



Scenes from the #FernhurstWomen Rally at the State Capitol on June 30, 2020, with Fernhurst graduates and community supporters.



Located in Makiki, our Fernhurst facility is home to the only community-based work furlough program in the state of Hawai'i. It is called Ka Hale Ho'āla Hou No Nā Wāhine, or the Home of Reawakening for Women.

Through this program, female inmates move from the Women's Community Correctional Center (WCCC) to Fernhurst. They can work and live in the community, with time to transition to life outside of prison. The women living at Fernhurst gain access to practical resources to help them secure jobs and maintain them, as well as the social-emotional support to build healthy relationships and successfully transition to their new lives.

In early June, budgetary concerns led the Public Safety Department to end the state contract for this program and to house the women back at WCCC instead of at Fernhurst. Since this is the only community-based work furlough program for women in the entire state, public concerns grew fast.

Program supporters, including former Fernhurst residents, quickly mobilized to advocate for the program and the women it serves. Their petition campaign generated nearly 170,000 signatures. Both the graduates and current program participants willingly shared their personal stories in front of video cameras. Some of them expressed their disappointment, but they also maintained a hope to remain in the program at Fernhurst and not return to prison.

"I'm hanging on to every bit of faith that I have, that some type of miracle happens,

that something will change," one program participant said. On June 24, 2020, Fernhurst residents returned to WCCC to continue the program inside the facility.

Our community responded quickly to this situation. Local media including Civil Beat, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser, Hawaii News Now, Hawaii Public Radio and KITV reported on the situation. More than 200 supporters showed up at the state capitol for sign waving and a rally held at the end of June.

State legislators in both chambers passed SB2523 to appropriate funds for the community-based work furlough program. Public Safety acted swiftly with the prospect of funding in sight by returning the women to Fernhurst so that they could continue their reentry work in the community.

On September 15, 2020, Governor Ige vetoed SB2523, citing technical challenges associated with the bill. The governor expressed his support for the program by issuing an Executive Order which directs the Department of Public Safety to implement a community-based work furlough residential program to help eligible women inmates.

"I never had anyone in my life fight so hard for me," said one of the residents who rejoined Fernhurst from WCCC. "Strangers spoke up for us. That was amazing. I am so grateful to be back at Fernhurst. I have so much to look forward to in life."

YWCA O'ahu is committed to empowering women in our community. Fernhurst will continue to keep its doors open to serve women during the most vulnerable moments in their lives. •

“ It was devastating. ... Everything seemed to be falling into place and one day I came home from work and I was told I had to go back to prison. How do you communicate that to your family? ”

STANDING FOR FERNHURST

Story by
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Check out the latest updates, photos and video at www.ywcaohu.org/fernhurst-women