

RES25-109

Testimony

MISC. COMM. 422

*INTERNATIONAL & LEGAL AFFAIRS (ILA)

***INTERNATIONAL & LEGAL AFFAIRS (ILA) Meeting**

Meeting Date: Aug 20, 2025 @ 01:00 PM

Support: 11

Oppose: 0

I wish to comment: 0

Name: Jacob Wiencek	Email: Jacob.m.wiencek@pm.me	Zip: 96815
Representing: Self	Position: Support	Submitted: Aug 15, 2025 @ 04:40 PM
Testimony: Aloha Committee Members, We've got a homelessness crisis that our city is struggling to address. The Crisis Outreach Response and Engagement (C.O.R.E.) is central to Honolulu's efforts to resolve the homelessness crisis. But is it working? Everyday across the city, so many of our citizens encounter individuals occupying our public spaces and creating social disorder. It is unfair to homeless individuals and the community to let the status quo continue. I urge the Committee to SUPPORT this resolution!		
Name: Danyelle White	Email: info@projectvisionhawaii.org	Zip: 96817
Representing: Project Vision Hawaii	Position: Support	Submitted: Aug 18, 2025 @ 08:58 PM
Name: Liam Chinn	Email: Liamchinn@hotmail.com	Zip: 96822
Representing: Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition	Position: Support	Submitted: Aug 19, 2025 @ 02:31 PM
Name: Carrie Ann Shirota	Email: cashirota808@gmail.com	Zip: 96813
Representing: Self	Position: Support	Submitted: Aug 19, 2025 @ 10:32 PM
Name: HESD Employee	Email: hesd@honolulu.gov	Zip: 96815
Representing: Self	Position: Support	Submitted: Aug 20, 2025 @ 12:55 AM
Testimony: Testimony in Favor of Resolution 25-109 Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee, I stand in strong support of Resolution 25-109, which seeks to enable the Honolulu City Auditor to conduct a thorough		

audit of the CORE division of HESD.

I can speak first hand and say that CORE as it is deployed is wasteful and inefficient. I would also like to point out that James Ireland and Ian Santee need to be scrutinized as they are funneling homeless outreach monies into their "Specialized Community Medicine" Branch where they operate specialized vehicles out of a Halawa warehouse costing the city nearly \$900,000 in rent alone. They have also spend hundreds of thousands of CORE/HESD monies on said specialized vehicles which include a command truck, MCI truck and a armored ambulance with a fire nozzle turret on the roof.

These are just some of the many mismanagements of funds that the HESD administration partake in. I'm 100% positive an audit will turn over additional misuses of fundings.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge you to pass Resolution 25-109.

Sincerely,

HESD Employee

Name:

Cameron Rasmussen

Email:

camron916@gmail.com

Zip:

96822

Representing:

Self

Position:

Support

Submitted:

Aug 20, 2025 @ 05:13 AM

Testimony:

I am writing to voice my support for the passage of Resolution 25- 109 directing the City Auditor to conduct a performance audit of the City's resource management and administration of the CORE program and HESD. I am a social worker, social work professor at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and a member of the the Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition. I want our community to be as safe as possible, and our City to support effective approaches to safety and justice that can make that possible.

I believe in the necessity of CORE, however, the purpose and current implementation of CORE is not aligned with proven crisis responder programs across the country that have been operating for decades. This audit is necessary to support CORE in following proven and evidence based practices that can make CORE an effective approach in our community, and one that we can expand across Hawai'i.

To be clear, the audit should not be used as a tool to eliminate the CORE program, or to cut funding and shrink the scope of the program which is already too limited. The audit should strictly serve as a tool to improve CORE.

Name:

Raelyn Reyno Yeomans

Email:

raelynreyno@gmail.com

Zip:

96734

Representing:

Position:

Submitted:

