multiple government agencies charged with serving those youth. One HYCF employee noted, "Everything is very siloed. DH, DOE, DHS–one kid will have five case plans with five public agencies. At minimum, we should have data sharing so that when we come together, we have one plan for the youth.... As State agencies, we get too territorial. We have to learn to share information and the purpose of what we're doing. It's like pulling hairs just to get an assessment that already exists in other agencies."

As a result, families have difficulty navigating these systems. One stakeholder emphasized, "Families and young adults have to go to multiple different services... we see families that have heavy mistrust because they haven't been engaged effectively."

Coordination challenges also exist among service providers. Many CBOs interviewed as part of this assessment reported being unaware of programming offered by other participating organizations in their own counties; multiple staff and organizations used focus groups and convenings for this project to meet each other and exchange needed information.

"Families and young adults have to go to multiple different services... we see **families that have heavy mistrust because they haven't been engaged effectively**."

Limited Use of Data to Inform Decision-Making

The quality, comprehensiveness, and usability of basic administrative data on Hawai'i's delinquency system and the young people therein are insufficient, limiting the use of data to drive decision-making. As noted in the Data and Methods section of this report, there are multiple statewide reports that could and should shed light on the delinquency system and process, were it not for a high volume of missing data and disconnectedness between analyses of different steps in the juvenile justice process. "The analysis is a point-in-time analysis, but [each step] is analyzed independently of one another. There's no data based on a cohort or analysis of how someone moves through the system," explained one person involved in the reports. Another person noted, "Race/ethnicity is very [frequently] missing, and that's been a huge issue forever, particularly in certain counties. I think there's a separate racial disproportionality analysis done through a different contract, but for some reason that data is not put into the JJIS system. The race/ethnicity data gets worse as the kids move through the system."[27]

In addition, data collection, ownership, analysis, and reporting are fragmented across a wide variety of departments and people, which means there is no holistic, shared vision for the use of these data or the reports that are derived from them. This is particularly unfortunate given the substantial effort put forth by the many people who use these data at various points from data collection to reporting, as well as their collective desire to use data to support court-involved youth. When asked about the goals of some of the State's juvenile delinquency reports, one person involved noted, "There is no clear 'why are we doing this? But slowly changes are happening [in the delinquency system]. When we started this report, we saw status offenses in detention, but that has changed over time. There is progress that has been made and changes that I've seen over the years, so that gives me some hope that the report is being used."

The majority of delinquency system data collected and reported in Hawai'i comes from JJIS. While this should make for robust, comprehensive juvenile justice data, stakeholders report limited communication and collaboration between the justice system agencies that enter data about the youth they interact with and the Crime Prevention and Justice Assistance Division (CPJAD) of the Department of the Attorney of the General, which manages JJIS. When asked about the JJIS data from their counties, multiple representatives from county-level agencies expressed confusion. In one county, a probation leader had never seen any of the statewide reports before and could not figure out who entered petition or adjudication data for their county: "This [data] looks like it must come from [our office], but I have no idea who enters it and I don't think it is accurate."

27. The Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS) is a statewide database designed to link data from each county's family court, police department, and prosecuting attorney, as well as HYCF.

Better collaboration around data entry and quality assurance, priority analyses, and reporting processes would go a long way toward improving the quality of the JJIS data; however, the data system itself is outdated and not user friendly, which also inherently complicates any efforts to increase the use thereof. The system does not reflect current standard practices in user-centered (or UX) case management designs, with interface and interactions designed to be intuitive and efficient for users of all levels, allowing them to easily navigate, access information, and complete tasks within the system.

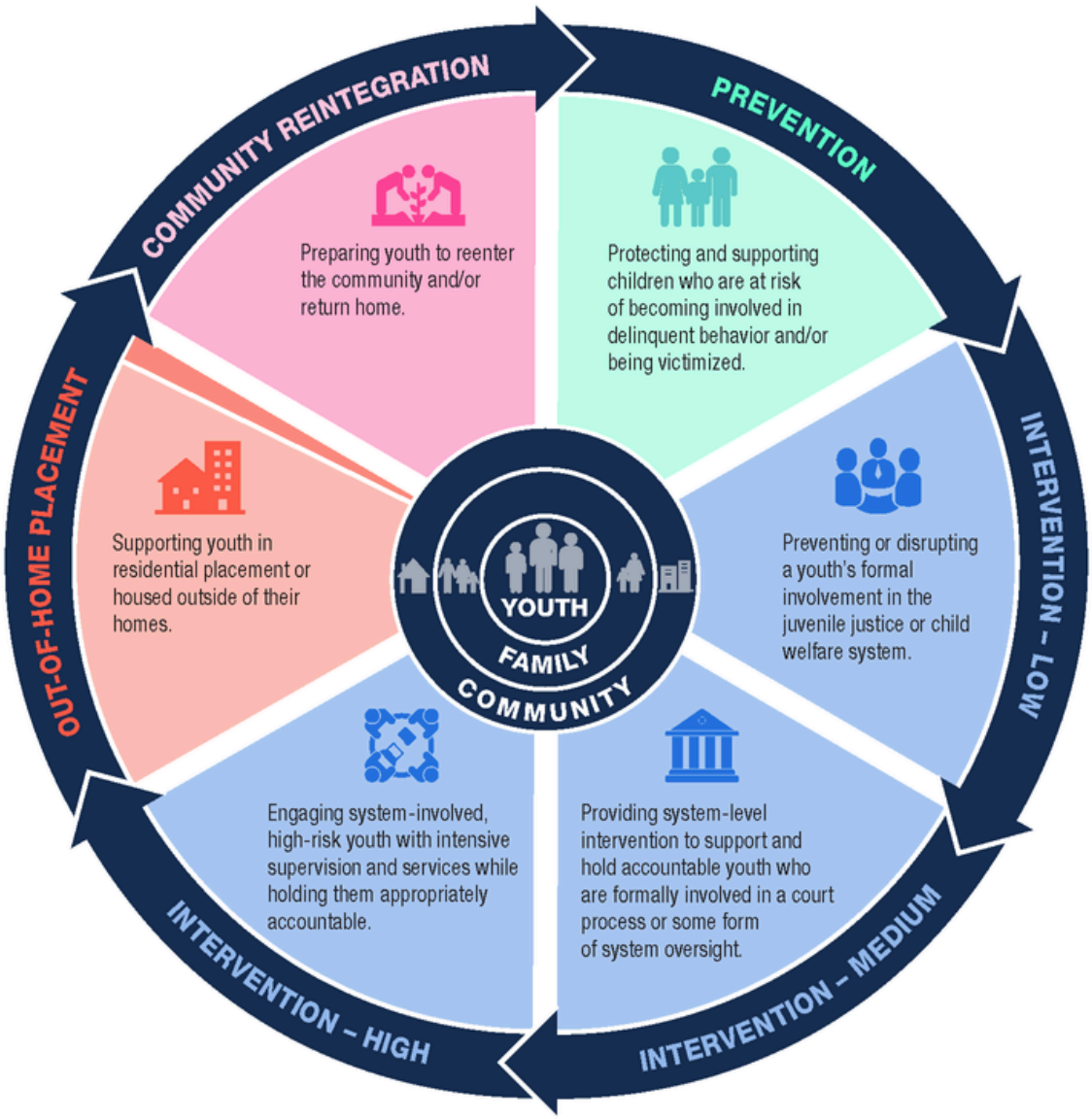
County-level data systems are also outdated or nonexistent. In the Oʻahu First Circuit Family Court, which accounts for the largest share of petitions and adjudications and oversees all detentions in the State, the Probation Department lacks a case management system, relying on an outdated court management system that tracks court dates, minutes, etc. but does not allow for case notes, service referrals, or youth and program outcomes.[28] Across the state, probation officers complained about case notes, most of which are handwritten and kept in paper files; CBOs reported receiving no data from probation about youth referred to their services, while probation officers and judges complained that they had no way to track service receipt, quality, or outcomes.

