



Nick Oza, The Republic
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Ho'iwai:

Transforming Lives, Restoring Communities, and
Re-imagining Systems

Co-published by:



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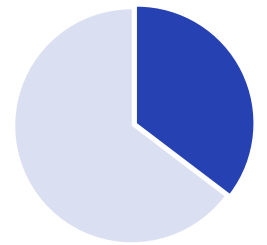
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While this report focuses on Native Hawaiian communities, we acknowledge the equally important over-incarceration of the Micronesian and Black/African-descent communities in Hawai‘i. This report is a starting point in this conversation because Native Hawaiians face unique issues in their homeland. We recognize this is part of a more extensive, ongoing dialogue about diversity and equity in Hawai‘i, and we encourage complementary research and reporting on other communities' experiences. The goal of this report is to open the dialogue. The full complexity of these issues and stakeholders merits a more comprehensive analysis beyond the scope of this document.

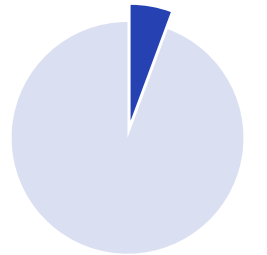
How does the Criminal Justice System impact Native Hawaiians?

Native Hawaiians are significantly and severely impacted by the criminal justice system both in Hawai'i and in the continental US. The following data points provide an overview of the scope of the problem adversely affecting Native Hawaiians.

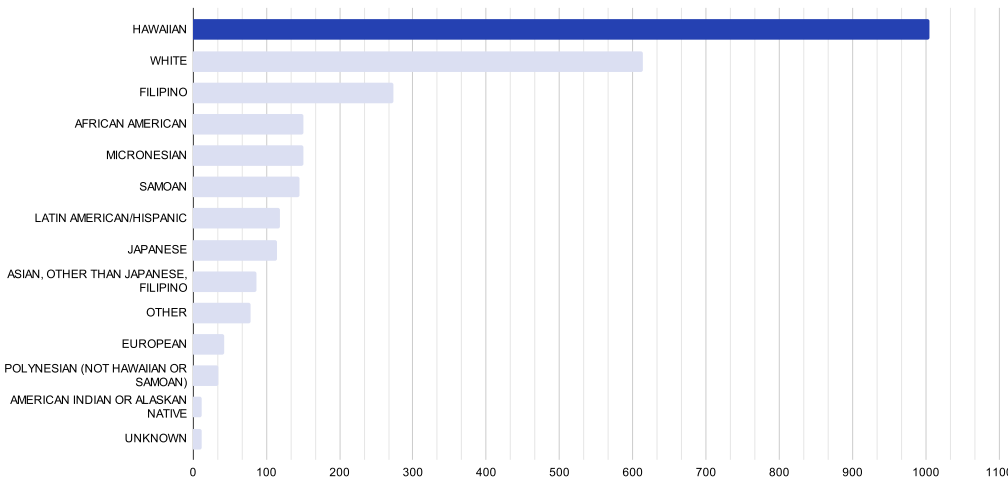
Native Hawaiians are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. They constitute 35% of the prison population while only comprising 6% of the overall population in Hawai'i.



35% of inmates in Hawai'i are Native Hawaiian



6% of residents in Hawai'i are Native Hawaiian



Population by Ethnicity

Nearly 28% of Native Hawaiians are incarcerated on the continent. (as of 9/30/24);

‘Ohana (*family*) is a core value of Native Hawaiian culture. Separating inmates thousands of miles from their ‘ohana disrupts the connectedness of the family and severs their connection to their homeland.



2,400 mi

2,900 mi

This report reflects analysis based on currently accessible data sources. While comprehensive historical data exists, some recent metrics were not available at the time of publication. We look forward to incorporating supplemental data in future updates as it becomes available.

Hawai'i Correctional System Oversight Commission. (2024). POPULATION BY ETHNICITY IN HAWAII JAILS AND PRISONS AS OF 9.30.24. [Data file]. Retrieved on November 20, 2024, from Brady, Kat.

