

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Committee on Judiciary  
Hawaii State Legislature

RE: Testimony in Support of Sonja McCullen for Appointment as an Associate Judge of the  
Intermediate Court of Appeals

Dear Sirs and Madams:

I am writing in strong support of Sonja McCullen's appointment as an Associate Judge of the Hawaii Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA).

I am an attorney licensed to practice law in Hawaii - a former partner at the law firm of Watanabe Ing LLP, and current Senior Counsel at Kamehameha Schools. I have known Sonja for over 20 years. We attended law school together, and I had the pleasure of clerking with her at the Hawaii Supreme Court when we graduated from law school. We have since remained in close contact through her years as a victims commission advocate, union counsel, and prosecutor.

Sonja is an intelligent, hardworking, and dedicated attorney, who has committed her life and career to serving the people of Hawaii. Her experience speaks volumes, and I believe that there is no one more qualified than Sonja to sit on the ICA. Not only does she have the experience, but she is professional in all she does. I've watched her on numerous occasions put in extra time and effort to ensure that her research is comprehensive and her understanding of the law flawless. Her attention to detail and respect for the court system are unparalleled. She is extremely respectful, and her understanding of the need to uphold the sanctity of the judiciary would make her a role model for all judges.

In addition to the foregoing, Sonja was born and raised in Hawaii, giving her a unique understanding of its community, culture, and political environment. Being from a multicultural family, including native Hawaiian, Sonja has a broad perspective and appreciation for all that Hawaii is and can offer to the world. As a mother, she has also demonstrated her commitment to making sure Hawaii is a place to live and thrive for all future generations.

Her experience, professionalism, and understanding of the unique systems we have in Hawaii will make her a truly wonderful Associate Judge of the ICA. I strongly support Sonja's appointment and appreciate your time and consideration.

Mahalo,

Emi Morita Aukai



# NATIVE HAWAIIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

Aloha mai no, Aloha aku  
Where love is given, love should be  
returned.

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair

Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice-Chair

### Testimony in Strong Support of GM 2

Confirming Sonja M.P. McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals

Wednesday, August 25, 2021, 1:00 p.m.

Via Videoconference

Chair Rhoads, Vice-Chair Keohokalole, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

Aloha and mahalo for the opportunity to present testimony today on behalf of the Native Hawaiian Bar Association (NHBA). I am Melody Kapilialoha MacKenzie, a past president and current member of the NHBA Board of the Directors. The NHBA is an association of lawyers, judges and other legal professionals of Hawaiian ancestry that seeks to promote excellence, unity, cooperation, education, and the exchange of ideas among its members and in the larger community. The Board of Directors of the NHBA highly recommends the confirmation of Sonja Monalisa Pualeialoha McCullen as an Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA).

Ms. McCullen, a graduate of the William S. Richardson School of Law, has been practicing law since 2002, most recently as a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney for the City & County of Honolulu in the Appellate Division. In that capacity, she has excellent knowledge of and experience in the appellate process, having filed over 170 briefs in the ICA and another 70 responses or writs in the Hawai'i Supreme Court. In addition, she has argued 20 cases in the Hawai'i Supreme Court. Early in her career, she clerked for Hawai'i Supreme Court Associate Justice Paula A. Nakayama and worked on several impactful water rights cases as well as other civil and criminal appeals. Her extensive appellate experience will enable her to smoothly transition to the ICA and help the ICA to address a significant case backlog.

Ms. McCullen was raised on Hawai'i Island and brings the experience of having grown-up in a rural neighbor island community to her work. Before attending law school, she taught social studies, Hawaiian Studies, and Hawaiian Language in the public school system at Wai'anae High School. She has remained an active member of the community by volunteering at He'eia loko i'a (fishpond), helping kūpuna prepare taxes through VITA, and tutoring keiki through Kalihi Kōkua.

Ms. McCullen is a compassionate person of good moral character with excellent appellate experience. If confirmed to fill the current vacancy on the ICA, we are confident that she will do so with diligence, competence, and humility. We urge you to give Ms. McCullen's credentials and character your most serious consideration and to confirm her appointment to the ICA.

Mahalo piha for the opportunity to present the testimony of the Native Hawaiian Bar Association in strong support of the appointment of Sonja M.P. McCullen.