28. It is worth noting that the Court's statistician and JDAI project manager are committed to maximizing what is available and work hard to identify and extract relevant data from this system.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's "Continuum of Care for Communities" document describes a framework for effective youth justice services.[29] This framework has been shown to improve youth outcomes and reduce reoffending, thereby advancing public safety. The graphic below reflects the process for providing services to youth impacted at each stage of the continuum.

Figure 5. OJJDP Continuum of Care for Communities



29. OJJDP Continuum of Care for Communities, 2024

In an effective continuum of care, the majority of youth would be served through prevention and early/low intervention services, with the number of youth decreasing in each stage of the continuum. Given the high cost of incarcerating a young person versus the lower cost of intensive community-based supervision, this approach is not only beneficial from a public safety standpoint but has long-term economic benefits.

Relatedly, NICJR promotes the implementation of a positive youth justice system organized around six principles:[30]

1. Minimize youth contact with the juvenile justice system.
2. Partner with youth and families to develop and share ownership of case plans.
3. Community-based organizations should take the lead in providing services.
4. Build on youth assets and provide services to address needs.
5. Provide exceptional care to those who do need system involvement.
6. Reinvest cost savings into the communities in which youth live.

As noted earlier in this report, Hawai'i has made great strides in implementing components of a positive youth justice system and developing a continuum of care for youth, evidenced by the significant reduction in the number of young people incarcerated in the state, the broad infrastructure of community-based organizations, and the commitment of youth justice leaders and State agencies to reform. However, the unique geographical landscape of Hawai'i (comprising several major islands) poses a particular challenge to the development of a comprehensive continuum of care in each county. Yet the social and fiscal costs of not having such a continuum, in forcing the most vulnerable and at-risk young people to access deeper end services only on O'ahu, are clear.

The following recommendations are based on the components of the positive youth justice system model, the continuum of care framework, and interviews with stakeholders across all counties of Hawai'i.

30. Developing a Positive Youth Justice System

Recommendation 1: Decentralize the Continuum of Care Across All Counties and Islands

Increase Funding for and Availability of Community-Based Services Outside of Oʻahu

As noted in Findings, there is a concentration of resources and services on Oʻahu, particularly in the urban areas of the island. As a result, young people from Neighboring Islands, particularly in rural areas, face challenges in accessing critical services, including substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment and/or residential care, and rigorous youth development programming. As a result, young people are sometimes sent to detention or the HYCF not because of a concern for public safety, but because of a lack of other effective options closer to their homes. This not only runs counter to what research indicates is best for young people and their families but is an inefficient utilization of resources. (As noted previously, approximately half of the youth confined at HYCF are from outside of Honolulu County.) Each county should have a continuum of care in their community so that youth can receive equitable prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation services closer to their homes and families.

Hawaiʻi has already demonstrated a commitment to serving youth in their communities by limiting the number of young people in custody, reducing youth incarceration by over 80% over the past two decades. The State can successfully serve the remaining highest-needs youth on their own islands by bolstering community-based partnerships. While OYS serves fewer youth in custody, it continues to serve youth in community programs. As incarceration rates continue to decline, State funding can and should be reinvested into the community providers to serve youth at home.

Services that should be augmented at the county level include:

- Transportation
- Supports for special populations, including LGBTQI youth, girls, and the Micronesian population
- Intensive mentoring
- Community-based mental health care (see below for a more comprehensive recommendation on mental health)

Increase Investment in Community-Run Residential Programs

Community-based residential facilities across Hawai'i must be funded at substantially higher levels to allow organizations to hire staff at a livable wage, increase retention, and improve facility resources and programming. Residential facilities have been completely shut down in some counties due to funding reductions and because there were no staff to supervise youth, while operating centers may have to turn youth away because they cannot provide care for high-needs youth. The Big Island, the second largest in population, especially needs increased residential services.

Residential programs must receive enough funding to offer salaries that attract staff willing to undergo training to provide therapeutic services to justice-involved youth. OYS already partners with successful programs operating across the state. These, and other emergency shelter and residential programs, could be better supported and utilized both by ensuring that contract levels allow for sufficient staffing, and by providing staff and leadership of the programs additional support and training to work effectively with higher-needs youth. Emergency shelter providers, whose contracts pay by reimbursement for fee for services, have particularly acute provider and funding needs.

Ensure Availability of Home-like Placements on All Islands and Transition Away from the Use of HYCF and Detention Home

Youth who need residential placements should be served in small, home-like facilities in their communities, to the greatest extent possible. Community providers should offer facilities with a range of secure treatment and non-secure therapeutic housing options. Staff with extensive training could manage the rehabilitation of youth in home-like environments where they are closer to their families and community. These can be used to place youth who have been adjudicated or to step down youth coming out of HYCF.

