

The Episcopal Diocese of Hawai'i

Prison Ministry Full Report

To the 58th Annual Meeting of Convention

Submitted by Chaplain Kaleo Patterson

'Iolani School · October 16–17, 2026 · Companion to the one-page Convention 58 summary

As this Convention welcomes Bishop-elect Libby Berman, the Diocesan Prison Ministry offers this report both as an accounting of the work carried out in her predecessors' years and as a covenant to continue it, deepen it, and keep faith with the pa'ahao of Hawai'i under her leadership. The pages that follow set out our anchor in the witness of Queen Lili'uokalani, the shape of the ministry today, and the reform landscape into which this Convention now speaks.

Part I. The Ministry

Our Anchor: Queen Lili'uokalani

This ministry does not begin in 2015. It begins in 1895, when Queen Lili'uokalani was held for eight months under house arrest at 'Iolani Palace after the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom. From that cell she translated the Kumulipo — our creation chant — into English and, in her own words, chose forgiveness for the men who imprisoned her. One year later, on 18 May 1896, she was baptized into the Anglican / Episcopal faith by Bishop Alfred Willis at St. Andrew's Cathedral, the font festooned with the flowers of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

Our diocese is therefore, uniquely among Hawai'i's churches, a body that received a queen who had herself been a pa'ahao. Her example — dignity in confinement, faith under injustice, and ho'oponopono toward her captors — is the cultural and spiritual ground of everything this ministry does today. The prison Makahiki program formally invokes her translation of the Kumulipo and her act of forgiveness as the model held before the men and women we serve inside.

"That first night of my imprisonment was the longest night I have ever passed in my life; it seemed as though the dawn of day would never come." — Queen Lili'uokalani

How the Ministry Developed

The Rev. Kaleo Patterson has carried this work for more than two decades — first among Native Hawaiian pa'ahao exiled to mainland prisons, and, after Hawaiian men were transferred from Oklahoma back to O'ahu Community Correctional Center (OCCC) in 2004, into the state facilities themselves. Under his leadership the Makahiki program expanded to Hālawā, Waiawa, and the Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC), with opening and closing ceremonies once drawing forty to fifty pa'ahao at a time.

In 2015, St. Stephen's Wahiawā launched a parish-based prison ministry that has since evolved into the Diocesan-supported project we now report on. Bishop Fitzpatrick's visitation to St. Stephen's on 22 June 2025 — with two adult baptisms and the blessing of the BacPacs — publicly re-affirmed the ministry as a diocesan-wide work rather than a single parish's outreach. The 55th Annual Meeting ('Iolani School, October 2023) formally seated Prison Ministry as an annual report to Convention, and Convention 55 delegates packed BacPacs on-site as an outreach act of the gathering.

The Ministry Today

Under the Rev. Kaleo Patterson, Vicar of St. Stephen's, Wahiawā, and Diocesan Prison Chaplain (0.45 FTE, Budget Line 5c), the project reaches every state facility in the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) system, the Federal Detention Center in Honolulu, and the Saguaro Correctional Center in Arizona. The 2026 diocesan budget narrative and the St. Stephen's postings together describe a single, integrated ministry with in-prison and out-of-prison arms:

- Makahiki Season of Peace. Weekly classes and culture-based restorative programming, opening and closing ceremonies, observation of the summer solstice, and instruction in pule, oli, and hula — recognized by DCR through the Native Hawaiian Church that Kahu Patterson helped establish inside the system.
- Hui Baibala. English / Hawaiian language Bible study anchored in the Revised Common Lectionary, the church year, Hawaiian vocabulary, and indigenous theology.
- Holy Eucharist and Pastoral Services inside facilities, together with the distribution of Hawaiian-language Bibles to pa‘ahao.
- ‘Eke Kua BacPac Project. Diocesan-wide reentry backpacks — body care, hygiene, snacks, linen, a bus pass, writing materials — packed and blessed at parishes around the diocese and handed to people at the prison gate on the day of release.
- Kapa Komo Reentry Clothing and Community Reentry Support Group. Clothing at release plus ongoing accompaniment, with practical assistance including cell phones, housing help, HOLO cards, travel assistance, and alms.
- Ho‘okuikahi-Reconciliation. Each 17 January, the Queen Lili‘uokalani Peace March from Mauna ‘Ala to ‘Iolani Palace and the annual Ho‘okuikahi Service — placing the ministry publicly within the diocese’s ongoing work of repair with the Hawaiian Kingdom.