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 8:10:34 AM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Stephen Tsushima	Individual	Support	Yes

Comments: August 23, 2021 Dear Senate members, I am writing in support of the nomination of Sonja McCullen for the position of judicial office of Associate Judge, Intermediate Court of Appeals. I have known Sonja as a colleague and a friend for over ten years, all of which have been during her employment as a fellow Deputy Prosecuting Attorney in the Appellate Division at the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney, City and County of Honolulu. Sonja is a hard-working, passionate, dedicated, and intelligent attorney who has established herself through her accomplishments as a successful appellate lawyer. In preparation for oral arguments before the Hawai'i Supreme Court, I have typically consulted with Sonja who has provided thorough, well-reasoned, helpful advice. Her knowledge of the law and experience in appellate work demonstrates her ability to successfully meet the demands of the position of Associate Judge for the Intermediate Court of Appeals. During her career at the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney, City and County of Honolulu, Sonja has displayed the highest level of professional behavior, integrity, legal knowledge, and fairness. Sonja has always strived for achieving justice and fairness in all of her cases. She approaches a legal issue (as one should) by looking at the strengths from both sides and demonstrating a sincere understanding of the opposing positions. For this reason, I believe she would be a valuable addition and asset to our judiciary. Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope the members of the Senate recommend Sonja McCullen for the position of judicial office of Associate Judge, Intermediate Court of Appeals. Sincerely, STEPHEN K. TSUSHIMA Senior Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Appellate Division Dept. of the Prosecuting Attorney City and County of Honolulu

Department of the Prosecuting Attorney  
**City and County of Honolulu**

ALII PLACE  
1060 RICHARDS STREET • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
PHONE: (808) 768-7400 • FAX: (808) 768-7515



STEVEN S. ALM  
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

THOMAS J. BRADY  
FIRST DEPUTY  
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

TESTIMONY ON GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE 2  
NOMINATION OF SONJA M.P. McCULLEN TO THE INTERMEDIATE COURT OF APPEALS

By

Steven S. Alm, Prosecuting Attorney  
Department of the Prosecuting Attorney

Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice Chair

Wednesday, August 25, 2021; 1:00 p.m.  
Via Videoconference

Chair Rhoads, Vice-Chair Keohokalole, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to encourage you to recommend that Sonja McCullen be confirmed as an Associate Judge for the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Sonja is bright, hardworking, and collaborative. She has been very active with her appellate work for the Prosecutor's Office for the last ten years and has also worked closely with our trial attorneys to make their cases better and free of appellate error.

Sonja's background as a teacher at Waianae High School grounded her in the community and made her sensitive to the needs of some of our most challenged students. She is not the first one to toot her own horn, but she truly walks the walk.

While she is a real asset to our office and her hard work would be sorely missed, I know she could also make a big contribution to the Intermediate Court of Appeals. I know we all appreciate a balanced, diverse court and she will be a great addition to the Court.

If I can provide further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me at [steven.alm@honolulu.gov](mailto:steven.alm@honolulu.gov) or at (808) 768-6407.

August 24, 2021

TO: Senate Judicial Committee  
Hawai'i State Senate

FROM: Jill Leilani Nunokawa, Esq.

RE: Testimony in Avid Support of Governor's Nomination for the ICA

WHEN: Wednesday, August 25, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. via videoconference

Good Afternoon Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

It is an honor and privilege to submit written testimony outlining my complete support for Sonya McCullen/s nomination to the Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA).

I have known Sonya for years and she possesses the attributes and qualities desired in the judiciary and more specifically at the appellate level of review.

Sonya is tremendously qualified and exceeds the confirmation requirements for this critical judicial position.

Sonya also bridges gaps of inequalities, a fact evident in our last judicial hearing.

She is acutely aware of the complexities of law and the communities they effect in real time. From Hilo to Honolulu, Puna to Punahou, Koloa to Ka'anapali; We are all Hawaii.

Former State Representative Marcus Oshiro once stated at the opening ceremonies of the legislature, "There's no difference between Waianae and Waialae." Although I hope his words of prophecy are actualized, today we are at the precipice of problems of first impression. The judiciary will be forced to render justice in unjust systems, institutions and histories. Having diverse lens of perspective is critical in understanding the reconciliation of common law and future technologies.

Dr.King wrote in 1947, "We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. The broad education will, therefore, transmit to one not only the accumulated knowledge of race but also the accumulated experience of social living.

Sonya's accumulated experience of social living is vast in breath and depth. She brings a wealth of legal acumen specific to the appellate realm; unquestionable integrity, character and humility; lessons from public to private, rural to urban, fully abled to disabled, disenfranchised to empowered.

I mahalo Sonya for her unwavering belief that her efforts matter and she can translate the practice of law into the interpretation of law so to improve the quality of life for all peoples in Hawaii.

I thank you Senators for your courage in the last vote, fair consideration for this nominee and the consciousness needed to lead our state in the 21st century.