Self	Support	Aug 20, 2025 @ 07:32 AM
Testimony: I am testifying in support of this resolution calling for an audit of the CORE program. An audit is an important way to determine if goals of the program are being met and are in line with best practices. We must insure that public funds are being used to effectively carry out the goals of a program and an audit is the best way to do that. At this point there is little data available from the CORE program to prove it's effectiveness in crisis diversion and long term follow up. Let's improve this program by passing this measure. Thank you.		
Name: Jenny Neal	Email: jenny.neal5290@gmail.com	Zip: 96778
Representing: Self	Position: Support	Submitted: Aug 20, 2025 @ 07:53 AM
Name: Jenny Neal	Email: jenny.neal5290@gmail.com	Zip: 96778
Representing: Self	Position: Support	Submitted: Aug 20, 2025 @ 08:09 AM
Testimony: My name is Jenny Neal and I was a field supervisor for CORE. I am a part of The Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition and we support this audit. When I joined CORE I had big hopes for it's future. I would love to see that program come to it's full potential. I believe accountability and transparency will help to build something that could serve our communities in a more intentional way.		
Name: Josh Frost	Email: jfrost@acluhawaii.org	Zip: 96813
Representing: ACLU of Hawaii	Position: Support	Submitted: Aug 20, 2025 @ 11:15 AM
Name: Nikos Leverenz	Email: naleverenz@gmail.com	Zip: 96818
Representing: Self	Position: Support	Submitted: Aug 20, 2025 @ 11:57 AM
Testimony: I am writing to strongly support Resolution 25-109 to direct the City Auditor to conduct a performance audit of the CORE program and HESD. Government programs should be continually assessed by an objective entity to determine effectiveness, costs, and the identification of opportunities for program and managerial improvements.		

Mayor Blangiardi recently noted that it's not his intention to further criminalize poverty and homelessness. Intensified sweeps have already caused significant disruptions and subjected many of our city's most vulnerable residents to detention in jail. Incarceration for any period of time is injurious to individual health and Intensifies underlying behavioral health problems.

Ideally counties across Hawaii should have alternative crisis responder mechanisms that respond to situations that increase the risk of injury and death with the presence of armed government officials. Other jurisdictions have done so with proven effectiveness over years.

With respect to reducing homelessness, the increased provision of safe and stable permanent supportive housing with wraparound services is an essential policy goal that all levels of government. Further, increased respite services for unhoused persons provides acute care and medical stabilization that position patients for additional medical care, social services, and perhaps housing upon release.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.



PROJECT VISION

Committee on International & Legal Affairs
Chair Nishimoto
Honolulu City Council

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RESOLUTION 25-109

Aloha Chair Nishimoto, Vice-Chair Tupola, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Project Vision Hawai'i, mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of Resolution 25-109. We are especially grateful to Vice-Chair Tupola and Councilmember Okimoto for introducing this important measure and for their commitment to reimagining how we respond to mental health and homelessness-related crises in our community.

As an organization engaged daily in homeless outreach and street medicine, we see firsthand how early, compassionate interventions can de-escalate situations, connect individuals to resources, and prevent unnecessary emergency room visits. Our teams work in the field to provide care in ways that build trust and dignity, and we know these same principles can be expanded through structured, county-supported crisis response.

The CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On the Streets) model in Oregon demonstrates how social workers, case managers, and medical professionals can respond effectively to 911 calls with a human-centered, trauma-informed approach. For over three decades, CAHOOTS has successfully diverted thousands of calls away from police and ER systems, proving that evidence-based, peer-supported crisis response is both cost-effective and life-affirming.

We are hopeful that the forthcoming audit will highlight opportunities for agencies to collaborate more closely and to share best practices across neighbor islands. By investing in trauma-informed care (TIC), peer supports, and evidence-based crisis models, Honolulu has the opportunity to lead in building a more compassionate and effective response system.

We respectfully urge the Council to adopt Resolution 25-109 and to prioritize the development of crisis response teams rooted in the principles of dignity, collaboration, and community well-being. We are eager to support these efforts and to work alongside partners in advancing a system that uplifts our most vulnerable residents while strengthening public safety and health outcomes.

Mahalo for your leadership and consideration.

Respectfully,

Project Vision Hawai'i



Aloha Chair Nishimoto and members of the International and Legal Affairs Committee,

The Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition supports passage of Resolution 25-109 directing the City Auditor to conduct a performance audit of the City's resource management and administration of the CORE program and HESD.

Our coalition includes dozens of public safety experts, including organizations that provide street medicine, mental health services, and housing for unsheltered residents. The coalition advances a public health based approach to safety in Hawai'i, including policies that reduce incarceration through deploying non-police responders and addressing the root causes of poverty and crime.

We believe CORE is a well intentioned service. However, **the purpose and current implementation of CORE is not aligned with proven crisis responder programs across the country that have been operating for decades.** This includes programs such as CAHOOTS in Eugene-Salem, which is the gold-standard for mobile crisis response, emphasizing de-escalation and crisis intervention.

