

April 5, 2024

Senate Comittee on Ways and Means

Hearing Time: 10:20AM

Location: State Capitol Conference Room 211

Re: HB1595 HD1 SD1, Relating to Expungement

Aloha e Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi hui, we are writing in **strong support** of HB1595 HD1 SD1, relating to expungement. This bill creates a pilot project to be administered by the Department of the Attorney General for a state-initiated expungement process of arrest records concerning certain marijuana offenses under section 712-1249 HRS. This also requires the Hawai‘i Criminal Justice Data Center to submit reports to the legislature.

This bill addresses a critical issue in our criminal justice system, providing a pathway for individuals with past convictions to rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society successfully.

Further, expunging records not only benefits individuals seeking a fresh start, but also contributes to the overall wellbeing of our communities. Research shows that individuals with expunged records are more likely to secure stable employment and housing, reducing the likelihood of recidivism. This, in turn, enhances public safety and fosters a sense of community rehabilitation.

Finally, the War on Drugs and the criminalization of cannabis has contributed to a racially inequitable criminal legal system that disproportionally impacts people of color, including Native Hawaiians, who constitute 37% of the adult incarcerated population while making up just 18% of the state’s adult population. According to the Attorney General’s office, there are over 50,000 arrests and 10,000 convictions in the system for low-level cannabis related offenses. By creating a pilot program aimed at expunging certain marijuana offenses, HB1595 HD1 SD1 recognizes the financial challenges that individuals with criminal records often face. Removing financial barriers to expungement ensures that all eligible individuals, regardless of their economic status, can access the benefits of a clean slate.

Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi is a collaboration of organizations and individuals committed to reducing the harmful effects of a punitive incarceration system for youth; promoting equity in the justice system; and improving and increasing resources to address adolescent and young adult mental health needs. We seek to improve the continuity of programs and services for youth and young adults transitioning from minor to adult status; eliminate youth houselessness and housing market discrimination against young adults; and promote and fund more holistic and culturally informed approaches among public/private agencies serving youth.

**Please support HB1595 HD1 SD1.**

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