US Census Bureau. (2023). US Census American Community Survey Hawai'i State Profile. [Data set]. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from <https://census.hawaii.gov/acs/acs-2023/>



Ed Greevy, 1983 (Fair Use – Educational)

The correlation between historical trauma and incarceration for Native Hawaiians

At a systemic level, the impact of the criminal justice system on Native Hawaiians is rooted in historical trauma and the insurmountable loss of land, language, and identity.

The following timeline provides deeper context and insight to understand the long-lasting, harmful effects of historical trauma on Native Hawaiian wellbeing. Furthermore, it points to underlying reasons for disproportionate rates of Native Hawaiians being incarcerated in Hawai'i and on the continental U.S.

“There is this emptiness that exists for a Hawaiian.”

Nānā I Ke Kumu, Volume II

1778:

Arrival of Captain James Cook and subsequent Western contact, introducing **foreign diseases, social disruption, and economic exploitation.**

1820s-1890s:

Influx of Christian missionaries, leading to **suppression of traditional Hawaiian religion, language, and cultural practices.**

1848:

The Mahele, meaning to divide, fundamentally **changed the land tenure system in Hawai'i from communal to private ownership.**

1893:

The illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom by U.S.-backed business interests, resulting in the **loss of Native Hawaiian sovereignty and self-governance.**

1896:

The Republic of Hawai'i passed Act 57, an English-only law that **banned the Hawaiian language** as the medium of instruction in public schools.

1898:

Annexation of Hawai'i by the United States, further solidifying colonial rule and **dispossession of Native Hawaiian lands.**

1959:

Hawai'i becomes a U.S. state, with **limited recognition of Native Hawaiian rights and historical injustices.**

Post-Statehood:

Continued **displacement of Native Hawaiians** from their ancestral lands, cultural appropriation, and underrepresentation in political and economic systems.

2020:

Census data reports that less than half of Native Hawaiians (46.7%) live in Hawai'i exacerbated by the **high cost of living**, further **displacing them from their land base and disconnecting** them from their identity as a people.



Best Practice: Healing through the Rediscovery of Native Hawaiian Identity

Andre Perez and his partner Camille Kalama co-lead Ko'ihōnua, a non-profit organization that transforms the lives and conditions of Native Hawaiians through the restoration of land, the revitalization of Hawaiian cultural practices, and investment in Hawai'i-based movements for sovereignty, self-determination, and social justice.

"We needed a space to be Hawaiian and to do Hawaiian things," shares Andre Perez, referring to the five-acre Hanakēhau Learning Farm he and Camille have stewarded for the past 15 years. Kalama emphasized the importance of reclaiming the inoa (*names*) and mo'olelo (*history*) of places to preserve, protect, and perpetuate Hawaiian traditions. "Land is the base of cultural identity," said Perez, who serves as project director of Ko'ihōnua, a non-profit organization dedicated to reclaiming and providing cultural space for the lāhui (*Hawaiian nation*) to learn, practice, and engage in Native Hawaiian traditions and practices.

Reconnecting pa'ahao (*incarcerated individuals*) to their religious cultural practices is critical to the healing and rehabilitative process within prison walls and as they transition back into their communities of origin. "Land dispossession creates a situation that pushes people into crime. To me, there's a direct correlation between landlessness and

"There's a direct correlation between landlessness and criminality."

Andre Perez, Ko'ihōnua

criminality," Perez said. Many elements of Ko'ihōnua's programming reflect specific cultural pathways for pa'ahao to ho'i i ka piko, return to their source and lifeline, as the Indigenous people of Hawai'i.

Part of Perez's early outreach work included support to pa'ahao in Mississippi and Arizona prisons, helping them access books and cultural items. The revival of Native Hawaiian religious cultural practices, namely the annual Makahiki observance, has proliferated locally and nationally, affirming access to religious freedom, as well as viable pathways for pa'ahao to reconnect to the source.¹ "I firmly believe that for Hawaiians, traditional and cultural approaches to rehabilitation are more powerful and long-lasting than any Western class or training," Perez said. "Our universal values are more meaningful and relevant when presented in ways that are understandable, palatable, and desirable. All Hawaiians have little seeds of traditional values somewhere inside of them. These seeds have roots through genealogical connections that are very powerful when nurtured."

