

ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

ispiglobal.com · ISPIGlobal@proton.me · (808) 999-0544

COMMENTARY

Policing the Community You Are From

Diversity, Cultural Competency, and Workforce Development in Pacific Island and Hawaii Law Enforcement

Research Pillar: Public Safety Workforce Development

Document Type: Commentary

Author: Warren Pulley, Founder & Executive Director

Institution: Island Security Policy Institute — Honolulu, Hawai'i

Published: 2026

Contact: ISPIGlobal@proton.me · (808) 999-0544 · ispiglobal.com

Keywords: diversity Hawaii law enforcement, cultural competency police Hawaii, Pacific Islander police, Native Hawaiian law enforcement, diverse police workforce Hawaii, community policing diversity Pacific, police diversity recruitment Hawaii

RESEARCH INDEPENDENCE STATEMENT

The Island Security Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization registered in the State of Hawaii. This publication represents ISPI's independent research and policy analysis. Views expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of any funder, sponsor, or affiliated organization. ISPI maintains full editorial independence on all research outputs. Commissioning clients do not influence ISPI's research conclusions, policy recommendations, or published findings. Full institutional credential documentation is available to qualified government agencies, foundations, and institutional partners upon formal request.

In 2020, a Honolulu Police Department study of officer demographics found that Native Hawaiian officers were significantly underrepresented relative to Native Hawaiian community population, while Pacific Islander communities were represented at rates well below their community proportion.¹ In a community policing model that depends on community trust, officer cultural competency, and the ability of law enforcement to communicate and build relationships across diverse community populations, this demographic gap carries direct public safety implications.

The diversity challenge in Hawaii and Pacific Island law enforcement is not primarily a matter of hiring bias — though that dimension exists. It is a matter of systemic structural barriers: lower average educational attainment among Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian candidates relative to other demographic groups, financial barriers to academy preparation, and limited family traditions of law enforcement employment in these communities.

The Case for Cultural Competency in Island Policing

Community policing research consistently demonstrates that officers who share language, cultural background, and community connection with the populations they serve are more effective at building the trust relationships that drive voluntary cooperation with law enforcement.² In a Pacific Island territory or Hawaii community with significant Chuukese, Marshallese, Ilocano, or Samoan populations, an officer who speaks the community language and understands cultural communication patterns has a demonstrable operational advantage.

ISPI Recommendations

1. Develop targeted law enforcement recruitment programs for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities — including community college pathways, academy preparation support, and multilingual recruitment materials.
2. Establish Pacific Island language training programs for Hawaii and Pacific territory law enforcement agencies prioritizing the Micronesian and Polynesian languages most prevalent in the communities those agencies serve.
3. Commission research on the relationship between officer cultural competency and community cooperation outcomes in Hawaii and Pacific Island law enforcement contexts.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

ABOUT THE ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

The Island Security Policy Institute (ISPI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Honolulu, Hawaii. ISPI produces practitioner-led research, policy analysis, training programs, and commissioned research on public safety, emergency preparedness, insider threat, and security policy for island and coastal communities worldwide. ISPI is registered as a federal contractor on SAM.gov under NAICS 541720. Warren Pulley, Founder & Executive Director.

Website: ispiglobal.com · Email: ISPIGlobal@proton.me · Phone: (808) 999-0544 · LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/warpul13](https://www.linkedin.com/in/warpul13)

© 2026 Island Security Policy Institute. All rights reserved. This publication may be reproduced for noncommercial purposes with full attribution to ISPI.