There are similar models across the nation. New York City's Administration for Children's Services operates a model called Close to Home,[31] which places youth in either a secure or non-secure track as determined by a judge. Located in all five boroughs, Close to Home offers placements for post-adjudicated youth in sites close to their own families and communities. In 2023, Close to Home had fewer than 50 youth in its facilities, which are operated by community-based organizations.

31. NYC Administration for Children's Services: Close to Home

Non-secure placement (NSP) group homes house post-adjudicated youth, offering medical, mental health, and substance abuse services tailored to their needs. Youth attend school from the facilities and can freely participate in extracurricular activities inside and outside of the home. Limited-secure placements (LSP) house post-adjudicated youth who have been determined to "present higher risks" than those placed in NSP. Run by nonprofits with the capacity to handle higher-needs youth, LSP sites also offer medical, mental health, and substance abuse services. New York City also operates non-secure detention facilities, which are also run by nonprofit community providers and offer similar services to young people pre-adjudication.

Both Close to Home and non-secure detention homes are small (with approximately 12 youth per location and often housing far fewer), located in residential neighborhoods, and designed to look as home-like and normative as possible, distinct from larger, more traditional correctional facilities and environments. The City does also still operate two secure detention facilities that only house youth who have been accused of serious violent offenses.[32]

---

32. NYC Administration for Children's Services: Secure Detention

Recommendation 2: Build on the Community-Based System of Care Through Improvements to Service Planning and Contracting Processes

Implement Service Planning Sessions with Stakeholders from Each Jurisdiction

OYS should host planning sessions with the judiciary, probation, CBOs, and youth and families in each county every three years to identify the needs of local youth and develop requests for proposals (RFPs). Each jurisdiction should indicate what services they need based on their work at the county level. This type of county-focused asset mapping work could not only better tap into local expertise about gaps and needs in available services, but it could also serve to better connect and identify existing community organizations for better referrals and utilizations.

Make Changes to Contracting and Procurement Process

Utilize Pass-Through Entities and Technical Assistance

OYS should incentivize larger CBOs to subcontract with smaller organizations that may not have the resources or ability to administer an OYS grant on their own. This is especially true in rural areas where organizations have very few staff. Larger organizations should function as both a pass-through entity and a technical assistance provider. This allows smaller organizations to grow their capacity and become competitive for OYS contracts in the future. This may also encourage organizations providing similar services to streamline and partner, as was seen with Maui Behavioral Health Resources.

In one example of a successful pass-through structure, the Washington, DC, youth justice system created the DC YouthLink initiative in 2008 to increase and improve community-based services for system-involved youth.[33] Specifically, the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) contracted with two community-based organizations, the East of the River Clergy-Police Community Partnership (ERCPCP) and the Progressive Life Center (PLC), to broker community-based services for DYRS youth. ERCPCP and PLC each served as a care coordinating entity, funder, and monitor of a network of local providers, known as a Regional Service Coalition, and DYRS monitored the services provided to young people through ERCPCP and PLC. Through these coalitions, community-based organizations provided a continuum of services to court-involved youth, including helping to reintegrate youth back into their communities after being held in custody through services and supports to the youth and their families.[34]

---

33. DC Youth Link
34. This initiative was disbanded following a change in administration at DYRS.

Similarly, the State of Maryland is currently developing an initiative called "Safer, Stronger Together" to braid the funding streams of three different youth serving agencies and make neighborhood-based investments in the areas with the highest rates of youth incarceration, using a nonprofit intermediary to provide pass-through funding and target smaller organizations that often do not receive government funding.

Allow CBOs to Serve Youth up to Age 24

Currently, the State and most community providers stop serving youth once they turn 18, but youth who are aging out of HYCF, for example, need access to services in the community to prevent them from becoming involved in the adult system. The State should increase funding of programs for transition-age youth, including transitional housing, substance abuse treatment, and mental health care. There are currently transitional residential options for Hawaiian youth, but many of these programs do not serve youth who have aged out of the delinquency system. State funding can expand these programs to serve transition-age youth, allowing lengthened support for youth to learn important life skills and prevent long-term system involvement.

In several states, including California and Washington, legislative changes have allowed juvenile courts and facilities to continue to supervise and serve young adults who entered the delinquency system as minors until those young people turn 24 (California) or 25 (Washington).[35,36] While ongoing confinement or supervision of delinquency-involved young people should be used sparingly, these laws do ensure that young people are not "cut loose" unprepared only because they have reached the age of majority.

Increase Funding Levels and Contract Lengths

As noted earlier in the report, duration and funding level of contracts can determine an organization's ability to effectively deliver the services it is contracted to provide. Organizations need increased funding to hire staff at wages consistent with the local cost of living and the training and education required for the positions. CBOs report high vacancies and staff turnover because they are unable to offer attractive salaries, and that the uncertainty of future contracts undermines their ability to invest sufficiently in adequate staffing over time.

The State of Hawai'i should ensure that government contract rates are set at the true cost of providing the service, covering the full program costs and the overhead required to run a nonprofit organization, accounting for increases in cost of living. This recommendation is consistent with the recommendations of the Hawai'i True Cost Coalition. Additionally, the State should increase the number of contracts with a six-year timeframe, including base contracts and renewal options, to provide greater stability for long-term planning.

---

35. California Welfare and Institutions Code § 875
36. Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR) to Age 25

Adjust Contract Funding Structure to Support Smaller Organizations

Smaller organizations, which often offer more culturally relevant programs, struggle to cope with the lengthy wait times and delays that are common in government contracting. For example, CBOs reported that the State's quarterly reimbursement payments are often made 30 days after invoices are submitted, meaning they receive payment four months after work has been performed. The State should restructure contracts to make reimbursement more efficient.

In Oakland, CA, the City changed its contracting process to address this challenge. The City now provides an advance quarterly payment at the beginning of the grant period. The contracted organization then reduces its quarterly invoices by one-fourth over the next year to repay the advance. This allows for both upfront payment and gradual, easy repayment of the advance.[37]

Recommendation 3: Increase Access to Mental Health and Mentorship Services

Address Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services

Streamline the Process for Accessing CAMHD Services

Officially, few barriers exist to youth accessing mental health services. Med-QUEST, which provides Medicaid coverage in Hawai'i, pays for services for Medicaid-eligible youth; private insurance covers some of those who are not Medicaid eligible; and OYS has a direct contract to cover the cost of services for other youth. In addition, CAMHD funds services for youth with serious mental health issues as well as MST services for court-involved youth who do not have serious mental health issues.