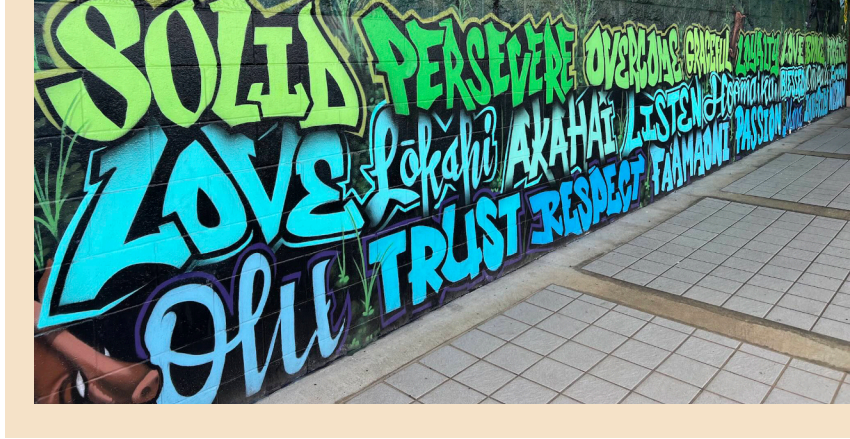
¹ Leone, D. (2011, November) State, CCA face lawsuit over Hawaiian religion, Ka Wai Ola: The Living Waters of OHA, Vol, 28, No. 11, p. 37, https://kawaiola.news/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/KA_WAI_OLA_201111.pdf

Best Practice: Healing through the Rediscovery of Native Hawaiian Identity

Ho‘iwai, (*to return and restore the waters*), describes the framework that guides the non-profit organization ‘Ekolu Mea Nui (EMN) to transform the criminal justice system into a restorative model that strengthens the health and well-being of pa‘ahao, rather than discard them from society for their crimes. “Ho‘iwai envisions a process where individuals—like water—move through structured pathways of care, growth, and support, emerging stronger, healthier, and ready to contribute back to their communities,” said Jamee Miller, ‘EMN’s Co-Founder and President.

The Ho‘iwai Framework reflects the organization’s vision and mission of a pono (*righteous*) justice system in Hawai‘i that heals and empowers individuals, ‘ohana (*families*), and communities through Native Hawaiian cultural practices and values. Their overarching goal to achieve their preferred future is to innovate alternatives to incarceration that restore the human spirit, build resilient ‘ohana, and change laws and policies.

A bright spot of ‘EMN’s innovation is Nā ‘Ōpio Waiwai, a youth-led council



committed to breaking the cycle of intergenerational incarceration through cultural grounding, leadership development, and systems change. This youth-led programming empowers ‘ōpio (*young people*) to invalidate the statistic that they are 75% more likely to face incarceration due to the imprisonment of a parent or a close family relative. “The name Nā ‘Ōpio Waiwai speaks to the wealth (*waiwai*) found in young people—their knowledge, experiences, and potential as future leaders. Just as wai (*water*) sustains life, these youth are the source of transformation, carrying strength and renewal into their communities,” Miller stated.

She also recognizes the visionary leadership of former Hawai‘i Youth Correctional Facility (HYCF) Warden Mark Patterson to activate community partnerships that diverted HYCF youth and women, during his tenure at the Women’s Community Correctional Center (WCCC), to more appropriate placements outside of prison. Miller is hopeful this work may continue with new leadership employing an aligned mindset and vision for leveraging diversion and community-based strategies for healing and rehabilitation.

‘EMN’s reach includes stakeholders and programming both inside and outside of the system, to ensure that incarcerated individuals, community organizations, and decision-makers are engaged in solutions that break cycles of incarceration, particularly for Native Hawaiian youth and families.

Inside the System

- **Ho‘oponopono (*Conflict Resolution*):** Facilitates the religious cultural practice of Native Hawaiian conflict resolution with adult inmates.
- **Higher Education Opportunities:** Teaches college-level courses (i.e. Intro to Social Work) in partnership with WCCC.
- **Workforce Development:** Provides Peer Support Specialists (PSS) training and collaborates with community organizations to hire PSS as interns and future employees.

