

first day at work with my new firm, I was assigned a mentor. My appointed mentor was Rosemary Fazio, a partner within the firm. She was there to help if I had any questions or problems, and was there if I wanted to seek advice on my career path. I was lucky to have a wonderful mentor, who in addition to being a resource for my cases and questions about the firm, encouraged me to get involved with the HSBA and other organizations. Rosemary shared with me how rewarding her experiences were in getting involved with the HSBA, Disciplinary Board, Judicial Selection Commission, and other activities, and encouraged me to participate and stay involved. One other attorney at the firm who has made a difference and whom I consider a mentor for his dedication to public service is Michael Gibson. Mike's commitment to serving the public and pro bono encouraged me to become more involved in the pro bono and Access to Justice movements.

Mentors help shape you as a lawyer and have a great influence on what type of lawyer you may become. I encourage those firms and entities which do not have an internal mentorship program to establish one. And for the solo practitioners, I encourage you to consider approaching new attorneys in the community and volunteering to mentor and help them as they navigate their way through the practice of law. Mentoring is extremely important in our profession. Our reputation and the quality of services to the members of our community improves as we assist our teens to understand and appreciate our legal system, our aspiring attorneys in their completion of their studies, and our new members in achieving competence in their fields of law. We should all strive to share our knowledge, skills, and time.

After determining that low and moderate-income Hawai'i residents have massive unmet civil legal needs, the Access to Justice Hui formulated a ten-step plan for addressing the "justice gap." The first recommended action is creation of a Hawai'i Access to Justice Commission ("Commission"), which would expedite and facilitate successful

implementation of the other nine action steps and ensure ongoing attention to access to justice ("ATJ") issues. In late February, the Hui submitted to the Hawai'i Supreme Court a proposed new rule creating such a Commission and formally requested its adoption.

Currently, twenty-four states and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have ATJ commissions or similar entities. Nationwide experience has shown that ATJ efforts are much more likely to succeed where an effective commission exists. There is widespread agreement among stakeholders regarding the need for a commission in Hawai'i. At least eleven organizations (including the HSBA, the Young Lawyers Division, Hawai'i Justice Foundation, several nonprofit civil legal service providers, and the William S. Richardson School of Law) have adopted the Hui's action plan and specifically support creation of a commission.

As proposed, the Commission would have twenty-two members. The members would include the Chief Justice or an Associate Justice and four judges appointed by the Chief Justice who are representative of the state judicial system; two HSBA representatives and two attorneys familiar with ATJ issues appointed by the HSBA; four nonprofit civil legal service

## A Hawai'i Access to Justice Commission:

# An Idea Whose Time Has Come

by George J. Zweibel



provider representatives appointed by a consortium of legal service providers; two non-attorney public representatives appointed by the legal

service consortium in consultation with the Chief Justice; one Hawai'i Justice Foundation representative; one law school representative; one paralegal appointed by the Hawai'i

Paralegal Association; and four government representatives (the Governor, Attorney General, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House, or their respective appointees).

The Commission would be charged with overseeing efforts to expand and improve statewide delivery of high quality civil legal services to low-income people. Among other things, the Commission would seek to increase and stabilize long-term funding for civil legal assistance, increase pro bono contributions by Hawai'i attorneys, improve collaboration and coordination among legal service providers, reduce language and other barriers to the civil justice system, increase support for self-represented litigants, and increase public awareness of ATJ issues.

The Commission would utilize committees and task forces to support its work, which could include persons who are not members of the Commission. Staff and funding support for the Commission would be provided by a combination of private and public sources of financial and in-kind support.

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