Despite this, probation officers and community-based providers noted difficulty accessing mental health services, even as some mental health providers reported unused service slots. Taken together, this indicates that the administrative processes for accessing services are significantly inefficient and unclear. CAMHD should work directly with the family court in each county to ensure that probation officers understand the services available and how to access them. Given the existence of multiple funding streams, CAMHD and OYS should also work together to implement a treatment-on-demand, or "care first" model, whereby youth are placed into services first and payment eligibility is determined later.

In addition, CAMHD should work with OYS and the family courts to deliver trainings on adolescent mental health, trauma, and youth development, as a means of establishing a common understanding of these issues and building relationships to facilitate service linkage. (See additional staff development and training recommendations below.)

---

37. Oakland Fund for Children and Youth Grantee Manual

Invest in Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services in Community Residential Settings

Each island should have residential programs with culturally attuned practitioners and curricula to treat young people who have experienced trauma as well as the capacity to serve youth who have high acuity mental health needs.

The State should also expand transitional housing for young people with behavioral and mental health needs, and therapeutic foster care placements for this population. Local providers should be incentivized to work with higher needs populations and given additional training and capacity building supports to work more effectively with youth with complex needs.

Invest in Culturally Relevant Cognitive Behavioral Services

As part of the contracting changes discussed above, OYS should prioritize both clinical mental health services provided by Native Hawaiian practitioners and cognitive behavioral services provided via trained credible messengers (described below). While mentorship cannot replace clinical services for youth with serious mental health disorders, nor address all of the ecological drivers that lead to delinquency, group and individual mentorship that uses a cognitive behavioral approach and is delivered by mentors with common life experiences has proven effective both across the United States and in other countries, including other Pacific Island communities.

Two US examples include: 1) NICJR's Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise, a trauma informed, culturally relevant, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) program designed for system-involved youth and young adults,[38] and 2) Rewire, a CBT program developed by the nonprofit organization Roca.[39]

Invest in Mentorship Services

Judges, probation officers, and residential providers all cited the importance of mentorship for youth. Several well-loved programs already exist, but they do not operate on every island, and they often have limited caseloads. In particular, youth do not have access to credible messengers, or people with similar lived experiences to them who can provide positive guidance and leadership. Notably, individuals who were previously incarcerated as youth in Hawai'i expressed a desire to be a part of a credible messenger program to support youth in ways they wish they had been supported.

Credible messenger mentorship models have been successful across that nation with high-risk populations. In Alameda County, CA, for example, the Probation Department partners with The Mentoring Center (TMC), which provides an "intentional, structured, systemic, cognitive behavior and corrective intervention" mentorship program called Transformative Mentorship. Their intensive service model involves individual mentorship and a curriculum-based, long-term group

38. Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise
39. Rewire CBT by Roca

program, both of which are led by mentors who come from the same neighborhoods as the youth they serve and have similar life experiences. Multiple evaluations have found Transformative Mentorship to reduce young people's contact with the delinquency system, and TMC now provides training and technical assistance to other mentorship programs nationwide.[40]

In 2024, the State of Maryland's Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) launched a similarly intensive credible messenger mentorship program called The Thrive Academy, which focuses specifically on young people at high risk for involvement in firearm violence. As part of this program, DJS pairs system-involved youth with local CBOs that provide intensive life coaching to the youth as well as support for the family. The life coaches employed by the CBOs are people from the same community as the youth, and they have similar lived experience. The life coach builds a positive and trusting relationship through daily communication with the youth and two to four times per week in-person engagement with the young person and their family. Eventually, the life coach works with the youth and family to develop a Life Plan that identifies needed services, and they connect them to those wraparound services. Groups of Thrive Academy youth also participate in educational excursions that expose them to new environments and experiences, and youth are eligible to receive a monthly financial stipend as an incentive for achieving certain milestones.[41]

Recommendation 4: Improve Interagency Coordination

Facilitate Quarterly Service Coordination Meetings with Judges, Probation, Parole, and CBOs

Maui and Kauaʻi have implemented regular convenings of County and community stakeholders. Such meetings should be a regular practice on every island, with attendance by and coordinating support from OYS staff. OYS Community Liaisons in particular could be utilized more fully to coordinate information gathering at these sessions, allowing them to improve their own awareness of available services and referral processes while helping to better network the system overall. This knowledge should contribute to ongoing service planning.

Bolster Pre-Release Reentry Planning Meetings with HYCF, Parole, CBOs, and Families

Every stakeholder should be engaged with youth at each step of the process. Parole officers should be aware of youth being committed to HYCF at the beginning of their terms. Case planning for reentry should begin at this point, as well. Youth who are aging out of the system should be given ample time to transition back into their community before they age out of OYS Parole supervision. Families, youth, partner agencies engaged with the youth, and relevant CBOs should also be pulled into reentry meetings well before a young person's release date.