Outside the System

- **Public and Private Partnerships:** Collaborates with a network of partners to advocate for policies that support rehabilitation and reduce recidivism.
- **Community Advocacy & Systems Change:** Leads campaigns that support systemic investment in culturally-based diversion and reentry support.
- **International School to Prison Pipeline Work:** Co-creates solutions with Oceania partners to address the disproportionate representation of Indigenous youth who are incarcerated.

Best Practice: Healing through leveraging lived experience as an agent of systemic change

EPIC 'Ohana, a non-profit organization in Hawai'i, works to strengthen 'ohana and enhance the welfare of children and youth through transformative processes that are respectful, collaborative, and solution-oriented. EPIC serves families involved in the foster care, child welfare, and juvenile justice systems. Native Hawaiian children and youth are also disproportionately represented in these systems, leading to an increased risk of incarceration as adults. EPIC amplifies the power of lived experience as a strength by utilizing a peer support model across its suite of programs and services. A peer support model of programming is when people with lived experience, similar backgrounds, or shared identities provide knowledge, experience, and emotional, social, or practical help to each other. "The power of peer support is to come alongside families and say, I've been there. I know what you're experiencing and there's hope. Let me help you understand the whys behind what you're being asked to comply with," said Deanna Gonda, EPIC's Parent Partners Program supervisor. The Mākua Allies program supports pregnant and new mothers battling substance use disorders. Mākua Ally Kim Nabarro has walked a similar path as the mothers she supports and acknowledges the importance of participants

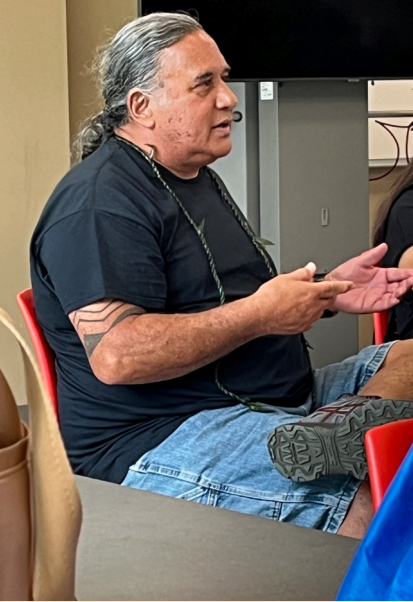
driving and defining what success looks like for them. "We meet them where they are and hold space for them to build their own team. So when everyone else goes away, they have relationships and can call folks directly to get the support they need," she stated.

EPIC 'Ohana also amplifies the voices of youth with lived experience to drive meaningful systemic change within child welfare through its dual leadership structure: a Youth Board and a Community Board (comprised of youth and adults). Working in powerful collaboration, these boards have successfully championed five transformative policy changes: expanded financial literacy programs for foster youth; extended Medicaid coverage to age 26; voluntary supportive services through age 21, including housing, case management, and financial assistance; the right for foster children to enjoy everyday experiences—such as playing sports or learning to drive—without requiring social worker permission; and the landmark 2018 Foster Care Bill of Rights. Through this youth-adult partnership model, EPIC 'Ohana ensures that those most impacted by the child welfare system are at the forefront of reforming it.

"We meet them where they are and hold space for them to build their own team."

Kim Nabarro, EPIC 'Ohana





daveynin, Flickr (CC BY 2.0)

Systemic Transformation: Normalizing the Pu‘uhonua Model Inside and Outside of Prison Walls for Native Hawaiians

The common themes highlighted in this report center around providing a safe space for pa‘ahao to reconnect to their cultural identity, access a community support network, and utilize their lived experiences to improve the systemic conditions for Native Hawaiians impacted by the criminal justice system. A pu‘uhonua is a traditional Hawaiian place of refuge, sanctuary, and healing, deeply rooted in Indigenous Hawaiian cultural and spiritual practices. Historically, it provided safety for those who violated kapu (*sacred laws*) or sought protection during war, offering them an opportunity for reconciliation and transformation. Today, this

concept is being revitalized as a model for restorative justice, emphasizing cultural practices, community support, and reconnection with the ‘āina (*land*) as an alternative to punitive systems like incarceration.

