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December 2, 2025

Via electronic submission

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, HI 96813

The Honorable Nadine K. Nakamura
Speaker of the House of Representatives
State Capitol, Room 431
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear President Kouchi and Speaker Nakamura:

Pursuant to Act 228, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2025, the Judiciary is transmitting a copy of the *Report on the Women's Court Pilot Program, Circuit Court of the Third Circuit – Kona Division*.

In accordance with Section 93-16, Hawai'i Revised Statutes, we are also transmitting a copy of this report to the Legislative Reference Bureau Library.

The public may view an electronic copy of this report on the Judiciary's website at the following link: https://www.courts.state.hi.us/news_and_reports/reports/reports.

Should you have any questions regarding this report, please feel free to contact Karen Takahashi of the Judiciary's Legislative Affairs and Special Projects Division at (808) 539-4896, or via e-mail at Karen.T.Takahashi@courts.hawaii.gov.

Sincerely,

Brandon Kimura

Brandon M. Kimura
Administrative Director of the Courts

Attachment

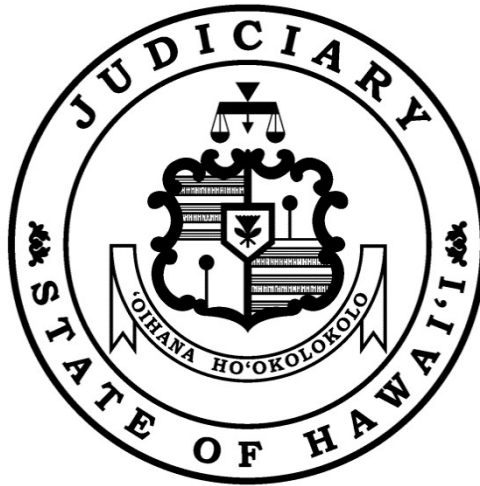
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**REPORT TO THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
2026 REGULAR SESSION**

ON

ACT 228, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2025

**Report on the Women's Court Pilot Program
Circuit Court of the Third Circuit – Kona Division**



Prepared by:

The Judiciary, State of Hawai'i

December 2025

**REPORT TO THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
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ACT 228, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2025

**Report on the Women's Court Pilot Program
Circuit Court of the Third Circuit – Kona Division**

The Women's Court Pilot Program in the Circuit Court of the Third Circuit – Kona Division (Nā Hulu Wehi or Kona Women's Court) was established by the Hawai'i State Legislature in May of 2025 and signed into law by Governor Josh Green as Act 228 on June 26, 2025. Nā Hulu Wehi is a two-year pilot program intended to acknowledge the distinct pathways that lead women into the criminal justice system and address their individual needs through:

- trauma-informed and evidence-based practices;
- gender-responsive programming;
- collaboration with stakeholders; and
- services to women in the court system with the goal of diverting participants from incarceration, supporting their success in the community, and reducing recidivism.

Background

The Judiciary's First Circuit Women's Court on O'ahu demonstrated that gender-responsive, trauma-informed interventions reduce recidivism and strengthen families. Act 228, SLH 2025 authorized expanding that model statewide, beginning with Kona. The Act emphasizes evidence-based, trauma-informed, and culturally grounded practices that improve outcomes while maintaining fiscal accountability.

The name Nā Hulu Wehi means "the adorned feathers" or "precious adornments." In Hawaiian culture, feathers represent dignity, honor, and sacred value, symbolizing each woman's inherent worth and her journey of healing and renewal.

Guided by cultural practitioner Lorna Lim, Nā Hulu Wehi integrates Hawaiian values and traditional practices into the court process, ensuring that healing is both evidence-based and culturally grounded. While participants are introduced to Hawaiian culture, customs, and values, they are also encouraged to explore and connect with their own cultural backgrounds and personal beliefs. The focus is not on adopting a specific culture, but on using shared values, such as gratitude, humility, and community connection, as pathways toward recovery, accountability, and personal growth.

Nā Hulu Wehi builds on the First Circuit Women's Court by expanding trauma-responsive, gender-specific, and culturally grounded services to West Hawai'i. The pilot program enhances the existing Kona Adult Drug Court by embedding specialized services that

address the distinct pathways of justice-involved women. It is not a separate court, but, rather, an enhancement within the current framework for women at high risk for recidivism and who have high treatment needs.

Research from AllRise, SAMHSA, and other experts confirm that justice-involved women are more likely than men to have experienced trauma, abuse, or violence, factors that often lead to substance use and criminal behavior. By integrating trauma-informed care, peer mentoring, Moral Reconnection Therapy (MRT), safe housing, and cultural healing, Nā Hulu Wehi promotes accountability, recovery, and community safety. These services delivered through Big Island community providers strengthen local capacity and expand available resources.