---

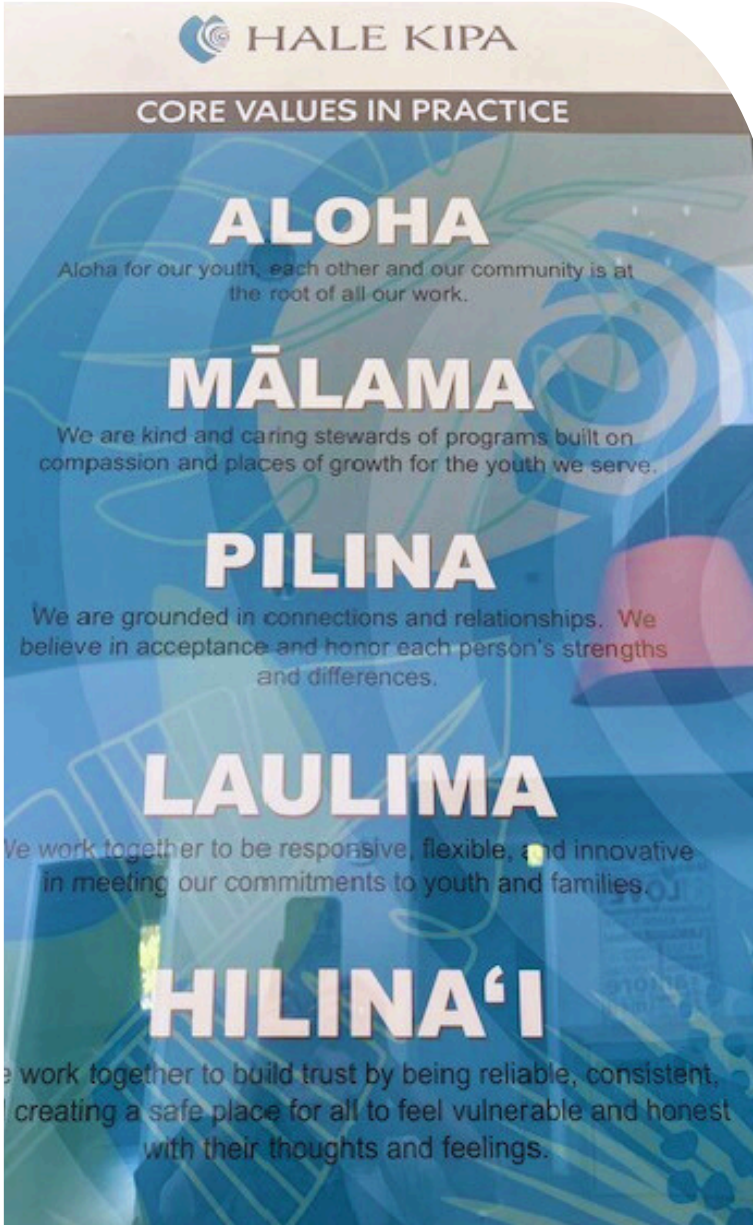
40. The Mentoring Center: Direct Service Programs
41. The Thrive Academy Honored by CJJA for Juvenile Justice Innovation

This coordination has been successfully implemented in other jurisdictions. For example, the Washington State Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) begins reentry planning for youth involved with the juvenile justice system within their first 30 days in custody. This "future plan" connects the care that the youth receives in custody to community-based resources. It also serves as a roadmap for reentry back into the community. This plan is developed by the youth and is written in the first person so the youth has ownership of their plan. While in custody, "reentry planning is a collaboration between the young person, family, friends, and [juvenile justice] staff who are committed to addressing identified risks, needs, and goals in the plan."[42] These stakeholders, along with community partners and service providers, work in collaboration to prepare for the youth's successful reentry, with a focus on: "health and safety, family/living arrangements, education, substance use, employment/vocation, peer group/friends, use of free time/recreation, and legal needs/requirements."

Fund Navigators to Improve Coordination with Other Government Agencies

Families need support to navigate the plethora of resources available and/or prescribed to them by the courts and probation. Many families are navigating the system for the first time, and Micronesian families may be doing so in a foreign language. Understanding eligibility requirements, completing forms, and gathering evidence to demonstrate eligibility for services like CAMHD support is difficult; successfully registering for services once approved is equally daunting.

System navigators can ensure that each youth receives speedy access to a wide range of services from CAMHD, the Department of Education (DOE), and even Child Welfare Services (CWS), while also promoting better interagency communication about individual youth and families who touch multiple public agencies and systems.



42. Washington State DCYF: Future Planning, Transition, and Reentry

Recommendation 5: Build on Successful Efforts to Identify and Leverage Local and National Philanthropic Funding

Building and strengthening relationships with local and national philanthropic organizations can bolster Hawai'i's Office of Youth Services. Collaborations with groups like Queen Lili'uokalani Trust and the Kellogg Foundation have already supported critical initiatives such as culturally informed programming and wraparound services. Lydia House, supported by the Queen Lili'uokalani Trust, is a drop-in center that offers youth essential resources like workforce development and mentorship, while Partners in Development Foundation (PIDF) provides land-based programming at the Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center. By deepening these relationships and fostering new collaborations, Hawai'i can build the capacity and sustainability of these critical programs.

Additionally, foundations that are already committed to Hawai'i can be partners in identifying other national funders that could invest in an ongoing, coordinated strategy to place Hawai'i at the forefront of culturally grounded youth justice transformation, particularly with a demonstrated commitment from the State to support this vision.

Recommendation 6: Invest in Staff Development and Training in Key Areas Related to Positive Youth Justice

A targeted investment in staff development and cross-training key agencies and organizations is essential. The Hawai'i Office of Youth Services and partner agencies should collaborate to implement (and co-fund) joint training for staff across HYCF, law enforcement, parole, probation, the judiciary, and community-based providers to foster collaboration and ensure consistent application of evidence-based programming. Trainings should be offered in trauma-informed care, credible messenger mentoring, and positive behavioral intervention to equip staff across the continuum with the tools to effectively support justice-involved youth, particularly those with higher needs. Hawaiian probation officers and staff who have previously received training in positive youth justice stated that it improved their service delivery. These trainings will also promote understanding of best practices across stakeholders, reduce gaps in service delivery, and improve communication across systems.

Recommendation 7: Improve Data Quality and Usability by Investing in Modern Collection Systems and Establishing More Collaborative Data Collection, Analysis, and Reporting Processes

The data systems currently used to manage and oversee the Hawai'i delinquency system are outdated and need to be replaced with modern, web-based case management systems that use application programming interfaces (API) to connect data from different agencies without requiring duplicative data entry. This will be a lengthy process and not an inexpensive one, but it is essential, and with every passing year, current data systems are becoming more outdated and less usable.

In the meantime, there are steps that State and County stakeholders can take to improve the quality and comprehensiveness of the data that are being collected and make better use of these data to inform decision-making at the county level. To start, representatives from each family court and associated probation department, OYS, and JJIS should meet to establish a common set of goals and objectives for statewide juvenile justice crime analysis reports and other analyses based on JJIS data. University of Hawai'i researchers who have experience analyzing JJIS data and expertise in juvenile justice should participate as well. As part of this process, all participants should discuss the analyses that would be of greatest use to the family courts and probation officers and the frequency with which these data would be useful. This would allow for more frequent and iterative reports that stakeholders could review on a regular basis to increase everyone's visibility into the delinquency system. Counties must commit to timely and thorough data entry, a task which will be of greater value to them if they are invested in the resulting reports.