Below is a list of specific issues with the CORE program, as well as recommendations.

First however, it is important to establish that while there are several problems related to misaligned purpose and lack of transparency and accountability, CORE is an indispensable service for successfully addressing the public health and housing crisis we see on our streets. **Therefore, the audit should not be used as a tool to eliminate the CORE program, or to cut funding and shrink the scope of the program which is already too limited. The audit should strictly serve as a tool to improve CORE** and bring it into line with proven crisis responder models nationwide. Structurally, CORE is well positioned to succeed as a permanent city/county service as it is currently integrated into EMS, which provides greater degree of stability.

Ultimately, CORE has the potential to save the City/County of Honolulu tens of millions of dollars by reducing EMS time//Police time/ER visits related to low level non-violent 911 calls. CORE can also free up police to more effectively address serious and violent crime.

Key issues with CORE

Lack of adherence to proven crisis responder models

The primary purpose of CORE is to address a city/county EMT shortage, not to function as a crisis responder service that diverts police calls, protecting vulnerable residents from the use of force and keeping them out of the justice system. CORE was primarily intended to support emergency services by handling overflow. It does not prioritize protecting individuals in crisis, or effectively connecting them to services.

Incorrect deployment strategy

EMTs and social workers operate separately. For example, only CORE EMTs respond to 911 calls involving homeless individuals—Community Health Workers CHW's) do not accompany them. However, EMTs are not skilled in de-escalation and have limited knowledge of social services. CHW's also do not have access to medical notes from EMTs.

Lack of Social Work Leadership

Paramedics run the CORE program, with no social workers in upper management. There is no field supervisor with a social work degree, lack of lived experience among leadership, and fewer CHWs than EMTs.

Failure to Make Referrals

CORE staff do not consistently refer individuals to community organizations . CORE social workers are inexperienced and lack established partnerships.

Lack of Crisis Response Training

CORE staff are not extensively trained for crisis response because that is not the program's goal. Staff mainly patrol Waikīkī and conduct homeless outreach. CORE EMTs lack crisis outreach skills, and no social workers accompany them on calls.

Lack of transparency and accountability- Very little data on CORE's performance metrics is available. Most recent data on CORE's website is from 2022.

Lack of Follow-Up

CORE frequently fails to conduct regular follow-ups with individuals they contact. Politicians often call for homeless individuals to be removed from specific areas, and while CORE conducts occasional outreach, they lack the capacity for sustained follow-up. Most interactions are one-time engagements.

Weak Coordination with HPD

CORE does not work closely with the police. They should meet with HPD weekly to coordinate efforts and familiarize themselves with frequent service users.

Emergency Services Culture

CORE was established with an EMT-focused culture, preventing it from evolving into a functional crisis responder program. The city's political landscape further reinforces this. The program remains rooted in EMS culture, and there is a lack of expertise in crisis response, mental health, and social services. CORE does not prioritize crisis response and social services; instead, it operates as an emergency services program run by paramedics rather than a crisis outreach team. The city attempted to integrate Community Health Workers (CHWs) into EMT services when the real need was to integrate a paramedicine model. Current CORE staff lack the capability to implement fundamental changes toward a proven crisis response model.

Equipment and Resource Issues

Many CORE ambulances frequently break down, with older vehicles failing between one to five times per month. The program has three old ambulances and one new one, which is only used by upper management. New ambulances for EMS sit unused in a warehouse. Social workers have been issued cars, but they are not used to engage with target populations. EMTs use SUVs but are not transporting people.

Response Time Disparities

While the program is active in Chinatown and Waikiki, and a new station in Wahiawa is planned, most other areas of the island remain severely underserved. The audit should analyze how CORE plans to expand crisis response services outside of urban Honolulu and improve response times everywhere service is delivered.

Political Resistance to Change

Efforts to shift CORE toward a crisis responder model face resistance because its primary function for politicians is to fill the EMT workforce gap.

Lack of Long-Term Commitment

CORE is still not considered a permanent program. It initially received \$3–4 million in federal funding.

Recommendations For C.O.R.E

#1 Adhere to proven crisis responder model

Staff, train, and send appropriate people. Hire more workers skilled in crisis intervention. All C.O.R.E. staff should receive regular training to develop effective crisis response tools and skills. Amend qualifications to focus on hiring peers/people with lived experience. A bachelors degree is not required to become a police officer or firefighter, and should not be required to be a crisis outreach worker.

