

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/guest-blogger-judge-steven-alm-on-the-success-of-the-hope-probation-program>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Editor's Note: Hawaii First Circuit Court Judge Steven Alm started Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE) program. Vera's Center on Sentencing & Corrections has written [a policy brief](#) about HOPE.

I was pleased to see Vera's policy brief about the HOPE program. It emphasizes an important point: HOPE is based on a simple idea that is a challenge to actually put into practice and that means following all of the program's features and bringing all of the players in the system together to operate differently and most important, faster. This includes probation officers, court staff, judges, prosecutors, defense, and law enforcement (both to take violators into custody at the probation offices and to go out and look for and arrest absconders). By achieving this coordination, you can provide the swift hearings needed. The judge then needs to provide certain but proportionate consequences.

I was really pleased to see how Professor Jeffrey Rosen emphasized in last month's *New York Times Magazine* [article](#) that HOPE is working in part because the offenders feel that it is fair. They are told what the rules are and if they break these rules, they are, in fact, sanctioned, but in a fair, proportionate way (for example, a week in jail). Society works partly because its citizens believe in the rule of law and some sort of social contract. People are more likely to follow the conditions of probation if they are enforced in a fair, just, and equitable manner.

As the Vera brief points out, HOPE appears to work because we adhere to all features of the program. I encourage other jurisdictions who are considering a HOPE approach to follow all the steps if they want to see the success we've had. The nonprofit organization [Friends of HOPE](#) has formed to support the program's efforts. You may want to read the ["Benchmarks for Success,"](#) those program attributes we believe are critical for a HOPE-style program to work.

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