



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

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INMATES SEW CLOTH MASKS FOR PUBLIC SAFETY DEPARTMENT STAFF AND THE COMMUNITY

HONOLULU – Inmates in the sewing program at the Waiawa Correctional Facility (WCF) and Kulani Correctional Facility (KCF) have begun to sew thousands of cloth face coverings for Public Safety Department staff, inmates and other state agencies, as a way to prevent COVID-19 from spreading, and to give back something to the community.

This sewing project began on April 1 with the assistance of the Hawaii Correctional Industries (HCI) who supplied the fabric, sewing supplies and sewing machines for the inmates.

The rollout to PSD's Corrections Division, Health Care Division, Law Enforcement Division, and Administrative Division staff has already begun. Once the orders for the staff are complete, pending orders from the facilities for cloth masks for inmates will follow. Work lines are currently producing 600-700 cloth masks per day. By April 17, HCI is projecting daily production goals of 1,200 masks per day, and by April 30, they anticipate manufacturing a minimum of 1,500 masks a day. The total order for the Department is currently 14,000 masks. Delivery will be in phases over the next few weeks and is estimated to be completed by the end of the month.

PSD wants to make sure everyone in the Department's Corrections, Law Enforcement and Administrative Divisions has at least two cloth masks each.

"On top of the personal protective gear already on-hand within our Divisions, we wanted to make sure everyone has a couple washable, reusable cloth masks. We don't have any confirmed cases of COVID-19 in our facilities and we are making every effort to keep it that way," says Nolan Espinda, Department of Public Safety Director. "We also wanted to provide our PSD staff with this extra layer of protection that they can use while working out in the community and as they go about their daily lives."

Since all non-essential inmate programming is temporarily suspended, wardens at WCF and KCF jumped at the chance to provide a program that keeps inmates busy, teaches them a new skill, and gives them a meaningful way to contribute to society.

"This was a great opportunity to give the inmates something productive to do and keep them from becoming idle. These guys were eager to play a part in helping our community by

volunteering their time. In the short time the Kulani sewing program has been in production, they've made over 600 masks and counting," says KCF Warden Wanda Craig.

WCF Warden Sean Ornellas says, "Our inmates are made aware of this worldwide pandemic through family phone calls, talking with our own staff and the daily news coverage. They know how it has changed and impacted everyone in this world. The inmates are more than happy and eager to work hard to give back to the public. We have many more inmates waiting in the wings, wanting to help sew these basic, but much needed barrier masks, but we need more equipment and sewing materials."

To meet the increased demand, HCI is grateful to be working with Hawaii Fabric Mart and Printex Fabrics, but they are also seeking donations from the public. There is a need for more sewing materials such as:

- sewing machines
- sewing machine needles
- new fabric by the yard (100% cotton or any poly cotton fabric)
- plastic tables
- irons w/ small tabletop ironing boards
- fabric scissors
- thread – all colors

Other state government departments and outside agencies are showing interest in purchasing masks for their staff. Hawaii Correctional Industries will be expanding to include orders for cloth masks for outside agencies once the PSD orders are completed. The Department of Health is already in line to place its order, and other agencies are eagerly standing by with their cloth mask orders.

Inmates in the sewing program at WCF, like Benjamin Zablan and Keoni Hylton, say once they are done with the internal orders, they want to sew masks for keiki to get them back to school and for kupuna to keep them safe.

"This is our opportunity to give back. We have children, grandkids, nieces and nephews. I thought about my keiki. I thought about their safety and what they are going through right now out there. It's definitely a privilege for us to take on a project like this," says Benjamin Zablan.

Keoni Hylton says, "My mom is in Arizona. She's coming back May 2 so I'm prepping her to be mandatory quarantined 14 days. She's amazed that I'm sewing these masks that she may probably wear. My mom is up there in age too. She falls into one of those categories, the elderly, and has underlying conditions. It is something of an intimate situation for me, it does hit home."

If you would like to donate equipment and/or sewing supplies, please contact Hawaii Correctional Industries at 808-677-6638 or email psd.hawaii@hawaii.gov.

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