Why This Ministry Is a Cultural and Historical Anchor

Three threads make this ministry unlike any other outreach the diocese sustains. First, it is our living connection to Queen Lili‘uokalani: the chaplain draws directly on her Kumulipo translation and her act of forgiveness as the theological center of the Makahiki program. Second, it addresses the deepest wound in Hawai‘i’s public life — the overrepresentation of Native Hawaiians in the criminal justice system — with culturally grounded, indigenous-theological practice rather than social service alone. Third, it carries the plain gospel mandate — “I was in prison and you visited me” (Matthew 25:36) and Isaiah 61’s “release to the prisoners” — that the Diocesan Council explicitly cites as the rationale for the chaplaincy line item.

Part II. The Reform Landscape — 12 Years in Brief

Where We Began (2014)

Twelve years ago, Hawai‘i’s correctional system was widely recognized as punitive, overcrowded, and disproportionately Native Hawaiian. Native Hawaiians made up about 21% of the general population but roughly 37% of those incarcerated. Hundreds of Hawai‘i men were held at the Saguaro Correctional Center in Arizona — an arrangement begun in 1995 as a three-year “temporary fix.” OCCC, opened in 1975 with 628 beds, was already chronically overcrowded.

The Reform Framework Takes Shape (2016–2019)

The Legislature convened the HCR 85 Task Force on Prison Reform in 2016. Its 2018 final report, *Creating Better Outcomes, Safer Communities*, called for a decisive shift from a punitive to a rehabilitative system: a smaller-and-smarter OCCC replacement, bail and pretrial reform, cultural courts, and reduction of Native Hawaiian overrepresentation. In 2019, Act 179 established the Hawai‘i Correctional System Oversight Commission (HCSOC), codified in HRS Chapter 353L, to bring independent oversight to the system.

Building the Machinery of Reform (2020–2024)

HCSOC’s Oversight Coordinator was hired in 2022 and reappointed by Governor Green in 2024. In 2024 alone the Commission held 18 public meetings, made more than 60 facility-specific recommendations, and publicly reported 12 deaths in custody (down from 17 in 2023). The Department of Public Safety was reorganized as the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DCR) in January 2024, and Governor Green declared Hawai‘i a trauma-informed state by Executive Order 24-01. The Women’s Corrections Implementation Commission, created by Act 244 (2022), was charged in 2024 with reducing WCCC’s population 25% by 2029.

Where Things Stand Today (2025–2026)

Reform remains urgent and incomplete:

- OCCC, designed for 628, averages roughly 925 residents — about 152% of design capacity — and the pretrial share of the population is dominant, with more than 200 people held over six months awaiting trial.
- About 800 Hawai'i men remain at Saguaro in Arizona, thirty years into a “temporary” arrangement, at real cost to 'ohana, culture, and reentry.
- Hawai'i's incarceration rate of 292 per 100,000 exceeds 85% of countries in the world, and roughly 30% of people in jail are experiencing homelessness.
- HCSOC has publicly written to Governor Green that DCR has not yet adequately addressed mental-health care or in-facility rehabilitation programming.

Part III. What the Next Two Years May Bring

Several decisions now moving through the Legislature and DCR will define the reform landscape through 2028:

- The new O'ahu jail. Conceptual designs from AHL are approved with more than 1,000 beds and a rehabilitation focus, but schematic design and the RFP are still pending. Cost estimates have risen to about \$937 million with \$3.5 million per month of potential escalation through 2027, and Governor Green is again pursuing acquisition of the Honolulu Federal Detention Center as an alternative.
- Bringing our people home. HB 1769 (2026) would require DCR to return 25% of the Saguaro population by July 2029 and at least 5% each year beginning 2031. HCSOC Chair Mark Patterson has estimated all 800 could be brought home in two to three years by intentionally moving people through minimum-security beds.
- Women's decarceration. WCIC is due to demonstrate real progress toward the 25% WCCC reduction target by 2029, with gender-responsive diversion for non-violent mothers as the centerpiece.
- Pretrial and bail reform. Measures to end monetary bail for non-violent misdemeanors continue to move (HB 2413 in 2026, following HB 1516's failure in 2025). DCR itself concedes the state spends about \$307/day to hold people who could post \$50 bail.
- Mental health, homelessness, and diversion. With roughly 30% of jail residents homeless and a large share showing serious mental illness, supportive housing and community-based treatment are the swing variable in whether Hawai'i actually needs a bigger jail.
- Native Hawaiian overrepresentation and cultural programming. The unfinished HCR 85 agenda — cultural courts, diversion of Hawaiian youth, culturally grounded reentry, and Makahiki-style in-prison programs — remains the moral center of this work.