**HEARING OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY**

**ATTN: CHAIR KARL RHOADS & VICE CHAIR JARRETT KEOHOKALOLE**

**Testimony in Strong Support of GM 2**

**Confirming Sonja M. P. McCullen to Hawai‘i’s Intermediate Court of Appeals**

**August 25, 2021, 1:00 p.m.  
Via Videoconference**

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Elena Bryant, and I am an attorney licensed to practice law before all of the courts in the State of Hawai‘i since 2011. I write to you today in **strong support of GM2**, Governor Ige’s nomination of Sonja McCullen to Hawai‘i’s Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA). I know Ms. McCullen through participating in the Ete Bowl – having competed against her as an Ete on the law school team and also alongside her as a fellow Bruzer. I am confident she will bring the same determination, grit, and aloha to the courtroom that she brings to the football field. In addition to her true mettle and aloha spirit, Ms. McCullen has significant practice experience and a depth of lived experience. These qualities make Ms. McCullen an ideal candidate to serve as an appellate court judge.

Ms. McCullen has significant practice experience and appellate experience in particular. Based on public data available from the Hawai‘i State Judiciary’s eCourt Kōkua website, she has handled more than 300 total cases and more than 300 appeals alone. In addition, she has conducted 20 oral arguments before the Hawai‘i Supreme Court. This experience would enable her to hit the ground running and immediately help to address the ICA’s significant case backlog.

In addition to her litigation experience, Ms. McCullen would bring a depth of lived experience to the ICA. Her perspectives and lived experiences as a Native Hawaiian woman and mother, as someone who grew up in Hilo, and as a former teacher of Hawaiian language and Hawaiian studies at Wai‘anae High School would help enrich and diversify Hawai‘i’s appellate courts and enable them to more broadly reflect the society and democracy that they serve.

If confirmed, Ms. McCullen will be an amazing role model for Native Hawaiian women and little girls like my own daughter because – *for the first time in the history of the ICA* – we will be able to see ourselves at the appellate court level. Please vote to confirm her today.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,





# SIERRA CLUB OF HAWAI'I

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

August 25,, 2021      1:00 PM      video conference

**In SUPPORT of GM2:** Relating to Nomination of Sonja McCullen  
to the Intermediate Court of Appeals

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Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and members of the committee,

On behalf of our 27,000 members and supporters, the Sierra Club of Hawai'i **supports** confirming Sonja McCullen as an associate judge to the Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA).

We support Ms. McCullen's nomination to the ICA because she has an extensive practice in appellate law. She has argued 20 cases before the Hawai'i Supreme Court, filed 70 writs and responses to the Supreme Court, and submitted 166 briefs to the ICA. In addition to this extensive appellate legal practice, Ms. McCullen brings needed experience and expertise to the ICA in the areas of criminal, labor, and environmental law.

Most notably for our interests, the Sierra Club supports Ms. McCullen's nomination because we think she will handle legal issues arising from climate change well. Based on her track record of helping to craft forward-thinking decisions on new and pressing issues of the day, we think that her legal analysis will help to shape the jurisprudence around climate issues that best serve the needs of Hawai'i's residents and unique natural environment.

We also find that Ms. McCullen is deeply familiar with life in these islands. From her own upbringing in rural Hilo to raising her own family in urban Honolulu, Ms. McCullen understands the real-world challenges many of Hawai'i's residents confront day-to-day. She has a wide variety of personal and professional experiences outside of the law that we think will help her to craft fair and balanced resolutions to the conflicts brought before the ICA.

Ms. McCullen is extremely well-prepared to be a leading jurist on this crucial appellate court. She is exactly the type of jurist that Hawai'i needs during these challenging and uncertain times. For these reasons, we strongly urge this committee to vote up on her confirmation. Thank you very much for this opportunity to provide testimony in **support of GM2**.

Mahalo,

Marti Townsend  
Chapter Director



**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/19/2021 7:48:41 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Amanda Furman	Individual	Support	No

Comments: I support the confirmation of Sonja McCullen to the Intermediate Court of Appeals. I previously worked with Ms. McCullen as a fellow Deputy Prosecuting Attorney for the City, and am also aware of her professional background. Ms. McCullen has the knowledge, skills, experience, and character to be an excellent judge on the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

**HEARING OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
ATTN: CHAIR KARL RHOADS & VICE CHAIR JARRETT KEOHOKALOLE**

**Testimony in Strong Support of GM 2  
Confirming Sonja M.P. McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals**

**August 25, 2021, 1:00 p.m.  
Via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

We are the Filipino Law Students Association (FLSA) at the William S. Richardson School of Law, and we are testifying today in strong support of Governor Ige's nomination of Sonja McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA).

Ms. McCullen is eminently qualified to be our next ICA Associate Judge. She has significant practice experience and appellate experience in particular. Based on public data available from the Hawai'i State Judiciary's eCourt Kōkua website, she has handled more than 300 total cases and more than 300 appeals alone. In addition, she has conducted 20 oral arguments before the Hawai'i Supreme Court. This experience would enable her to hit the ground running and immediately help to address the ICA's significant case backlog.

