



**HONOLULU CITY COUNCIL**  
**KE KANIHELA O KE KALANA O HONOLULU**  
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**TOMMY WATERS**  
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April 17, 2025

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair  
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary  
**Sent via Email**

**RE: Letter of Support for the Nomination of Judge Karen T. Nakasone to the Seat of Chief Justice of the State of Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals**

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard and Members,

With this letter, I would like to convey my strong support of Judge Karen T. Nakasone's nomination to be selected Chief Justice of the State of Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals.

I first met Judge Nakasone in law school, and then we worked as colleagues in the Office of the Public Defender. As colleagues, I saw firsthand Judge Nakasone's legal skills, staunch work ethic, and dedication to the art of being an effective and successful trial lawyer. Judge Nakasone eventually received a merit-based promotion to a Level 4 Public Defender, in which she was assigned to the most difficult and serious cases. After leaving my position as a Public Defender, I met Judge Nakasone again while I was a member of the Judicial Selection Commission, and she was appointed to her first judgeship in 2011 by Governor Abercrombie. Since that time, I would occasionally argue cases before her in court when she served as a criminal trial judge.

In all of my interactions and dealings with her, Judge Nakasone has always conducted herself in the most fair and unbiased way, holding herself to the highest standard of professional and respectable manner. She is extremely thoughtful of others, as well as mindful of her surroundings and the people with whom she interacts. Judge Nakasone is open-minded and listens well to the arguments and sides that are presented to her. She is always aware of her position in any decision-making matter. As a lawyer, I know many fellow attorneys who agree that Judge Nakasone is one of the most honest and trustworthy people we know. I have yet to meet someone who does not share the same high regard and respect that I have for Judge Nakasone. She is one of the most stable, steady, and even-keeled people that I have the pleasure of knowing, and I admire her integrity, excellent work ethic and shining character. She is truly one of the best people I know and I am proud to consider her a friend.

Thank you for considering my letter during this process. If you have any further questions or concerns about my comments, please feel free to contact me.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tommy Waters", is written over the printed name.

Tommy Waters  
Chair, Honolulu City Council

**GM-790**

Submitted on: 4/15/2025 7:20:51 AM

Testimony for JDC on 4/22/2025 9:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Eric Nitta	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support.

April 15, 2025

**SENT VIA EMAIL**

Hawai'i Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 228  
Honolulu, HI 96813

**RE: GM 790 – Testimony In Support of the Honorable Karen T. Nakasone**

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Committee Members:

I wholeheartedly write in support of the Honorable Associate Judge Karen T. Nakasone's appointment as Chief Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals. Although I am a licensed attorney in private practice, I submit this testimony in my personal capacity based on familial knowledge.

My paternal family has been active in the Chinatown community over multiple generations<sup>1</sup> and shares a presence in Fort Street Mall since 1995. As a result, I am intimately familiar with many of our beloved former and current family-owned small businesses in the area. Judge Nakasone's parents are the original owners of the Flower Fair floral and lei retail store at 1188 Fort Street Mall from the mid-1980's through 2004. Several family friends and longtime business owners in the area fondly recall Judge Nakasone as an industrious and diligent worker at the family business throughout her formative years. I also understand that Judge Nakasone frequented the other family-owned stores (e.g., the former Logo's Bookstore and Shoe's By Michael) along Fort Street Mall during her leisure time and excelled as a student in the balance of her familial obligations. The Nakasone's operated a community oriented business and was once recognized as the "Most Supportive Small Business" by the Hawaii Pacific College Student Association.

I believe Judge Nakasone's entrepreneurial upbringing shaped her storied record of community leadership and volunteer service in multiple organizations, including the Japanese American Citizens League Honolulu Chapter, Hawaii United Okinawa Association, and Pacific Century Fellows. These experiences demonstrate that Judge Nakasone is well prepared to effectively lead an organization and collaborate with diverse stakeholders as the Chief Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

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<sup>1</sup> United Chinese Society of Hawaii, Mun Lun School, and Lum Sai Ho Tong (Lum, Lim, Lam, Lem and Lin (林) surname benevolent society).

**Kendrick S. Chang**  
kchang@wik.com  
(808) 627-2758  
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Finally, Judge Nakasone is also a lifelong martial arts student and volunteer instructor in Kendo and Karate. As a mutual black belt discipline in Tae Kwon Do, I can attest that traditional martial arts is a holistic pursuit that embodies many principles that we expect in a jurist: modesty, courtesy, integrity, self-control, perseverance, and indomitable spirit, etc. I have no doubt that Judge Nakasone follows these principles based on her previous judicial opinions and advocacy work with the Japanese American Citizens League.