Part IV. Direction and What We Ask of Convention

Direction for the Next Two Years

To keep pace with the reform landscape above, the diocesan project is moving in five clear directions:

- Rebuild Makahiki to pre-COVID scale at Hālawā, Waiawa, and WCCC, and extend it into the Federal Detention Center and, where feasible, Saguaro.
- Deepen the Native Hawaiian Church presence inside DCR facilities as a recognized religious body, expanding pule, oli, and hula programming.
- Grow the Community Reentry Support Group so every release includes a person, not only a backpack — cell phone, transportation, housing referral, and church accompaniment.
- Anchor the diocese's public witness at the 17 January Queen Lili'uokalani Peace March and Ho'okuikahi Service, linking prison ministry to the diocese's ongoing reconciliation work.
- Prepare pastoral capacity for the anticipated return of men from Saguaro and the OCCC replacement, both of which will bring hundreds of pa'ahao into new O'ahu-based facilities within the next few years.

What We Ask of Convention 58

The prison chaplaincy remains a 0.45 FTE line — one part-time chaplain covering every state facility, the federal center, and Arizona. We invite the Bishop-elect, Bishop Fitzpatrick, the Standing Committee, and every parish of the diocese to join us in four concrete commitments:

1. Sustain diocesan funding for Lines 5c (chaplaincy compensation, with the assumed 4% increase for 2026), 5d (pension), and 5e (program).
2. Adopt the BacPac program in every parish on every island, with regular blessing of the packs in Sunday liturgy.
3. Provide trained volunteers — kūpuna, clergy, and lay — for Makahiki, Hui Baibala, and reentry accompaniment, cleared through DCR safety and security protocols.
4. Offer prayer, presence, and public voice as decisions are made in 2026–2028 on the new O‘ahu jail, the Saguaro return, and women’s decarceration.