In addition to her litigation experience, Ms. McCullen would contribute invaluable lived experience to the ICA. Her perspectives and experiences as a Native Hawaiian woman and mother, as someone who grew up in Hilo, and as a former Hawaiian language and Hawaiian studies teacher at Wai'anae High School would help enrich and diversify Hawai'i's appellate courts and enable them to more broadly reflect the society and democracy that they serve. She represents what we desperately needed in terms of judicial diversity in our judiciary.

Ms. McCullen is the perfect pick for our next ICA Associate Judge. Please vote to confirm her today.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

*FLSA*

## Testimony on GM2

Wayne Tanaka <wctanaka@gmail.com>

Sat 8/21/2021 6:54 PM

To: JDC Committee <JDCCommittee@capitol.hawaii.gov>

Aloha,

Please accept the below testimony in SUPPORT of GM2, nominating Sonja McCullen to the Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals (apologies -- the capitol website does not appear to be functioning).

Mahalo,

Wayne Tanaka

### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF GM2:

*Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Please support this historic nomination of an eminently qualified attorney with a rich background in, and deep understanding of, Hawai'i's unique laws and social fabric, which are both essential to the proper and meaningful administration of justice in these islands. I respectfully urge you to recommend that the Senate ADVISE AND CONSENT to GM2.*

*Mahalo nui!*

*Wayne Tanaka*

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/22/2021 1:36:53 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Dayton Seto Myers	Individual	Support	No

Comments: I support in full this nominee, particularly because of her judicial experience and her time as a Native Hawaiian cultural practitioner. I believe she will begin the process of promoting Native Hawaiian representation in Hawai'i's government-something which has been historically oppressed by the occupational state.

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/22/2021 3:23:06 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Amy Sojot	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, My name is Amy Sojot. I am testifying today in strong support of GM2, Governor Ige's nomination of Sonja McCullen to Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA). Ms. McCullen's appointment will provide the court with much needed ethnic and gender diversity to reflect our broader Hawai'i community. Furthermore, from handling numerous appeals to giving arguments before the Hawai'i Supreme Court, Ms. McCullen brings years of experience that will be valuable as the next ICA judge. This litigation experience will be beneficial to address the ICA case backlog. Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to testify in strong support of Ms. McCullen's nomination. Sincerely, Amy Sojot

## Testimony in Support of Sonja McCullen

Rhiannon Tereari'i Chandler-'Iao <maramahawaii@gmail.com>

Sun 8/22/2021 6:32 PM

To: JDC Committee <JDCCommittee@capitol.hawaii.gov>

Aloha Senate Judiciary Committee,

Mahalo for what you do. My name is Rhiannon Tereari'i Chandler-'Iao. I tried to submit testimony through the capitol website, but I was not able to click submit. I do not plan to testify over Zoom, but I would like to share my brief thoughts.

As an attorney and a woman of color, I understand the huge opportunity we all have to participate in helping to shape the justice system we need for our communities.

There are currently no Native Hawaiian, Filipino, Black, or Pacific Islander judges on the Intermediate Court of Appeals or the Hawai'i Supreme Court, and there has not been a Native Hawaiian on either court for decades.

The Senate has an amazing nominee up for confirmation. Sonja McCullen is a Native Hawaiian teacher, mother, and attorney with tremendous appellate experience. I know Sonja's work ethic and her ethics in general. She is an excellent selection, and a brilliant person to reflect our diverse communities.

The people of Hawai'i deserve a judiciary that reflects their diversity.

Please vote to confirm ICA nominee Sonja McCullen.

Mahalo,  
Rhiannon

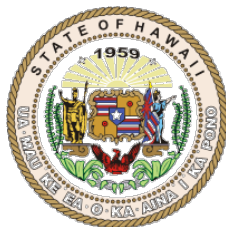
**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/22/2021 8:43:02 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Tracy L Kane	Individual	Support	No

Comments: It is with great pleasure that I support Sonja McCullen for Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals. I have know Sonja since 1999 when we met at Kailua Canoe Club. Sonja has been known as a good paddler who could easily blend with others in the canoe. Not only blending with Precise technique but with a sweet natured competitive spirit. Her ease of coordinated athleticism was very clear As we went through our paddling season from short sprint races culminating in the crossing of the Kaâ€™iwi Channel. Sonja was a supportive teammate who was always encouraging when our crew needed a boost and was a leader in Her training work ethic. Paddling highlighted Sonjaâ€™s nature of perseverance, motivation and intelligence and she Demonstrated these traits with Hawaiian values which she still lives by today. Witnessing her transition from high school teacher to lawyer was inspiring. I am very proud of Sonjaâ€™s professional And personal accomplishments. I wholeheartedly recommend Sonja McCullen for Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals. Mahalo, Tracy Kane



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
WAI`ANAЕ HIGH SCHOOL  
85-251 FARRINGTON HWY  
WAI`ANAЕ, HAWAII 96792

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Marites Kaji  
Assistant Vice-Principal  
Wai`anae High School  
85-251 Farrington Highway  
Wai`anae, HI 96707

August 20, 2021

Senator Karl Rhoads  
Judiciary Committee Chair  
State Capital  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Rhoads:

I am pleased to write on behalf of **Sonja Monalisa Pualeialoha McCullen**, which I do entirely in my individual capacity.

