

LOCAL NEWS

'Behind Bars: Prison Women Speak' screens at Doris Duke

by: [Sandy Harjo-Livingston](#)
Posted: Feb 13, 2023 / 09:52 PM HST
Updated: Feb 13, 2023 / 09:53 PM HST



Courtesy: Honolulu African American Film Festival

SHARE



HONOLULU (KHON2) — According to the [American Civil Liberties Union](#), “nationally, there are more than 8x as many women incarcerated in state and federal prisons and local jails as there were in 1980, increasing in number from 12,300 in 1980 to 182,271 by 2002.”

There was a 717% increase in the female prison population between 1977 and 2004 leading to an average 8.8 percentage change per year.

As these numbers continue to increase, there is little heard from this population and what they experience. But, thanks to a new film that explores the voices of these women, there is a unique opportunity to feel and see their lives in prison and after prison.

The 2023 [Honolulu African American Film Festival](#) is in full swing at the Doris Duke Theatre at the Honolulu Museum of Art. The locally made film, *Behind Bars: Prison Women Speak*, is set to show at the theater on Saturday, Feb. 18 at 7 p.m.

“I hope this film helps raise awareness about the intersection of incarceration, physical wellness, mental health, poverty and trauma. In 2021, it cost Hawai`i taxpayers \$238 per day to hold an inmate in a facility; and every year, the price goes up. It’s important to understand how serious the incarceration of women is in our State,” said Tadia Rice, the film’s producer.

The producer of the film is a Kailua resident. Her film showcases interviews with women who are currently and formerly incarcerated at the Women’s Community Correctional Center.

“We must recognize that 75% of our incarcerated women are mothers, and many have substance abuse problems. In Hawai`i, sixty percent of our female inmates are victims of childhood physical, mental and sexual abuse,” explained Rice.

Through their stories, the audience has a rare opportunity to view these women as people with stories, loves, losses, heartbreaks, successes, failures and dreams. It allows the audience to step back and realize that ‘prisoner’ is a one-dimensional view and that these women have experiences that everyone needs to ponder.

“Women in prison need education, mentor programs, a gender-responsive approach that acknowledges the unique pathways into and out of the criminal justice system, and a recovery system that addresses poverty as well as social and cultural determinants,” added Rice.

“What’s most disturbing is that Hawai`i locks up a higher percentage of people than many wealthy democracies like the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia; and more than four times more than Canada. We need safety. We need justice, but we also need humanity. We need to do more to heal the trauma and mental illness experienced by our marginalized communities. We need to change a seriously broken system,” concluded Rice.

The [Prison Policy Initiative](#) discovered that women who are incarcerated in Hawai'i are 40% Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander despite comprising only 20% of the total population.

Meanwhile, The [National Institute of Justice](#) said that female inmates are the fastest growing segment in Hawai'i's prison populations.

After the screening of the film on Saturday, the festival will be hosting a discussion panel. Judge Sandra Simms, the first African American female judge for the District Court of the First Circuit in Hawai`i will moderate the panel.

The panel will consist of Larson Medina, Recreation Specialist at the Women's Community Correctional Center and Attorney Leslee Mathews, President of the African American Lawyers Association of Hawai'i and Special Counsel to the Judiciary.

The panel will also include formerly incarcerated and long-term Beyond Bars participants: entrepreneur Zoe O'Brien and Momilani Cody, Paipai o Ko'olau peer mentor at Windward Community College.

Of course, filmmaker Tadia Rice, recipient of the Stars of Oceania Leadership Award from the University of Hawai'i and distinguished recipient of the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, will also participate.

Copyright 2023 Nexstar Media Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.