Leading this movement is ‘Ohana Ho‘opakele, founded by kūpuna (*elders*) to address the disproportionate incarceration of kānaka in Hawai‘i’s prisons. The group’s efforts began with opposing the construction of new prisons on Hawai‘i Island, advocating for the observance of the Makahiki Festival in prisons—a traditional Hawaiian celebration honoring Lono, the god of peace, agriculture, and fertility, marked by gratitude, rejuvenation, and

strengthening familial and communal bonds—and raising awareness about the need to establish pu‘uhonua (*wellness centers in prisons*). These pu‘uhonua provide culturally grounded healing and support for pa‘ahao as they prepare to reintegrate into society.

"We need to correct the injustice that was done (the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893)," said Ron Fujiyoshi from ‘Ohana Ho‘opakele. "We are being occupied and America does not have a good reputation. It has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. Hawaiians provided a forgiveness model that even if you did wrong, you could make amends, clean up your



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“Hawaiians provided a forgiveness model that even if you did wrong, you could make amends, clean up your life, and come back into society. I think that’s what’s needed for the world.”

Ron Fujiyoshi,
‘Ohana Ho‘opakele

life, and come back into society. I think that’s what’s needed for the world,” he said.

The ‘Aha Ho‘omana curriculum was developed for medium-security facilities, supporting Hawaiian religious sessions protected under federal law. The curriculum emphasizes spiritual practices aligned with the Kaulana Mahina (*Hawaiian moon calendar*) and sacred observances throughout the year.

Co-author of the curriculum is Kaleihau Kamau‘u, who served time in prisons on the US continent, far away from his ‘ohana and island home. “I come from a very culturally grounded family and grew up surrounded by ceremony,” stated Kamau‘u. “I rebelled against all of that which

resulted in me ending up in prison. I saw for my own healing, the need to go back and recapture these things that I had the opportunity to learn,” he said.

Kamau‘u emphasized the need for transitional housing and ‘āina for pa‘ahao to practice their culture as a lifestyle. “Pu‘uhonua is ‘āina. You bring people on (‘āina) and grow food and it’s a practice of the culture day in and day out,” he said.

He also stressed the need for services to obtain social security and identification cards and resources for basic needs (i.e. SNAP benefits) to prepare pa‘ahao for life outside of prison walls.

Normalizing the pu‘uhonua model brings together all identified best practices to

prioritize a system of healing through reconnection with ‘āina, and reintegration into society. To fully realize its potential, accelerated investment in resources such as housing, and culturally aligned programs are essential for pa‘ahao to thrive and rebuild their lives.



He Mo‘olelo Hou: Creating a New Story, a New Way Forward

Distinct yet complementary sections of this report have weaved a mo‘olelo hou, a new story founded upon the voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of Native Hawaiians impacted by the criminal justice system and those who walk alongside them.

Deepen Understanding of Native Hawaiian History and Culture

- Educate yourself further about Native Hawaiian history and the impact of incarceration; some options are below.
 - Lander, Joan and Puhipau. (Directors). (1991). *Act of War-The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation [Film]*. Nā Maka o Ka ‘Āina. <https://oiwi.tv/video/act-of-war/>
 - Kajihiro, K. (2010, April 2). *Nation Under The Gun: Militarism and Resistance in Hawai‘i, Cultural Survival*. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/nation-under-gun-militarism-and-resistance-hawaii>
 - Maunakea: What Kind of Kupuna Will You Be? [Film]. Kanaeokana. <https://vimeo.com/360934977>
- Visit a bookstore like [Native Books](#) or your local independent bookstore for books such as:
 - Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, N. Howes, C., Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio, J.K., & Yamashiro, A. (2020). *The Value of Hawai‘i Volume 3- Huluhia, The Turning*, University of Hawai‘i Press. [The Value of Hawai‘i Volume 3 - Huluhia, The Turning](#);

- Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, N, Hussey, I. & Wright, E. (2014). *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land and Sovereignty*, Duke University Press. [A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land and Sovereignty](#);
- Rohrer, J. (2016). *Staking Claim: Settler Colonialism and Racialization in Hawai'i*, University of Arizona Press. [Judy Rohrer's Staking Claim: Settler Colonialism and Racialization in Hawai'i](#);
- Kame'eleihiwa, L. (1992). *Native Land and Foreign Desires: Pehea Lā E Pono Ai?* Bishop Museum Press. [Native Land and Foreign Desires](#)
- Partner with funders and intermediaries in Hawai'i, specifically with Native Hawaiian communities. Hawai'i People's Fund is a wonderful place to start, as they can connect you directly to Native Hawaiian-led grassroots organizations in Hawai'i to gain insights about the current social change and non-profit ecosystem. On the continent, foundations like the Gerbode Foundation or New Breath Foundation and others can be a resource.
- Demonstrate respect for Native Hawaiian expertise by providing meaningful compensation for consultations, including honorariums, direct funding opportunities, and strategic introductions to other funders.
- If you must visit Hawai'i, [please do so responsibly](#).

Strengthen Support for Native Hawaiian Leadership

- Identify and fund Native Hawaiian-led organizations across all portfolio areas, including arts, healthcare, education, climate action, and youth development.
- Prioritize organizations led by individuals with direct community experience and deep cultural knowledge.
- Conduct portfolio reviews to ensure Native Hawaiian perspectives and needs are integrated across all funding streams.

Advance Systemic Change

- Leverage organizational influence to amplify Native Hawaiian-led initiatives and policy priorities.
- Allocate resources to support community advocacy initiatives, including civic participation, legislative testimony, and programs that strengthen health, well-being, and family resilience.
- Create dedicated funding streams for Native Hawaiian-led systemic change efforts.
- Build long-term partnerships that support sustainable, community-driven solutions.



Mahalo (*Gratitude and Appreciation*)

This report emerges from a collaborative learning journey undertaken in October 2024 across Oahu and Hawai'i Island. The journey brought together three foundations committed to supporting Native Hawaiian communities: the Gerbode Foundation, Hawai'i People's Fund, and New Breath Foundation.

The Gerbode Foundation, with its longstanding presence in Hawai'i, seeks to deepen its understanding of the systemic challenges facing Native Hawaiians in their ancestral homeland. This commitment aligns with New Breath Foundation's mission to support Native Hawaiian-led organizations, which first led to their partnership with the Hawai'i People's Fund.

The Hawai'i People's Fund is a cornerstone of grassroots advocacy in the islands, providing vital support and resources to community-based organizations while championing social justice initiatives. Their deep connections within the community and expertise in supporting local initiatives have been instrumental in guiding this collaborative effort.

This partnership represents a shared commitment to understanding, supporting, and amplifying the work of Native Hawaiian organizations addressing the pressing needs of their communities.

Our work was enriched by the following learning sites and their dedicated staff:

- The Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility, under the leadership of former Warden Mark Patterson
- The Women's Community Corrections Center (WCCC)
- Ko'ihōnua, through the guidance of Andre Perez and Camille Kalama
- EPIC 'Ohana, led by Delia Ulima
- Hale Kipa, led by Venus Kau'iokawekiu Rosete-Medeiros
- 'Ohana Ho'opakele, through the efforts of Kaleihau Kamau'u and Ron Fujiyoshi

- The “No Labels” writing program at WCCC includes writing instruction by Colleen Banik and sharing the group’s e-newsletter, Liberty.

We are particularly indebted to Jamee Miller and ‘Ekolu Mea Nui for facilitating vital connections and invitations to these learning sites.

Hawai‘i People’s Fund has been instrumental in helping us shape our vision and fostering meaningful connections within the Hawai‘i community. Their commitment to building relationships with Aloha has been invaluable to this work.

This report has been enriched by the wisdom and expertise of numerous community leaders, including Aunty Lynette Cruz, Uncle Sparky Rodrigues, Mary Tam (Board member of the Hawai‘i People’s Fund), Colleen Rost-Banik, and Kat Brady of the Community Alliance on Prisons, among many others who generously shared their experiences and stories.

Special recognition goes to Andrea Dias-Machado of Huliau Aloha LLC for her skillful writing and Justyn Nieto for the report’s design.

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We also would like to express our appreciation to Executive Chauffeur Hawai‘i, a Native Hawaiian-owned business, for providing thoughtful transportation services during our Honolulu site visits.

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