Sonja and I both started our teaching career at Wai`anae High School in the 1990s. As an exceptional educator, Sonja valued building positive relationships with her students and colleagues. She believed kids learn from teachers they trust, who genuinely care for them, and who are easily approachable. As vice-principal now at Wai`anae High, I have had the pleasure of reuniting with many of Sonja's former students, now parents. They shared how Sonja made them feel important by simply being present by listening and showing authentic fondness for her students.

Sonja was also persuasive as a teacher. I remember Sonja not allowing a student to settle for a D on an assignment. She recognized that the student was not fulfilling his academic potential, so she encouraged and worked with the student to earn a grade that merely revealed his academic ability.

As a person, Sonja is reliable, reflective, and selfless. I recall a time when she played Bruzer Football a few years ago and she dislocated her finger after being tackled. She stayed in for as long as she could tolerate the pain but realized she wasn't helping the team with an injured hand. After reflecting on the situation, she intentionally pulled herself out of the game. Sonja decided



the greater good for the team was more important than her desire to continue playing. These personal attributes are reasons why Sonja is respected by her peers and colleagues.

As an attorney, Sonja's commitment and dedication to serving the community cannot be questioned, as she knowledgeably and confidently served as Deputy Prosecuting Attorney for over nine years. If appointed Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals, Sonja would proudly serve with utmost integrity, honor, and fairness. She truly believes in the justice system and will continue to uphold the principles of equity, equality, and need within her capacity as a judge.

Should you have any other questions that I may be able to answer, please feel free to contact me at [t.kaji@seariders.k12.hi.us](mailto:t.kaji@seariders.k12.hi.us) or by phone at (808) 697-9400.

Sincerely,

*Marites Kaji*

Marites Kaji  
Vice-Principal

Darcy K. Coronil  
AVID Teacher  
Kapolei Middle School  
91-5335 Kapolei Parkway  
Kapolei, HI 96707  
(808)693-7025  
darcy.coronil@k12.hi.us

August 21, 2021

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I am pleased to write this letter on behalf of Sonja McCullen in an individual capacity.

I believe Sonja McCullen is more than qualified to be the Associate Judge, Intermediate Court of Appeals, State of Hawai'i based on knowing Sonja for 27 years both professionally and personally.

I first met Sonja during our first year of teaching at Wai`anae High School (WHS). While at WHS, Sonja taught Modern History of Hawai'i and 'Ōlelo Hawai'i. We became more than colleagues when we discovered that we shared similar values such as a passion for teaching, commitment to our students, and mālama i ka 'āina. We remain friends till today. Sonja is dependable, serious and candid when she needs to be, and never hesitates to help me in any way.

Sonja's passion for teaching was demonstrated in how she taught her lessons. She worked hard to make learning meaningful. Teaching allowed Sonja to demonstrate excellence in patience, empathy, organization, and problem-solving. I remember visiting Sonja's classroom one day after school. When I arrived I noticed that most of the student desks had been removed. Sonja explained it was a lesson to demonstrate the Hawaiians losing their land when they did not apply to keep their land. During the week before the students' desks were removed, Sonja placed a small notice in the room for students to apply to keep their desks. Naturally not every student applied for their desk, and the students experienced a glimpse of what the Hawaiians felt. Sonja's lessons touched the lives of her students and made them think about Hawai'i's past and future.

In May of 1996, Sonja and I chaperoned Wai`anae High School's Hawaiian Studies Program's trip to Kaho'olawe. The trip was organized by Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana. We did not know what to expect for the trip, but Sonja convinced me it was important to work with the students to mālama the island. We flew to Maui, slept on a beach under the stars, rode on a boat then jumped onto a zodiac, and swam to shore in water filled with runoff. We bathed in the ocean and everywhere we walked, we encountered mice. We cleared invasive species and planted coconut trees in an effort to restore the island's natural environment. Sonja embraced being on the island as she was thankful to be able to mālama Kaho'olawe and work with her students. Through this experience, I wholeheartedly believe Sonja will persevere through any situation that she is faced with.