Based on the foregoing reasons, I believe Judge Nakasone will serve us well as Chief Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals and hope the Senate Judiciary Committee renders a favorable advise and consent recommendation.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kendrick S. Chang', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kendrick S. Chang

**GM-790**

Submitted on: 4/15/2025 1:01:51 PM

Testimony for JDC on 4/22/2025 9:15:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Salina Kanai	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

## Comments:

I write this letter in strong support of Judge Nakasone.

I first met Judge Nakasone (of course, Karen, then), when I was a 2L law student interning for the summer at the State Public Defender's Office. I had the opportunity to write the opening brief on an appeal of a trial she had done. I was able to discuss with Karen her trial strategy, appellate issues, and pick her brain about what the appeal should focus on. That was more than 20 years ago, in approximately 2001. I still recall that case because Karen was a respected trial attorney in the office, and even though I was just a law student intern, she treated me with respect and talked to me as if I were an attorney.

A few years later, I did become a trial attorney at the PD's office, and Karen was in the appellate section. I often sought out her advice on cases because her experience was broad and her judgment was always sound. Karen is one of her pursuit of justice. It surprised no one when she became a judge.

Much later in my career, I had the opportunity to appear several times before Judge Nakasone in Circuit Court, including doing a jury trial. I was impressed (but again, not surprised) by her level of preparedness, fairness, impartiality, and commitment to the rule of law. Handling a heavy felony calendar is not an easy thing. Judge Nakasone did it well, and she did so with composure, even-handedness, and respect to all parties. I appreciated that even with a heavy calendar, she did not rush to get through things. She thought deeply about issues. I truly enjoyed appearing before her.

I have been a trial attorney for close to 20 years now, in both state and federal court. I am realizing more and more that one of the most important qualities a judge should have is the working knowledge of how trials are done. This might be even more important for an appellate judge. Judge Nakasone has that trial experience as well as the other qualities that a judge should have – impartiality, a commitment to the rule of law, composure, and integrity, just to name a few.

Thank you for reading my comments.

1130 N. Nimitz Hwy., Suite A-254  
Honolulu, HI 96817

April 15, 2025

Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Hawai`i State Capitol  
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: Comments Regarding Gubernatorial Nominee Karen T. Nakasone as Chief  
Judge of the Hawai`i Intermediate Court of Appeals

Honorable Committee Members:

I write in wholehearted support of Karen T. Nakasone as Chief Judge of the Hawai`i Intermediate Court of Appeals ("ICA"). I met Karen when she joined the Public Defender's Office in 1996 after a judicial clerkship with now retired Hawai`i Supreme Court Associate Justice Simeon R. Acoba (a known appellate taskmaster). [I retired after 34 years as a Deputy Public Defender, 1989-2023.] After advancing from the Appellate Section through the trial sections (misdemeanor and Felony), Karen returned to the Appellate Section (2004-2011). The Appellate Section consists of five senior appellate attorneys (including myself 2003-2023), so Karen and I worked closely with each other until 2011, when she was appointed as a Circuit Court Judge.

Karen is hardworking and extremely diligent, the classic overachiever. I was impressed when she told me she had been reading all newly-issued appellate cases, both civil and criminal, in the years leading up to her circuit court appointment. That is a huge task, but I believe it helped her hit the ground running when she went to the civil bench as she did not have significant civil experience. Since Karen became an ICA Associate Judge in 2020, I have read many of her opinions. I was impressed by Karen's willingness to research and write a dissenting opinion (i.e., extra and difficult work) when she believed the majority (of the 3-judge panel) incorrectly analyzed and/or decided an issue. Karen obviously has excellent legal research and analysis skills. She is also a practical problem solver. She is smart, creative, and can think out of the box. I appreciate Karen's ability to view the facts of a case in their context, which guards against myopic, impractical decisions.

Karen is quiet and a bit shy until you get to know her. She has a strong sense of morality and ethics and would not be influenced by compassion or passion. Karen is well-organized in both her personal and professional life, a requirement for the Chief Judge position. Her experience as an Associate Judge also gives her great insight into how to keep the ICA's hefty caseload flowing while maintaining quality, well-reasoned decisions. For all the above reasons, I humbly request that you confirm Karen T. Nakasone as Chief Judge.

Sincerely,

/s/Phyllis J. Hironaka  
Phyllis J. Hironaka  
Deputy Public Defender, retired