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By Daniel R. Foley

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Hawaii is paving the way in providing Access to Justice.

In a recent "access to justice" report, the National Center for Access to Justice ranked Hawaii No. 1 for providing support to self-represented litigants. And as this year comes to a close, I cannot help but reflect on how far we have come this past decade to give a voice to those who cannot afford an attorney, and how much help has been provided to those who navigate the judicial system on their own.

We came from humble beginnings. A small group of people, passionate about making justice accessible for all people from all income levels, came together to form the Access to Justice Hui.

The hui found that only 1 in 5 low- and moderate-income residents had the resources to meet their civil legal needs. This left 4 out of 5 people on their own.

Representatives from the Hawaii Justice Foundation, Hawaii State Bar Association (HSBA), state of Hawaii Judiciary, the William S. Richardson School of Law, nonprofit legal service providers and others worked toward the vision of increasing access to justice for civil legal matters. On May 1, 2008, the Hawaii Access to Justice Commission was established by the state Supreme Court.



Daniel R. Foley is an associate judge in the Hawaii Intermediate Court of Appeals and chairman of the Access to Justice Commission.

The number of supporters that are now behind the Access to Justice Commission's mission has grown over the past six years with more lawyers, judges, legislators, nonprofits and community members on board and working together to achieve common goals of increasing access to justice.

Together, we have been able to accomplish much with limited resources and affect change throughout the judicial system.

Each year, the commission hosts an annual Access to Justice Summit. This gathering of attorneys, judges and members of the public serves as a forum to raise awareness, share ideas and foster solutions.

Under the leadership of Chief Justice Mark Recktenwald, the state Judiciary has opened self-help centers in every major courthouse statewide. Since the first opening in 2011, the self-help centers have assisted more than 6,900 people at almost no cost to the public as attorneys from state and local bar associations have stepped forward to provide legal information and advice to the self-represented to make the process more understandable and their self-representation more effective.

One way we have been able to utilize technology to expand services is a partnership between the state Judiciary, the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii and the HSBA to make self-help interactive court forms available online.

In August 2014, the Hawaii State Public Library System joined this partnership by launching its A2J

Interactive Forms Initiative, which has trained our public librarians to assist library patrons to access the interactive forms on its 800 computers and 250 netbooks state-wide. In spring 2015, the partnership will be offering know-your-rights workshops at public libraries across the state, including Molokai and Lanai.

With the Legislature's support, the commission has found ways to fund nonprofit legal service providers. The filing fees for certain civil court documents were increased, and now provide more than \$1.5 million a year for the nonprofits. Court rules have also been amended to provide for the distribution of excess funds from class-action lawsuits to nonprofits.

Along with the state Judiciary, we have made increasing access to justice for all Hawaii residents a top priority.

Thanks to all our partners who have helped us come this far, and let's continue to build on this momentum in the coming year.

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