Sonja definitely left her mark in Wai`anae, but she knew she could also help the people of Hawai`i by studying law. Sonja's qualities, law experience, passion, and genuine love for Hawai'i makes Sonja an excellent choice for Associate Judge, Intermediate Court of Appeals, State of Hawai`i. I humbly ask that you confirm Sonja for this honorable position.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darcy K. Coronil', written in a cursive style.

Darcy K. Coronil  
AVID Teacher  
Kapolei Middle School

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 7:40:12 AM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Shanna De Lima-Suganuma	Individual	Support	No

Comments: I am in strong support of Sonja P.M. McCullen's nomination to Hawaii's Intermediate Court of Appeals.

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 8:04:49 AM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Brandy De Lima-Suganuma	Individual	Support	No

Comments: I'm in strong support of Sonja P.M. McCullen's nomination to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA).

Theresa Sanchez  
Waipahu, HI 96797

August 23, 2021

The Honorable Karl Rhoads  
Chair  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 204  
Honolulu, HI 96813

The Honorable Jarrett Keohokalole  
Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 205  
Honolulu, HI 96813

The Honorable Laura Acasio  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 203  
Honolulu, HI 96813

The Honorable Mike Gabbard  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 201  
Honolulu, HI 96813

The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 218  
Honolulu, HI 96813

The Honorable Chis Lee  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Hawaii State Capitol, Room  
Honolulu, HI 96813

The Honorable Kurt Fevella  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 217  
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: Nomination to the Intermediate Court of Appeals

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, Ranking Member Acasio, Ranking Member Gabbard, Ranking Member Kim, Ranking Member Lee, and Ranking Member Fevella,

I am grateful to have the opportunity to express my complete and unwavering support of Sonja M.P. McCullen for the position of Associate Judge in the Intermediate Court of Appeals. With her resume of experience standing as a strong testament to her professional abilities to fulfill the role, I write to you in my individual capacity to share that she imbues the necessary personal abilities for the role as well.

I am currently an Educational Specialist in the Hawaii Department of Education and was fortunate to meet Sonja McCullen 25 years ago when I started my career in education as an English teacher. I recall being impressed with her ability to be in tune with the needs of her students so early in her career as a teacher. I observed the positive interactions she had with students who described her as a teacher who “goes out of her way for me” and who “doesn’t let other students get away with acting up.” She provided an effective learning environment

that was safe and nurturing through well-developed lessons, engaging teaching strategies, and clear expectations with caring and consistent enforcement of consequences.

When Sonja moved on from education, I was inspired by her enthusiasm and persistence for her law career. She is intelligent, committed to excellence, of good moral character, and deeply invested in her work. While her experience stands as a testament to her professional qualifications to fulfill the role as judge in the Intermediate Court of Appeals, over the years I have come to know her personally. I can attest that she is as invested in her family and friends as she is in her work. She even knows how to have fun being a powder puff linebacker for the Bruzers in the Ete Bowl for over 19 years. Sonja demonstrates through her personal relationships that she understands what it takes to build a thriving and resilient family and community.

I have no reservations expressing my strongest recommendation that you confirm Sonja M.P. McCullen. She would be an excellent Associate Judge in the Intermediate Court of Appeals, State of Hawai'i.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Theresa Sanchez

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 8:58:58 AM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Lea Hong	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Aloha Chair Rhoads and Members of the Committee: In my individual and personal capacity, I strongly support the nomination of Sonja Monalisa Pualeialoha McCullen to the Intermediate Court of Appeals. I've known Sonja for more than 20 years. She has extensive appellate experience, litigating hundreds of cases and participating in 20 oral arguments before the Supreme Court. She has an excellent reputation in the courts, and experience clerking for Supreme Court Justice Paula Nakayama, researching and drafting appellate opinions. Sonja would provide good balance to the Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA). Other justices on the ICA have a civil or public defender background, and Sonja would provide balanced prosecutorial/criminal background. She also is a great person. She is Native Hawaiian, raised in Hilo, taught a Waiâ€™anae™ High School before law school, is a mom with two kids, and has the utmost integrity. She would make an excellent judge and I give her my highest and unqualified recommendation. Mahalo - Lea Hong



August 22, 2021

Chair, Senator Karl Rhoads  
Vice Chair, Senator Jarrett Keohokalole  
and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

RE: SUPPORT FOR APPOINTMENT OF SONJA M.P. MCCULLEN FOR ASSOCIATE  
JUDGE, INTERMEDIATE COURT OF APPEALS

Aloha Hawai'i Senate Judiciary Committee,

I write in strong support of candidate Sonja M.P. McCullen. Ms. McCullen is extremely qualified and well-respected throughout the community and State of Hawai'i.

