

Honolulu, Hawaii

APR 25 2025

RE: GOV. MSG. NO. 790

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi  
President of the Senate  
Thirty-Third State Legislature  
Regular Session of 2025  
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Judiciary, to which was referred Governor's Message No. 790, submitting for study and consideration the appointment of:

CHIEF JUDGE OF THE STATE OF HAWAI'I INTERMEDIATE COURT OF APPEALS

G.M. No. 790      KAREN T. NAKASONE  
for a term to expire in 10 years,

begs leave to report as follows:

Your Committee reviewed the personal history, resume, and statement submitted by Judge Karen T. Nakasone for service as Chief Judge of the State of Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Your Committee received testimony in support of the appointment of Judge Karen T. Nakasone from one member of Hawai'i's congressional delegation; Office of the Governor; Office of the Public Defender; one member of the Honolulu City Council; Kobayashi Sugita & Goda, LLP; Chozen-Ji, International Zen Dojo; Hawaii Friends of Civil Rights; Japanese American Citizens League, Honolulu Chapter; Yagaji Doshi Kai; NAACP Honolulu Hawaii Branch; Hawai'i Women Lawyers; and ninety-two individuals.

Your Committee received comments on the appointment of Judge Karen T. Nakasone from the Hawaii State Bar Association.

The Hawaii State Bar Association Board of Directors (HSBA Board) uses a rating system that considers several criteria to assist the HSBA Board in making a recommendation to your Committee on whether the appointee is "qualified" or "not qualified".



Specifically, the criteria the HSBA Board employs is the same criteria found in the American Bar Association's Guidelines for Reviewing Qualifications of Candidates for State Judicial Office. Those guidelines include the following criteria, which are not exclusive: integrity, diligence, legal knowledge and ability, professional experience, temperament, financial responsibility, public service, and ability to perform the responsibilities and duties required of the position for which the applicant has been appointed. Upon review of the established criteria, the HSBA Board found the appointee to be qualified for the position of Chief Judge of the State of Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Judge Nakasone attended Bryn Mawr College, where she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science. She received her Juris Doctor from the Boston University School of Law, where she was the Vice President of the National Asian Pacific American Law Students Association and President of the University's Asian Pacific American Law Students Association. Judge Nakasone has been licensed to practice law in the State of Hawai'i since 1995.

Since 2020, Judge Nakasone has served as an Associate Judge for the State of Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals. As an Associate Judge, Judge Nakasone has decided appeals from the State's circuit, district, and family courts, including state and county agency appeals, and ruled on appellate motions in three-judge decision panels. Judge Nakasone has served on seven hundred sixty-five merit decision panels, authored two hundred eleven of those decisions as lead judge, and separately authored seven concurring and dissenting opinions. Judge Nakasone has also ruled on more than one hundred fifty motions per year, both as lead judge and by rotation on a three-judge motions panel.

Judge Nakasone previously served as a trial judge for nine years on the First Circuit's Circuit Court. For four of those years, she was a criminal trial judge, where she presided over criminal jury and bench trials, pretrial litigation, sentencing hearings, and post-conviction relief, and a civil trial judge for five years, where she oversaw civil jury and bench trials and pre-trial litigation for civil actions filed in circuit court.

Judge Nakasone has dedicated her legal career to public service. Before becoming a judge, Judge Nakasone served as a Deputy Public Defender for the Office of the Public Defender for fifteen years, where she handled more than five thousand criminal matters, including petty misdemeanors, misdemeanors, and class A,



B, and C felonies. Her experience at the Office of the Public Defender included eighteen jury trials and over one hundred non-jury trials. Judge Nakasone also obtained significant appellate experience as a Deputy Public Defender. Over the course of eight years, Judge Nakasone handled sixty-five appeals, authored certiorari and mandamus applications, and presented eight oral arguments. Before working at the Office of the Public Defender, Judge Nakasone clerked for Judge Simeon R. Acoba, Jr., on the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

In addition to her professional work, Judge Nakasone is an active volunteer in the legal community. She is currently a member of the Hawai'i Chapter of the National Asian Pacific Bar Association and Hawai'i Women Lawyers and has previously served as Director for both organizations. Judge Nakasone also previously served on the Judiciary Penal Rules Committee, as Director for the Mediation Center of the Pacific, Director of the Hawaii Justice Foundation, Commissioner for the Access to Justice Commission, and Director for the Supreme Court Board of Bar Examiners. Judge Nakasone is also an active member of several community organizations. She is a karate instructor for Chozen-ji International Zen Dojo, Assistant Instructor and Treasurer for Shorin-Ryu Hawaii Seibukan, and is a lifetime member of the Hawaii United Okinawa Association.

Testimony submitted in support of Judge Nakasone's appointment commends her preparation, thoughtfulness, demeanor, and professionalism. Testimony further indicates that, during her years as a judge, Judge Nakasone has consistently demonstrated her desire to stay connected to the broader legal community by regularly attending bar-related events, conferences, forums, and retains a deep respect from practitioners and parties.

Your Committee finds that, based on the testimony submitted on her behalf, responses to questions asked by the members of your Committee, and your Committee's review of information about her and her qualifications, Judge Karen T. Nakasone has the knowledge, dedication, and other competencies to be the Chief Judge of the State of Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals, and possesses the legal expertise and integrity to fully and faithfully discharge the duties associated with that judicial office.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Judiciary that is attached to this report, your Committee, after full consideration of the background, experience,



and qualifications of the appointee, has found the appointee to be qualified for the position to which appointed and recommends that the Senate consent to the appointment.

Respectfully submitted on  
behalf of the members of the  
Committee on Judiciary,



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KARL RHOADS, Chair