#2 Create formal partnerships with community providers to ensure continuum of care

For C.O.R.E. to live into its promise, it must be able to regularly connect service users with community organizations and social services, and have the capacity to follow up with service users when appropriate. In addition to the increased staffing of crisis intervention specialists workers, C.O.R.E. should seek formal partnerships with community organizations across Hawai'i.

#3 Establish Evaluation, Oversight, and Accountability

Most recent public data on CORE performance is from 2022. Need to establish community oversight body for mobile crisis responder program (CORE). CORE should commit to advancing voluntary treatment, justice and due process protections in crisis continuum

#4 Expand scope of CORE

For CORE to become a viable alternative to police/EMS, service must be 24/7, and island wide. Response times must be in line with police/EMS.

The Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition appreciates your passage of Resolution 25-109, and we look forward to working with City/County leadership to strengthen and expand C.O.R.E. in line with proven crisis responder models.

Mahalo,

The Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition

August 19, 2025

Committee on International and Legal Affairs
Chair Scott Y. Nishimoto, Chair
Vice Chair Andria Tupola, Vice Chair
Honolulu City Council
Hearing: August 20, 2025, at 1:00 P.M.

Re: Support for RESOLUTION 25-109 Performance Audit of CORE

Dear Chair Nishimoto, Vice Chair Tupola, and Council Members:

I am writing in support of **RESOLUTION 25-109** directing the City Auditor to conduct a Performance Audit of the City's Resource Management and Administration of the Crisis Outreach Response and Engagement Program and the Honolulu Emergency Services Department.

As a resident of Honolulu, a mother, an attorney, and a policy advocate for data-driven solutions to community safety, I acknowledge the City's efforts to create the Crisis Outreach Response and Engagement Program ("CORE"). It reflects a growing recognition in Honolulu that we need innovative community-based public safety systems to provide mental health responses for crises involving mental illness, houselessness, and addiction.

While well-intended, **CORE lacks some of the key structural components in alignment with the White Bird Clinic's CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) model in Eugene, Oregon**, which is considered the gold standard for alternative crisis response systems. The following are programmatic highlights from CAHOOTS:

- The program mobilizes two-person teams consisting of a medic (a nurse, paramedic, or EMT) and a crisis worker who has substantial training and experience in the mental health field.
- The CAHOOTS teams deal with a wide range of mental health-related crises, including conflict resolution, welfare checks, substance abuse, suicide threats, and more, relying on trauma-informed de-escalation and harm reduction techniques.

- CAHOOTS staff are not law enforcement officers and do not carry weapons. Instead, their training and experience are the tools used to ensure a non-violent resolution of crises.
- CAHOOTS also handles non-emergent medical issues, avoiding costly ambulance transport and emergency room treatment.

CAHOOTS has been studied, with proven benefits to the communities it serves.

- <https://www.vera.org/behavioral-health-crisis-alternatives/cahoots>
- <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2020/12/cahoots-program-may-reduce-likelihood-of-police-violence/617477/>
- <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/10/874339977/cahoots-how-social-workers-and-police-share-responsibilities-in-eugene-oregon>

Given the complex social problems that our communities face, I support the City Auditor conducting a performance audit of the CORE program. An audit is a good business practice. Significantly, it will provide CORE leadership, lawmakers, and the community with independent evaluative feedback of findings and recommendations. In short, an audit will outline key areas for growth and improvement.

Specifically, I recommend that the audit focus on five specific areas:

- 1) Lack of alignment with proven crisis responder models and specific comparison to CAHOOTS
- 2) Lack of measurable program goals, objectives, and benchmarks
- 3) Limited crisis response training of CORE staff
- 4) Failure to establish partnerships and provide local referrals and follow-up to persons in need
- 5) Lack of evaluation, oversight, and accountability of CORE performance

In summary, the City has an opportunity to strengthen its landmark efforts to create a non-armed alternative response system to policing. In turn, this will produce better outcomes for residents in the City and County of Honolulu and serve as a blueprint for similar response systems within the neighbor islands.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments in support of **Resolution 25-109**.

Sincerely,

Carrie Ann Shirota, Esq.
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813



Aloha Chair Nishimoto and members of the International and Legal Affairs Committee, **The Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition supports passage of Resolution 25-109 directing the City Auditor to conduct a performance audit of the City's resource management and administration of the CORE program and HESD.**

Our coalition includes dozens of public safety experts, including organizations that provide street medicine, mental health services, and housing for unsheltered residents. The coalition advances a public health based approach to safety in Hawai'i, including policies that reduce incarceration through deploying non-police responders and addressing the root causes of poverty and crime.