In Connecticut, the partnership between the State's Judicial Branch and the Office of Policy Management (OPM) provides a valuable model for this approach. With input from the State's Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC), OMP's Data and Policy Analytics developed a series of juvenile justice dashboards that use data from the Judicial Branch to provide quarterly data on referrals to and processing in the State's delinquency system.[43,44] The JJPOC continues to oversee the project to ensure that the dashboards can evolve over time.

43. State of Connecticut Juvenile Justice Equity Dashboard
44. About the State of Connecticut Juvenile Justice Equity Dashboard

VII. CONCLUSION

As noted throughout this report, Hawai'i has made great strides in transforming its youth justice system in recent years, becoming a national model for driving down the number of youth incarcerated while expanding community-based and culturally responsive alternatives to incarceration. This progress is the result of the efforts of many, and the commitment to young people from the leadership of the juvenile justice system, the judiciary, and community partners is clear. There is now an opportunity to make even greater progress by delivering even better outcomes for young people and their families, further improving public safety, and investing in the communities that are the foundation of Hawai'i's incredible cultural wealth and assets.

The recommendations in this report are ambitious but possible with the right commitment. They reflect both the evidence base of what works for youth justice and the wisdom and expertise of leadership on the ground. Leaders have already begun to come together, uplifting the goal of zero youth incarcerated in Hawai'i through utilizing cultural and indigenous strengths to heal and fortify the young people of Hawai'i and their families. Hopefully, these recommendations can help further this effort and provide a blueprint for how government leaders can work alongside them to make this vision real.

APPENDIX A:

Stakeholders Engaged and Sites Visited

Honolulu County: Stakeholders Engaged

State stakeholders	Staff from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, First Circuit Parole, Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility, Juvenile Justice State Advisory Council, Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center, Department of the Attorney General Crime Prevention and Justice Assistance Division Juvenile Justice Information Services Judges and staff from First Circuit Family Court, First Circuit Girls Court, First Circuit Juvenile Drug Court, staff from First Circuit Probation, Hale Ho'omalu Juvenile Detention Facility Leadership and staff from the Office of Youth Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division Youth residents of Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility, Hale Ho'omalu Juvenile Detention Facility
Community-based stakeholders	Leadership and staff from Child and Family Service; EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.; Hale Kipa; Hawai'i Families as Allies; Hawai'i Youth Services Network; Ho'ola Na Pua; Ke Kama Pono; Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services; Multisystemic Therapy Services; Papa Ola Lokahi; Parents and Children Together; Partners in Development Foundation; Pearl Haven; Lili'uokalani Trust; Residential Youth Services and Empowerment; Surfrider Spirit Sessions; Susannah Wesley Community Center Former youth residents of Ke Kama Pono

Honolulu County: Sites Visited

State sites	Kawailoa Youth and Family Wellness Center, Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility First Circuit Judiciary, Hale Ho'omalu Juvenile Detention Facility, Home Maluhia
Community-based residential programs	Hale Kipa, Ke Kama Pono, Lydia House, RYSE
Community-based programs	EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.; Kupa 'Aina Farm; Susannah Wesley Community Center

Maui County (Maui and Moloka'i Islands): Stakeholders Engaged

State stakeholders	Staff from the Child Welfare Services Branch, Department of Education, Department of Health, Maui Children's Justice Center Judges and staff from the Second Circuit Court, leadership and staff from Second Circuit Probation
County stakeholders	Mayor Richard Bissen Staff from the Maui Police Department, Moloka'i Police Department, Office of the Prosecuting Attorney, Maui Schools
Community-based stakeholders	Leadership and staff from Ala Kukui; Aloha House; Family Guidance Center; Friends of the Children's Justice Center; Hana Arts; Hana Youth Center; Hale Pono; Hui Malama; Hui No Ke Ola Pono; Kamehameha Schools; Living Way Church; Malama Family Recovery; Maui Boys and Girls Club; Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc.; Maui Family Support Services, Inc.; Maui Youth and Family Services; Ma Ka Hana Ka Ike; Moloka'i Child Abuse Prevention Pathways; Parents and Children Together; Pili Kaiaulu

Maui County (Maui and Molokaʻi Islands): Sites Visited

State sites	University of Hawaiʻi Molokaʻi Education Center, Second Circuit Judiciary
County sites	Baldwin High School, Hana High School, Maui High School
Community-based residential programs	Aloha House, Hale Pono, Kanehoalani Safe House for Boys
Community-based programs	Maui Economic Opportunity, Inc.; Paʻia Youth Center

Kauaʻi County: Stakeholders Engaged

State stakeholders	Staff from the Child Welfare Services Branch, Department of Education, Family Health Services Division of the Department of Health, Kauaʻi Children's Justice Center, Kauaʻi Community College Judges and staff from the Fifth Circuit Court, staff from Fifth Circuit Probation
County stakeholders	Kauaʻi Police Department, Office of the Prosecuting Attorney
Community-based stakeholders	Leadership and staff from Hale Opio, Family Guidance Center, Hina Mauka, Kauaʻi Boys and Girls Club, Kauaʻi Medical Clinic, Keala Foundation, Parents and Children Together, Liliʻuokalani Trust

Kauaʻi County: Sites Visited

State sites	Fifth Circuit Judiciary
Community-based programs	Liliʻuokalani Trust Kipuka Kauaʻi

Hawai'i County: Stakeholders Engaged

State stakeholders	Staff from Hawai'i Children's Justice Center, Department of Health CAMHD, Department of Education, Department of the Public Defender Judges and staff from the Third Circuit Court, leadership and staff from Third Circuit Court Probation
County stakeholders	Mayor Mitch Roth Staff from Deputy Corporation Counsel, Hawaii Island Police Department, Office of the Prosecuting Attorney, Liquor Commission, Hawai'i County Committee on the Status of Women
Community-based stakeholders	Leadership and staff from Salvation Army family interventions; Big Island Juvenile Intake and Assessment Center; Alu like; Catholic Charities; EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.; Going Home Hawai'i; Hale Kipa; Ho'ola Na Pua; Hawai'i Island Community Health Center; Kumukahi Health and Wellness; Ku Anuenue; Lili'uokalani Trust; Goodwill Ola Ika Hana program; Paying it Forward West Hawai'i; YWCA; Positive Women's Network; Vibrant Hawaii; Hawai'i Behavioral Health; Goodwill Ola Ika Hana program; Kaulana Nā Pua

Hawai'i County: Sites Visited

State sites	Third Circuit Court – Hilo Hale Kaulike, Kona Keahuolū Courthouse
County sites	West Hawai'i Civic Center
Community-based residential programs	Salvation Army Noho Olu Safe House for Girls- Hilo, Salvation Army Ke Kama Pono Safe House for Boys- Kona, Salvation Army Emergency Shelter
Community-based programs	'Aina University

APPENDIX B:

County-Level Overviews

Honolulu County

Assets

Density of Services

Oʻahu has the most resources and services available of any island. Youth in Oʻahu have access to youth development programming such as afterschool programs at much higher rates than other islands. Moreover, youth can access residential programs without being completely removed from their communities.

