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# Federal Detention Center eyed to replace Oahu Community Correctional Center

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State Rep. Gregg Takayama is pushing a proposal to have the state buy the Federal Detention Center, above, to use as a replacement for the aging OCCC.

## ADVERTISING

State Rep. Gregg Takayama hopes to convince the federal government to sell the Federal Detention Center next to the Honolulu airport to the state to use as a replacement for the aging Oahu Community Correctional Center in Kalihi.

Gov. David Ige's administration is asking lawmakers this year for \$5 million to investigate how the state might finance construction of a new jail in Halawa Valley, an undertaking that is expected to cost about \$525 million.

But Takayama (D, Pearl City-Waimalu-Pacific Palisades) said Ige is also interested in purchasing the detention center at 353 Elliott St., which opened in 2001 and can house about 1,200 prisoners.

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"It's in good shape, and it's in good shape largely because it's mostly unused," Takayama said. The [website](#) for the facility indicates it is holding about 400 prisoners today, he said, but about 160 of those are Hawaii inmates who are being held in leased beds at FDC because there is no room for them in OCCC.

"In view of that, and with Congress passing a federal prison reform act that is expected to reduce the population of their prisons and jails, I think it makes sense for us to put money on the table and offer to buy it," Takayama said.

Thus far the federal Bureau of Prisons has not shown any interest in that idea, but Takayama said that's because they didn't think the state was serious. He said the idea originated with state Director of Department of Public Safety Nolan Espinda, who pitched the idea to Ige.

Ige supports buying the FDC and met with federal prison officials during President Obama's administration, but they declined, Takayama said. Takayama said the detention center was built for about \$170 million, and he introduced [House Bill 1177](#) this year to "put money on the table" for federal officials to consider.

OCCC is Hawaii's largest jail and was holding slightly more than 1,100 inmates at the end of last year, but lawmakers have argued for years the Kalihi facility should be relocated so that the site can be used for transit-oriented development along the rail line.

State prison officials in August completed an environmental impact statement for the jail replacement project, which is planned for the state Department of Agriculture's Animal Quarantine Station.

If the state follows through with those plans and builds an entirely new jail, the federal detention center will not have "nearly enough" inmates to justify the cost of keeping it open, Takayama said.

House Finance Chairwoman Sylvia Luke said she has visited the detention center because the FDC's high-rise design was seen as a model for the proposed new Oahu jail. She said Takayama's plan is "worth looking into."

"We should look at alternatives, and I'm glad Gregg thought about this," in part because it would eliminate the need for a \$5 million feasibility study for financing the new jail, she said.

Luke said lawmakers have told the Ige administration “time and time again” that it needs to incorporate into its construction plans various prison and bail reform proposals that would reduce prison and jail populations.

“We cannot just continue to build prisons based on the current population, because the current population is wrong,” Luke said. “OCCC is filled with people who cannot make bail and people who are there prior to trial, so these are individuals who could be out on bail, who could be trying to rehabilitate in the meantime. Instead, we keep them in jail.”