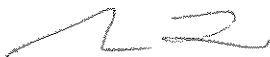
I personally know Ms. McCullen through previously working with her at the Honolulu Prosecutors Office as well as through our membership with the Bruisers Football Team. Her written and oral advocacy skills along with her immense experience in a variety of legal matters makes her an exceptional candidate for this position. Ms. McCullen's work in the appellate division of the Prosecutor's Office for over 10 years on an array of different appellant issues not only makes her qualified but demonstrates her work ethic and dedication to public service.

Ms. McCullen's dedication to public service started well before her legal career when she served as a mentor and teacher to many youth, teaching them the importance of Hawai'i's unique history and language. She has also been instrumental in helping to organize the annual Ete v. Bruiser football game which has a deeply rooted history in the legal community. Her dedication to the alumni, law students and broader community shows her outstanding character, leadership ability and commitment to the community.

Although her achievements thus far are many, Ms. McCullen is one of the humblest colleagues I have worked with. Her work ethic, legal ability and character will lead to her success as a Judge for the Intermediate Court of Appeals. I respectfully request that you confirm the appointment of Ms. McCullen to the ICA. Her appointment will help to ensure fairness, diversity and efficiency in our judicial system and the betterment of the community at large.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit support on this nomination.

Me ka 'oia'i'o,



Ha'aheo M. Kaho'ohalahala, Esq.



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – LEEWARD DISTRICT  
**JAMES CAMPBELL HIGH SCHOOL**  
91-980 NORTH ROAD  
EWA BEACH, HAWAII 96706

August 20, 2021

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I have known **Sonja McCullen** for over 25 years both on a professional and personal level. We first met when we were students at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa in the College of Education. After graduating, we both began our teaching careers at Waianae High School and have kept in touch over the years.

Sonja McCullen's record as an educator speaks for itself. While at Waianae High School, she was known to be a very passionate and dedicated teacher. Daily she drove from her home in Kailua (before H-3 was built), travelling over an hour each way, to and from Waianae. Though there were high schools that were much closer to her home, Ms. McCullen chose to teach at Waianae High School as she felt there was a calling for her there and because she loved the students and families that she worked with. At Waianae High, Ms. McCullen served as a role model for many students as she was a person of Hawaiian ancestry who was the first in her family to graduate with a college degree and went on to further her education in graduate studies. She paid her own way through college by working part-time, earning academic scholarships and by taking out student loans. Ms. McCullen had a connection with her students, as she too came from humble roots. She grew up living in her grandmother's home on Oahu, then moved to Hilo in 8th grade where her father worked as a baggage handler with Aloha Airlines and her mother sewed leis for a living. Through her humble upbringing, Ms. McCullen learned first hand the importance of working hard and persevering to make a better life for herself and her family.

Seeing the need for her students to be exposed to post-high school and career opportunities outside of the Waianae community, in 1997 Ms. McCullen organized a trip to the Big Island for approximately 75 juniors. As she wanted all of her students to participate, she solicited donations from various community and corporate donors and worked tirelessly with her students and families to fundraise for this once in a lifetime opportunity. The interisland trip was a success; for many of the students, this was the first time they travelled on a plane and left the island. Visiting the different businesses on the Big Island, experiencing and participating in classes at UH Hilo and seeing dormitory life first hand was an experience that many of her students would never forget. Her idea of taking students and exposing them to career and college life outside of Oahu was a first at Waianae High. This experience proved to be life-turning for many, as a number of students from that trip fell in love with UH Hilo and ended up enrolled there as a freshman in the Fall of 1998.

Though many years have passed, our friendship has remained strong throughout the years. In the 25 years that I have known Sonja McCullen, I have always known her to be a very honest and genuine person. She is a grounded individual with a good heart, who is dedicated to her both family and her profession. It is for all these reasons that I humbly ask that Sonja McCullen be given serious consideration for selection as Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals in the State of Hawai'i.

Sincerely,

Kathy M. Silva  
Vice Principal  
James Campbell High School

**COUNTY COUNCIL**

Arryl Kaneshiro, Chair  
Mason K. Chock, Vice Chair  
Bernard P. Carvalho, Jr.  
Felicia Cowden  
Bill DeCosta  
Luke A. Evslin  
KipuKai Kualii



**OFFICE OF THE COUNTY CLERK**

Jade K. Fountain-Tanigawa, County Clerk  
Scott K. Sato, Deputy County Clerk

Telephone: (808) 241-4188  
Facsimile: (808) 241-6349  
E-mail: cokcouncil@kauai.gov