Challenges

Concentration of Services in Honolulu

While Oʻahu as a whole has the highest concentration of resources for juveniles, the island itself does not have equitable access to them. Youth who live outside of Honolulu City (where services are concentrated) face transportation barriers. The northern part of the island has very limited routes that can get backed up with traffic, making either public or private transportation from that region a burden.

Staffing Shortages

Many programs on Oʻahu, particularly those on the Leeward Coast, face staffing issues. A stakeholder noted that "the number of service providers available has gone down a lot," due to providers' inability to hire and retain staff. This shortage limits the number of young people who can receive essential programming and puts undue strain on current employees, increasing attrition rates.

Coordination Challenges

Many Oʻahu-based stakeholders expressed frustration with the fragmented nature of services as well as the lack of collaboration between service providers and public agencies. A community-based representative stated, "We see the need for less silos—families are navigating multiple systems without coordination, and service providers are not aligned to make that process easier."

Maui County

Assets

Strong Foundation of Service Providers

Maui has promising programs that underpin a strong service network. Maui Behavioral Health Resources, for example, supports youth with addiction services in outpatient settings through its Maui Youth and Family Services arm. Larger organizations such as this can help smaller organizations through grant coordination and community collaboration.

Challenges

Collateral Impact of Maui Fires

The fires have had far reaching impacts on Maui families, stakeholders, and the community at large. Maui stakeholders feel families just need basic support, stating, “I think that there should also be more financial support for parents because we are struggling here, especially on Maui with the fires and what that caused.” The effect of the fires is also complex and far reaching–for example, the housing shortage and associated increased cost of living has driven many service providers off the island, even as people traumatized by the fires require mental health services. These cost and service issues affect residents across the Island, even if the fire itself did not.

Lack of Infrastructure in Rural Areas

Rural areas in Maui such as Hana Town and Molokaʻi Island have particularly struggled with service delivery. Hana lacks basic infrastructure for CBOs who do work in the region. One stakeholder spoke of the abrupt closure of a building that housed multiple community organizations, saying, “We were given two months' notice to vacate and told we would be back in six months. It's been five years… so many people who were employed there lost employment.” Today, there are multiple CBOs housed on the Hana Elementary and High School campus in temporary buildings. Some CBOs have stopped operating in Hana altogether. Molokai’i residents similarly identified a need for physical space for services, especially given limited transportation for youth on the island. “The pathway for kids to getting assistance is too complex. Different offices, different locations, different organizations. We need a ‘one stop shop.’We need a physical presence or office here where they can be diverted to different organizations.”

Staffing Shortages

On Maui, staffing shortages impact the services available to youth. One stakeholder noted the lack of behavioral health workers, stating, “The pay is not enough to keep staffing, and burnout is high.” This staffing shortage has also affected school-based programs, leading to the elimination of effective efforts like the Maui Youth program. Even Child and Welfare Services in Maui is operating at a 35% staffing level. On Molokaʻi, this issue is compounded. There are no local service providers for mental health or intensive behavioral health services. A community-based representative stated, “We don’t even have providers on the island. If our kids or families need any intensive in-home services, that has to be on Zoom, which is not ideal.”

Coordination Challenges

Maui has promising programs that underpin a strong service network. Maui Behavioral Health Resources, for example, supports youth with addiction services in outpatient settings through its Maui Youth and Family Services arm. Larger organizations such as this can help smaller organizations through grant coordination and community collaboration.

Kauaʻi County

Assets

Regular CBO Convenings

The juvenile judge in Kauaʻi hosts regular meetings with community service providers. They work collaboratively to identify gaps in their community and build relationships between the courts and providers.

Challenges

Mental Health Service Gaps

Kauaʻi is a small island community with very few resources. Like most islands, Kauaʻi does not have any residential mental health or substance abuse treatment. One CBO stakeholder pointed out that there was a substance abuse treatment center that had been built, but that it was not functioning, likely due to staffing. Other CBOs noted that they were unaware of the programming offered by the few organizations that do exist on the island and would appreciate stronger coordination among them.

Small Service Provider Pool

Kauaʻi does not have enough mental health practitioners who work with children. In addition to lack of staff, the smallness of the community creates issues for providing objective and confidential care. One stakeholder said they had to stop serving youth on Kauaʻi because of familiarity with their families.

Staffing Shortages

On Kauaʻi, staffing is of particular concern, especially due to the island's rurality. There was consensus among stakeholders that the judiciary as a whole is very understaffed, with one judiciary staff member stating, "This is the smallest our staff has ever been." Further, limited local resources mean that judiciary staff have to rely on contracted services, but there are lengthy hiring delays to fill these gaps. One stakeholder explained, "We need to move quicker because if people are applying here, they're applying elsewhere." This lack of staffing is particularly acute for mental health practitioners who work with children and creates issues for providing objective and confidential care.

Coordination Challenges

Coordination challenges across agencies hinder service delivery for youth in Kauaʻi. A number of judiciary stakeholders highlighted that there was a lack of clarity about where a youth's case is in the court process, making it difficult to provide appropriate interventions. One judiciary staff noted, "Sometimes we don't know where the kid is in the system—we see an arrest in JJIS, but we don't know if the report has been forwarded to the prosecutor or where it's at." There is also a lack of information sharing between schools and the judiciary. Often, staff do not hear about family or school issues unless they are directly tied to charges a youth is facing, leaving important information about a youth's circumstances unaddressed.