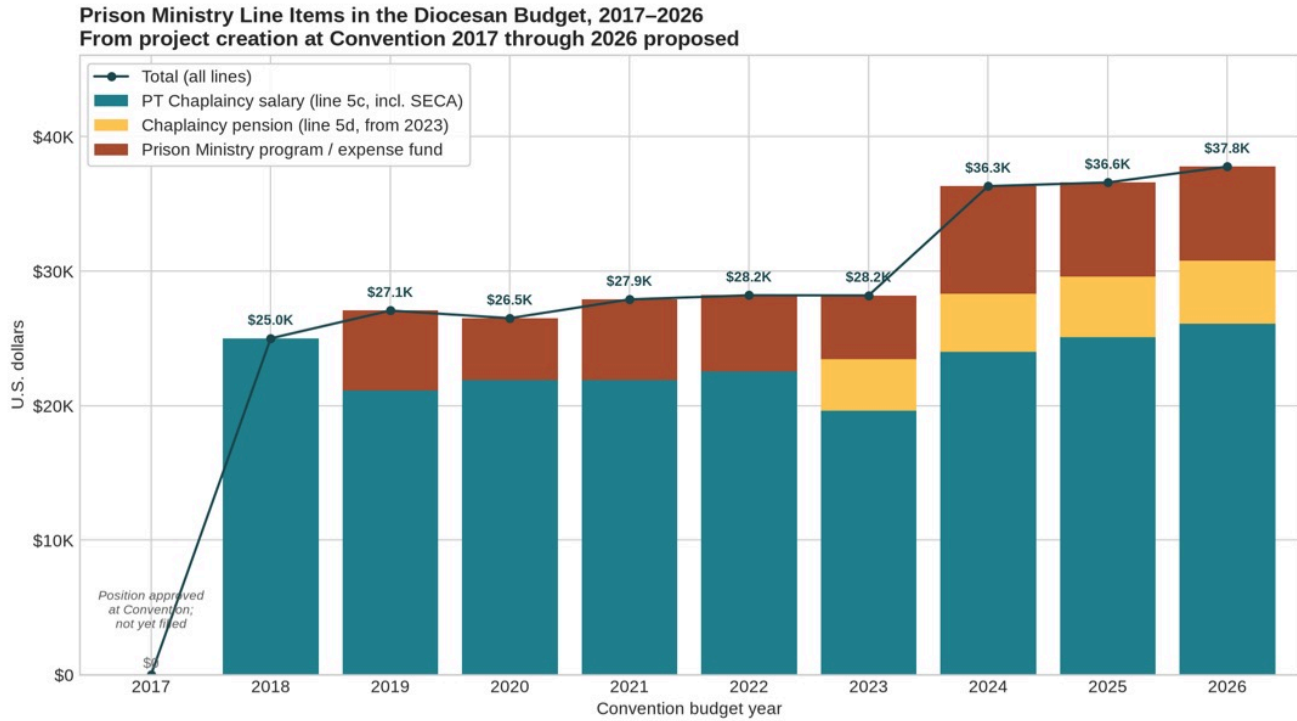
A Word for Our Convention

Twelve years in, Hawai‘i has built the scaffolding of reform — HCSOC, DCR, WCIC, a trauma-informed executive order, and a redesigned jail concept — but the lived reality inside our facilities has not yet caught up with the language of rehabilitation. As a diocese, our chaplaincy, Makahiki, Hui Baibala, BacPac, and reentry accompaniment place us alongside those the system too often forgets. The next two years — decisions on the new jail, the return from Saguaro, women’s decarceration, and pretrial reform — will show whether Hawai‘i chooses ho‘oponopono and restoration, or another generation of the same.

What began at ‘Iolani Palace in 1895 continues in Hālawā, Waiawa, WCCC, OCCC, the Federal Detention Center, and Saguaro today. If the diocese chooses to keep this ministry strong, it is Queen Lili‘uokalani’s own witness — dignity, forgiveness, and aloha for those in chains — that our diocese will be extending, in her name, into Hawai‘i’s next generation.

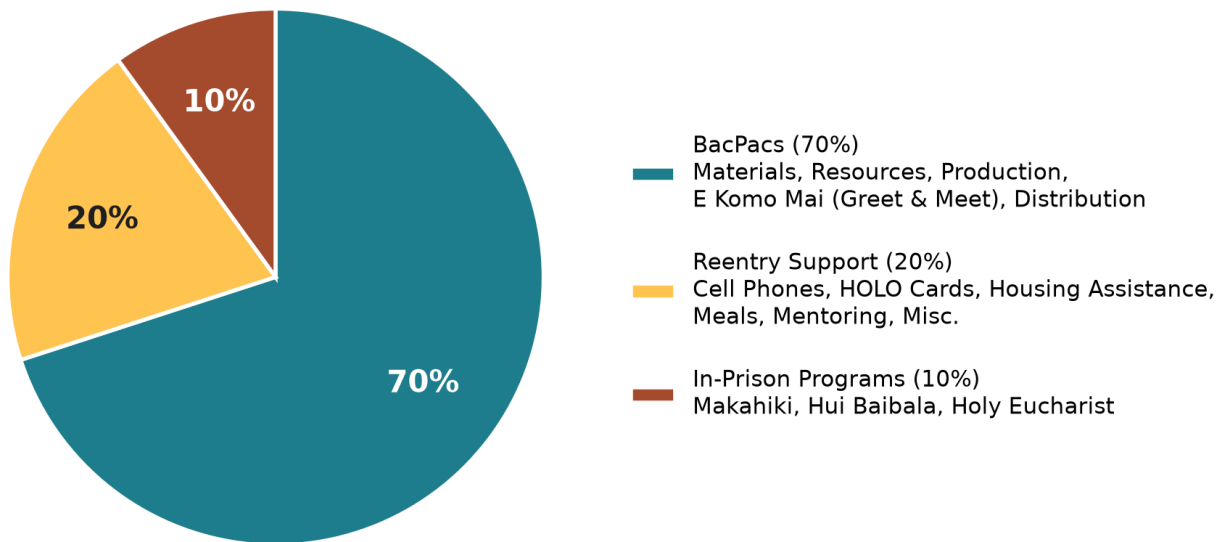
Submitted by Chaplain Kaleo Patterson
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Appendix A. Prison Ministry Budget Line Items, 2017–2026



Source: Episcopal Diocese of Hawai'i Convention Journals, Approved and Proposed Budget Narratives, 2017–2026 (episcopalhawaii.org). Beginning in 2023 the chaplaincy pension contribution is reported on line 5d.

Appendix B. 2026 Expenses Breakdown



Percentages are approximate, based on program expense accounting.