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Lack of transparency and accountability- Very little data on CORE's performance metrics is available. Most recent data on CORE's website is from 2022.

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CORE does not work closely with the police. They should meet with HPD weekly to coordinate efforts and familiarize themselves with frequent service users.

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most other areas of the island remain severely underserved. The audit should analyze how CORE plans to expand crisis response services outside of urban Honolulu and improve response times everywhere service is delivered.

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For C.O.R.E. to live into its promise, it must be able to regularly connect service users with community organizations and social services, and have the capacity to follow up with service users when appropriate. In addition to the increased staffing of crisis intervention specialists workers, C.O.R.E. should seek formal partnerships with community organizations across Hawai'i.

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The Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition appreciates your passage of Resolution 25-109, and we look forward to working with City/County leadership to strengthen and expand C.O.R.E. in line with proven crisis responder models.

Mahalo,

The Reimagining Public Safety in Hawai'i Coalition



Committee: International & Legal Affairs
Hearing Date/Time: Wednesday, August 20, 2025, at 1:00pm
Place: Council Chamber & Via Videoconference
Re: Testimony of the ACLU of Hawai'i IN SUPPORT of Resolution 25-109

Dear Chair Nishimoto, Vice Chair Tupola, and Members of the Committee:

The ACLU of Hawai'i **strongly supports** Resolution 25-109, which directs the City Auditor to conduct a performance audit of the city's resource management and administration of the Crisis Outreach Response and Engagement (CORE) program and the Honolulu Emergency Services Department.

It must be stressed that our support for an audit, nor any findings of an audit, should be used as justification to eliminate the CORE program. The audit should be used to improve the existing program.

We applaud the creation of CORE as an indispensable program for addressing ongoing public health and housing crises impacting our communities. However, we believe the program is vastly under-resourced and misapplied. Presently, the program is not properly aligned with proven crisis response programs on the continent. The CAHOOTS program in Oregon is seen by advocates and experts as the "gold standard" for these types of programs. Honolulu's CORE program falls short of that standard.

CORE is currently operated by paramedics who are essential but have not been extensively trained in crisis response. There are no trained social workers in the upper management of the program. CORE's EMTs lack critical crisis outreach skills and are not accompanied by social workers on calls into the community.

It seems that the practical purpose of the CORE program currently is to address the county's EMT shortage. CORE should be diverting calls from police response, protecting vulnerable residents from the use of force, and allowing the police to focus properly on public safety. With proper resources and data-driven managerial decision-making, CORE would successfully keep vulnerable people from unnecessary interaction with the criminal justice system.

Further, there is a frustrating lack of transparency and accountability for the CORE program. Virtually no data on the program's performance metrics is readily available. Information on the CORE website is outdated with no apparent updates since 2022. It is also unclear from the City and County budget documents how funds appropriated to the program are allocated or spent. An audit would allow for greater transparency and better understanding of how funds are being used by the Emergency Services Department and the CORE program.

The program appears to consistently fail to refer individuals in crisis to local community organizations for assistance. CORE's social workers lack practical experience and established relationships in the community.

CORE services appear to focus almost solely on Chinatown and Waikīkī, though we understand a new station is currently planned for Wahiawā. The rest of O'ahu remains significantly underserved.

By increasing efficiency across EMS, HPD, and emergency department visits related to non-violent, non-criminal 911 calls, the CORE program has so much potential to save the City and County tens of millions of dollars. We urge the committee to advance this measure, and we look forward to working with the Council, Administration, and community partners to improve CORE's vital service.

Sincerely,

Josh Frost

Josh Frost

Policy Advocate

ACLU of Hawai'i

jfrost@acluhawaii.org

The mission of the ACLU of Hawai'i is to protect the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the U.S. and State Constitutions. The ACLU of Hawai'i fulfills this through legislative, litigation, and public education programs statewide. The ACLU of Hawai'i is a non-partisan and private non-profit organization that provides its services at no cost to the public and does not accept government funds. The ACLU of Hawai'i has been serving Hawai'i for over 50 years.

American Civil Liberties Union of Hawai'i
P.O. Box 3410 Honolulu,
Hawai'i 96801T:
808.522.5900
F: 808.522.5909
E: office@acluhawaii.org
www.acluhawaii.org