

Chief Justice Mark E. Recktenwald
Welcoming Remarks for Access to Justice Conference
William S. Richardson School of Law
June 7, 2019

Good morning and aloha. I'd like to start by thanking the Access to Justice Commission for sponsoring today's conference, and for all the Commission does to increase access to justice in Hawai'i. In addition, I'd like to acknowledge my good friend and former colleague, Commission Chair Justice Simeon Acoba, for his leadership of the Commission. I also want to thank Dean Avi Soifer and the William S. Richardson School of Law for hosting the conference with such aloha for the past eleven years!

I would like to take this time to acknowledge Bob LeClair and the Hawai'i Justice Foundation, the Cades Foundation, Pat Mau-Shimizu and Derek Kobayashi of the Hawai'i State Bar Association, as well as the countless attorneys, staff, and volunteers who are doing amazing things to increase access to justice throughout the state.

Since the Hawai'i Access to Justice Conference was first held in 2009, it has become the gathering place for people who are supporting, envisioning, or engaging in initiatives to increase access to justice. Mahalo to everyone who works so hard to plan these conferences, including Carol Muranaka and the Access to Justice Commission's Education Committee, and all of

the distinguished speakers and panelists who will be participating at today's conference.

Please join me in acknowledging everyone who helped make this conference possible.

We are fortunate to have a very special keynote speaker for today's conference: Special Counsel for Pro Bono Initiatives at Schulte Roth & Zabel in New York, Danny Greenberg. Danny has had a distinguished career as former president and attorney-in-chief of the Legal Aid Society of New York, and director of clinical programs at Harvard Law School. Welcome to Hawai'i, Danny, and thank you for joining us here today.

I would especially like to recognize the legal services providers who are here with us, and who put in the hard work day-in and day-out to empower, guide, and uplift those in need. They do amazing things with very limited resources, and deserve our heartfelt thanks. Also, many thanks to the pro bono attorneys who, despite busy work schedules, nevertheless take on cases and volunteer their talent to help others.

There have been many significant efforts underway this past year that have been helping to bridge gaps, improve efficiency, and bring together partners with similar goals.

The cornerstone of our access to justice efforts has been the creation of Self-Help Centers in courthouses statewide. At these centers, self-represented litigants can receive free legal

assistance from volunteer attorneys. We appreciate every volunteer who contributes their time and talent, whether by volunteering through their law firm, or organization, or finding a day to come in to fill an empty slot. To date, there have been close to 25,000 people helped at Self-Help Centers in courthouses across the state, and the impacts being made are significant. For example, one user stated that “[the volunteer] helped me to be . . . strong[er] and realize my potential to get past all of these current issues in my life.”

Another bright spot in our access to justice efforts is the Volunteer Court Navigator Program, which was recently made permanent in the Second Circuit. The volunteers assist individuals without an attorney when they appear in district court civil cases, such as landlord-tenant disputes or debt collection cases. These enthusiastic navigators, with their bright, orange, easy-to-identify badges, help in small, but vitally important ways: they help to ensure that parties arrive at the proper courtroom, check-in, and respond when called on, among other things.

There are approximately twelve dedicated volunteer court navigators volunteering so far. Many of the volunteers are retirees who bring a lifetime of experiences to bear on their service as court navigators, and we are very appreciative of their contributions. Since the project’s launch in November

2017, over 200 self-represented litigants have received assistance from these court navigators. The program has received positive feedback from those helped such as, "I felt out of my element and [the court navigator] helped put me at ease" or "[The court navigator] was informative, factual, and very centering for me." Thank you to the Access to Justice Commission's Task Force on Paralegals and Other Non-Lawyers, Second Circuit Chief Judge Joseph Cardoza, a stalwart member of commission who is retiring later this month, and the many partners who have helped to make this program such a success.

All of our work on access to justice has helped establish credibility and recognition for Hawai'i. This recognition has opened the doors to increased opportunities and funds to support the reach of our access to justice efforts. For example, Hawai'i was one of seven states to receive a Justice For All grant worth \$116,000. Grant efforts are finishing with the successful launch of two meaningful initiatives: the Community Navigator Project, which is training trusted leaders in the community on available access to justice resources and tools (150 trained); and the Hawai'i Legal Aid Interagency Roundtable, which is breaking down silos in state agencies. Nalani Fujimori Kaina and Representative Della Au Belatti will be presenting on the two projects during the afternoon workshop, and I encourage

anyone who is interested in learning more to attend to learn about the great being done under this grant. Thanks to Representative Belatti and other members of the Legislature, including Representatives Joy San Buenaventura and Chris Lee, and Senator Karl Rhoads for their support of access to justice.

Another promising initiative involves an online tool being developed to increase access to the courts. The "Legal Navigator" portal is an on-line legal service portal that will use artificial intelligence to help people identify legal problems, and then access resources that address both their legal issues and related needs. This project is being piloted in Hawai'i and Alaska, and was made possible thanks to the Microsoft Corporation's almost \$2 million contributions, and contributions from LSC, ProBono Net, and the Hawai'i Justice Foundation. There are some exciting activities planned around this project during the afternoon tech workshop so I encourage you to attend that session if you would like to learn more.

Other exciting initiatives include Online Dispute Resolution for small claims cases which will give parties the option to resolve disputes through an online mediation platform, and the Civil Justice Improvement Task Force which is currently finalizing its recommendations for how to make our circuit court civil courtrooms more efficient and accessible.

Needless to say, a lot of changes have occurred in the legal community and at the Access to Justice Conference since this conference was first convened in 2009.

Many things, however, have also stayed the same. One of those constants is Dean Avi Soifer, and the hospitality that he has shown to host the Access to Justice Conference at the law school each year. Avi leads with kindness, and, without fail, people note his warmth, openness, and willingness to consider new ideas, which is part of what makes him effective as a leader at the law school and respected in the community as a whole. Avi is the longest serving dean at the law school, serving with distinction for sixteen years. His time as Dean has been marked with an unfaltering commitment to increasing access to justice in Hawai'i, support for law students who wish to give back to their communities, and encouragement to help people with big ideas make those dreams a reality. He has been a member of the Access to Justice Commission since its inception in 2008, and has done an extraordinary job of representing Hawai'i's only law school on the national and local level.

Avi, because of your dedication to access to justice and your service to the law school and the Hawai'i community at large, in light of your pending retirement as Dean, and in celebration of all that you will continue to do as an esteemed

professor, I, on behalf of the Hawai'i Supreme Court,
Representative Della Au Belatti on behalf of the legislature,
and Justice Acoba on behalf of the Access to Justice Commission,
would like to present you with certificates of recognition.

Avi, thank you again for all you have done and continue to
do for access to justice efforts in Hawai'i, the law school, and
the greater community at large.