Core program components:

- a women's mental health professional for trauma-informed clinical care;
- behavioral health beds providing safe, stable housing during treatment;
- a cultural practitioner to strengthen cultural identity, healing, and community connection;
- Moral Reconnection Therapy (MRT) to improve decision-making and accountability;
- a drug court peer specialist offering lived-experience mentoring;
- Women's Court Advisory Committee ensuring services remain responsive to participants and community needs;
- with the commencement of the Nā Hulu Wehi Program, the Kona Drug Court calendar has been restructured to reflect gender-responsive best practice—men now appear first, followed by a dedicated women's session—creating a safer, more open and trauma-sensitive environment, which benefits men and women alike.

Major Milestones (July–November 2025)

July 2025 – Program Pre-Implementation: Finalized scope of work and procurement processes.

August 2025 – Statewide Trauma Training: Hosted with national experts from SAMHSA and AllRise, equipping Hawai'i teams in trauma-responsive court practices.

September 22, 2025 – Orientation and Blessing: Launched Nā Hulu Wehi and solidified community partnerships. The orientation and blessing ceremony brought Judiciary leaders, treatment providers, community partners, and legislators together to launch the program and affirm that collaboration, is key to successful implementation.

September 2025 – Public Outreach: Radio and newspaper interviews highlighted the program's mission and encouraged community support.

October 1, 2025 – Full Service Activation: All contracts began for clinical, peer, cultural, MRT, and evaluation services.

Participant Profile and Early Engagement

As of November 1, after one month of implementation, 16 participants had been enrolled so far (15 women from Drug Court and one non-Drug Court woman).

- **Mental Health Services:** Individual therapy and a weekly women's group began in October, addressing trauma recovery, self-esteem, and parenting.
- **MRT:** Early sessions show high attendance and motivation.
- **Peer Specialist:** A certified Kona Drug Court graduate now serves as Peer Specialist, meeting weekly with participants and supporting both women and men.
- **Cultural Practitioner:** Weekly sessions have been planned to strengthen identity and universal cultural connection, with future family involvement planned.
- **Advisory Committee:** Meets regularly to review data and advise on service adjustments.

Fiscal Overview – Quarter 1 (FY 2026)

Only a partial amount of funds were expended during the first quarter “establishment phase,” as all funds will be committed only after full contract execution and service readiness. The resulting first-quarter savings will be strategically invested in expansion of the existing drug court program, as described below:

Preliminary Expenditure Plan for Savings

Excess funds from the first quarter are being strategically invested to strengthen services, enhance program quality, and support community engagement, as follows:

- expand behavioral health provider and MRT contracts;
- extend program evaluator contract for enhanced data capacity;
- increase funding for drug testing and lab confirmation;
- purchase 24/7 breathalyzers and GPS monitors;
- support peer mentoring volunteer training and stipends;
- host a healing retreat for trauma recovery and cultural restoration;
- implement a kahili featherwork healing project where participants create small kahili that will one day form a collective symbol of unity and renewal;
- provide light refreshments for the orientation and blessing ceremony to foster community participation and collaboration.

Participant Numbers (as of November 1, 2025)

- Women accepted into the program: 17 (including one non-Drug Court participant)
- Eligible but not accepted: 0
- Completed the program: 0
- Removed from the program: 0

Expanded Best-Practice Metrics (First Circuit and AllRise aligned):

Expanding best-practice metrics in the Kona Women's Court helps us learn, in real time, what parts of the model are actually working for our women and where adjustments are needed. By tracking a broader range of meaningful outcomes, we can refine the program based on evidence and ensure the court continues to improve as we learn more.

- Treatment engagement and retention
- Substance use and testing outcomes
- Trauma and mental-health improvement scores
- Housing stability and duration
- Parenting and family engagement
- Employment and education status
- Recidivism and compliance rates
- Graduation and program completion
- Participant satisfaction and qualitative feedback
- Fiscal efficiency (cost per participant, cost avoidance)
- Fidelity to team model and gender-specific calendar practice

The national-level Program Evaluator will develop a dashboard of key performance indicators, provide quarterly updates to the Judiciary and Legislature, and publish an annual outcome report with trend analysis and recommendations.

Next Steps (Nov 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026)

1. Launch program evaluation and dashboard (Dec 2025).
2. Expand core services (Behavioral Health, MRT, Peer Support, Cultural Practices). (November–June 2026)
3. Host healing retreat and kahili project (Mar–Apr 2026).
4. Prepare mid-year legislative report with data-supported outcomes (May–Jun 2026).

Conclusion – Reflection and Lessons Learned

The early months of Nā Hulu Wehi demonstrate that when community stakeholders, Judiciary leaders, and service providers work together, meaningful change is possible. Collaboration with legislators, treatment partners, and local leadership remains the key to sustainability and impact.

The program will continue to align with AllRise Best Practice Standards and the latest advances in trauma-informed and gender-responsive healing, ensuring that Nā Hulu Wehi remains a national model for how to balance justice, accountability, and compassion.

Nā Hulu Wehi is more than a pilot program, it is a testament to what can be achieved when healing, culture, and collective effort come together for the good of our island community.