Hawai‘i County

Assets

Commitment to Serving Youth in Community

Probation staff and judges across the Big Island have a demonstrated commitment to keeping youth out of incarceration and serving them in their communities. When asked about successes in their jurisdiction, Kona staff pointed out, “We are not incarcerating youth… it's very rare to commit a youth from Kona.” According to probation staff, “Judges do everything they can” to prevent a youth from becoming incarcerated.

Challenges

Case Processing Delays

Case processing delays on the Big Island, both in Kona and Hilo, often result in youth waiting up to a year or more between an incident and the completion of the court adjudication process. A judiciary stakeholder noted, “Because it takes so long to get through the system, especially if [the charges] are assaults or terroristic threats, it would reopen the wound because it came so far down the pipeline.” The longest delay occurs between when the prosecutor files the petition and when probation gets a court date. This issue is exacerbated by understaffing in the justice system, as there is only one public defender handling juvenile cases on the Hilo side and one juvenile prosecuting attorney handling cases for the whole island.

Lack of Transportation

Hawai‘i County has an extreme lack of transportation options. In both Hilo and Kona there are very few public bus routes. This island is also more spread out than others, making it difficult for youth in remote areas to access services. The bus routes that do exist are often dangerous. Probation officers explained that youth who use the route available to them are exposed to dangerous behavior by adults at bus stops.

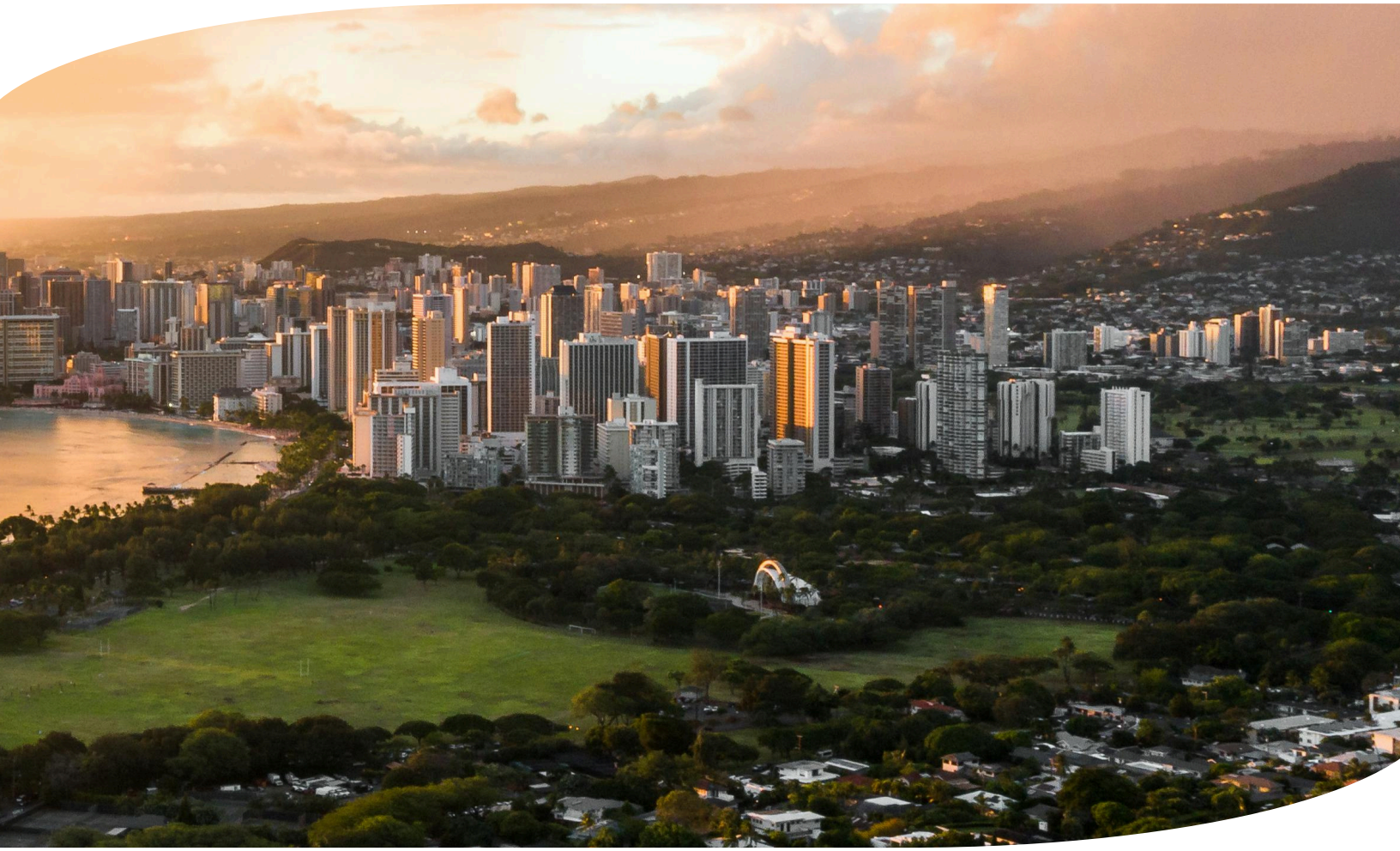
Probation staff and community providers also pointed out that school buses were not running on the island. Truancy was cited as a serious problem for many youth on Hawai‘i island, often leading to status offenses. Living on a large island with sprawling housing, many youth are very far from their schools and have no transportation without a school bus.

Staffing Shortages

Staffing issues on the Big Island are a major challenge. There are a number of unfilled positions, particularly in Kona, where the cost of living and limited resources cause additional barriers. As one stakeholder noted, “I’ve had open positions in Kona for ten years. Nobody wants to work over there because of the cost of living.” The shortage of staff has led to critical service gaps, including the closure of the Kona shelter, an important resource for youth. Moreover, the shortage of therapists and other mental health professionals creates long waitlists for services, leaving youth without timely access to mental health services.

Coordination Challenges

Coordination among agencies and service providers on the Big Island is fragmented. A stakeholder noted, “We all are on the same team and want the communities to be healthier and thrive,” but mentioned that the communication gaps and high turnover among agencies cause a lack of collaboration. For example, during court meetings for youth, CAMHD and DOE representatives often provide only high-level contributions, which can omit critical details that support decision-making for the youth.



NCJR
National Institute for
Criminal Justice Reform

BUILDING A CONTINUUM OF CARE:

An Assessment of Hawai'i's System of Care for Court-Involved Youth