

EDITORIAL**HOPE deserves support**

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While politicians across the country have enhanced their public reputation as being tough on crime by pushing for long sentences for repeat offenders, a Hawaii state judge has built a successful system of creating incentive for offenders to straighten their lives.

As other states model their programs after Hawaii's system, Hawaii should expand it to reduce crime and the state's prison population.

Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement, or HOPE, was conceived by Circuit Judge Steven S. Alm, a former city deputy prosecutor and Hawaii's U.S. attorney under the Clinton administration, and implemented five years ago. In a short time, it resulted in reduced recidivism by convicts sentenced to probation instead of prison.

Probationers in the program are subjected to close scrutiny, given only a few hours instead of a month's notice for drug tests. If they fail the test, they are put behind bars for a relatively short time, beginning with two or three days.

"I just hate going to jail," probationer Kirkland Tabanera told the Star-Bulletin's Susan Essoyan after recently completing substance abuse treatment, having been addicted to methamphetamine.

That opinion appears to be shared by others who have experienced prison. Those on regular probation failed more than half their drug tests. Within three months of joining HOPE, the failure rate dropped to 7 percent and the rate continues to lessen with time in the program.

The program is in contrast with the failed "Three Strikes and You're Out" system in California, where the prison population has soared from 76,000 in 1988 to nearly 167,000 today. California spends more on incarcerating adults than it pays to educate 226,000 students in its 10-campus University of California system.

HOPE has drawn worldwide attention and is being considered in Washington, Oregon, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and New Jersey as a model for convicts sentenced to probation or serving parole following prison terms.

Alm was invited to discuss drug policy in Portugal in April and has agreed to a similar agenda at Stockholm with the Swedish Carnegie Institute in November.

Mark A.R. Kleiman, a professor of public policy at UCLA and an expert on drug policy, said of HOPE, "As a recidivism prevention program, it's unmatched, and as a drug treatment program, it's unmatched."

A federal stimulus of \$420,000 will help expand HOPE by adding drug testers, probation officers, a deputy city prosecutor and deputy public defender.

About 1,500 of the state's 8,000 probationers are in the program now, and Alm wants to double that number. The state administration and legislators should give him the needed assistance.

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