

## 2024 HAWAI‘I ACCESS TO JUSTICE CONFERENCE

### “MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF CIVIL ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL”

Friday, June 21, 2024

William S. Richardson School of Law, University of Hawai‘i

#### Summary of Afternoon Session<sup>1</sup>

3:35 – 4:15 **Plenary: “Meeting the Challenges of Civil Access to Justice for all”  
Regan Iwao and Nikole Nelson**

Regan Iwao, President and Director for the Legal Aid Society of Hawai‘i and a Director for the Hawai‘i Justice Foundation, started the session by asking what does meeting the challenges of Civil Access to Justice for all mean? He went on to highlight the various speakers and presentations throughout the conference.

Mr. Iwao thanked all attendees, first line responders, and Chief Justice Recktenwald. He discussed how the self-help centers are still open and there have been 7,800 remote hearings held, thus increasing accessibility. He mentioned the Committee on Artificial Intelligence which may also help and increase access to justice.

Mr. Iwao talked about how Frontline Justice meets needs. He reviewed the morning panel that discussed the legal community’s response to the Maui wildfires. There was a shared mission during this crisis which resulted in outpouring of support and collaborative efforts to address community needs.

Nikole Nelson, the Chief Executive Officer of the nonprofit Frontline Justice, talked about what it takes to be a community justice worker in Alaska. She discussed how the Frontline Program focuses on underlying issues and is community based. The justice workers are trained to help with other areas like simple legal procedures and filling out forms, which does not require a lot of training. She highlighted the low barrier model which is inclusive and that everyone could do it if they are provided with the right training and support.

Ms. Nelson answered a question about how they obtained the support of the bar association. She explained how the unauthorized practice of law is permissive and that there are many areas where there are no lawyers. They provided the bar association with evidence of the lack of capacity of legal aid and the success of nonlawyers helping to provide services. Access to justice became a part of the bar association’s strategic plan. The community also lent support before the idea was

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<sup>1</sup> Simeona Mariano, a member of the Commission’s Committee on Education, Communications, and Conference Planning, prepared this summary.

introduced to the Supreme Court. They passed the waiver for legal aid with just one dissent.

Ms. Nelson then discussed the inquiry about any push back from licensed attorneys regarding the low barrier model. She said there was not a lot of push back, but some were worried about the quality of service. She believes that it helped that they laid the groundwork for the model. She added that lawyers should not have a monopoly on services that they are not providing.

Lastly, Ms. Nelson responded to the question about how much of a factor was the geography of Alaska in the low barrier model. She explained how the map helps you visualize the large size of Alaska. And that there was a stress on the system and how stress breaths innovation. But in the end, numbers are very similar no matter where you go.