

MARCH 17, 2023

Opportunity Youth Action Hawai'i Policy Initiative

OYAH Policy Team Testifies at the Capital



On March 14, Melissa Pavlicek, Carla Houser and OYAH policy interns Sydney Story (pictured left) and Haumea Velasco (pictured right) testified at the capital in support of the OYAH policy priorities. The policy team previously met with Doctor Erin Harbinson (pictured middle), Director of the Criminal Justice Research Institute, to discuss angles of testimony and the benefits of HB 68 (relating to criminal justice).

This collaborative meeting allowed the policy team to gain insights from Dr. Harbinson's expertise and needs from legislation, ensuring that their advocacy was well-informed and pointed in the right direction to further HB 68 along the legislative process. This bill appropriates funds to establish a centralized statewide criminal pretrial justice data reporting and collection system pursuant to state law.

In her testimony, Dr. Harbinson noted that through Act 179 of the 2019 Legislative Session, the Legislature created the Criminal Justice Research Institute (CJRI) to assess the technological feasibility of collecting data from numerous statewide databases to provide the proper metrics in analyzing criminal pretrial data. Currently, she said, the review of pretrial data is limited to annual data requests from three different state agencies accessing four different data sources. Through the proposed funding in H.B. 68, H.D. 1, CJRI will be able to create a centralized data collection system.



Haumea Velasco testified on behalf of OYAH (left, below). He emphasized the significance of implementing a centralized statewide criminal pretrial justice data reporting and collection system, highlighting its potential to improve policy, research, and efficiency between agencies.



Sydney Story (above) explained the necessity of HB 349, the bill to establish a judicial process for certain youth to achieve emancipation. This bill was supported by the Hawai'i Youth Services Network, the Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i, Opportunity Youth Action Hawai'i, and Residential Youth Services & Empowerment.

The AHA Foundation testified in opposition to the bill. Comments were submitted on the measure from the Judiciary and Department of Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division. The AHA Foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit founded by women's rights activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and is working to end honor violence that shames, hurts or kills thousands of women and girls in the U.S. each year, and puts millions more at risk. Its testimony expressed concern that emancipation not pave the way to abuse.

Policy intern Leah Delos Santos also contributed to the advocacy efforts at the capital this week.