**Council Services Division**  
4396 Rice Street, Suite 209  
Lihu'e, Kaua'i, Hawaii 96766

August 23, 2021

**TESTIMONY OF KIPUKAI KUALII  
COUNCILMEMBER, KAUAI COUNTY COUNCIL  
ON**

**GM2, Gubernatorial Nomination of Sonja M.P. McCullen to the  
Intermediate Court of Appeals as Associate Judge  
Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Wednesday, August 25, 2021  
1:00 p.m.  
Via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Rhoads and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of GM2, Gubernatorial Nomination of Sonja M.P. McCullen to the Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA) as Associate Judge for a term of ten (10) years. My testimony is submitted in my individual capacity as a Member of the Kaua'i County Council, Chair of the Kaua'i County Council's Housing & Intergovernmental Relations Committee, Vice Chair of the Kaua'i County Council's Finance & Economic Development Committee, Co-Chair of SCHHA's Policy Board, longtime advocate for the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL) waitlistees, an Anahola homesteader, and an Anahola agricultural lot waitlistee.

As a Native Hawaiian, I take particular interest in this nomination as Ms. McCullen's invaluable life experiences and perspectives as a native Hawaiian will enrich and diversify Hawai'i's appellate courts and enable a broader reflection of Hawai'i's society and democracy. Ms. McCullen has significant litigation and appellate experience. Based on public data available on the Hawai'i State Judiciary's eCourt Kōkua website, Ms. McCullen has handled more than 300 total cases and more than 300 appeals. In addition, Ms. McCullen has conducted 20 oral arguments before the Hawai'i Supreme Court. This experience will enable Ms. McCullen to hit the ground running and immediately help to address the ICA's significant case backlog.

*Mahalo* for your favorable consideration of Sonja M.P. McCullen's nomination to the ICA and for this opportunity to provide testimony. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or Council Services Staff at (808) 241-4188 or via E-mail to cokcouncil@kauai.gov.

Sincerely,

KIPUKAI KUALII  
Councilmember, Kaua'i County Council

**Susan K. Lum  
95-107 Leolani Place  
Mililani, Hawaii 96789**

August 20, 2021

Senate Judiciary Committee  
State Capitol  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I am honored to be writing to express my unqualified and strong support of Sonja McCullen's nomination to the Intermediate Court of Appeals as an Associate Judge.

I am sure there will be many others who can speak to Sonja's legal acumen, but I wanted to share my perspectives of her as a former teacher and the unique qualities she will bring to the job, if appointed.

I met Sonja when we were both teachers at Waianae High School; she taught social studies while I developed and worked in the Marine Science Learning Center. We worked collaboratively as my program required that students form companies, learn to grow and market ogo (seaweed), and maintain accurate ledgers of their finances. Eventually, using the profits from the sale of their products, students learned about financial planning, investing, and the benefits of diversification, through the social studies class that Sonja led. During this time, I was able to observe, first-hand, her dedication to her job, the patient, calm, and empathetic manner in which she treated her students.

As you know, many in the Waianae area are faced with economic challenges, and pupils of this age group are, by nature, exploring and testing boundaries, using this time as they transition from adolescence to adulthood to examine their sexual identities, values, relationships and the possibilities for the future. Sonja recognized this and was fair and understanding, but firm when it came to disciplining and guiding her students.

Before leaving teaching to pursue a career in law, she also taught Hawaiian studies and Hawaiian language, playing a pivotal role in perpetuating the native culture. Among the activities she participated in were voyaging on the E`ala and learning field trips to Kaho`olawe and Hawai`i Island.

Young people are particularly astute and sensitive to those who treat them fairly, ones who will neither prejudge them nor come with preconceptions. They can discern who sees value in them as individuals and are truly looking out for their interests. I believe, in this respect, they are good judges of people's character and integrity, and why Sonja was a beloved teacher.

She is compassionate and even-tempered, yet is willing and able to make tough, objective decisions. These qualities, exhibited in the classrooms of Waianae High School, will serve her well in the judicial appointment she is seeking. I admire her desire to serve a broader community and hope that you will give her your favorable consideration.

Sincerely yours,

/S/ Susan K. Lum  
Retired educator

**Sandra-Ann Y.H. Wong**

*Attorney at Law, a Law Corporation*

*1050 Bishop Street, #514*

*Honolulu, Hawaii 96813*

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT, GM 2**

Before the Committee on Judiciary  
on Wednesday, August 25, 2021 at 1p.m.  
via Videoconference

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and members of the Committee:

I am writing in **support of GM 2**.

As a woman lawyer who has practiced law in Hawaii for over 30 years, I am happy to support the nomination of Sonja M.P. McCullen to be an Associate Judge on the Intermediate Court of Appeals. Ms. McCullen's extensive appellate experience makes her qualified for the job.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in Support of GM2.

Sandra-Ann Y.H. Wong

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 1:13:32 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Sterling Wong	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee: My name is Sterling Wong, and I am testifying today in my personal capacity in STRONG SUPPORT of Governor Ige’s nomination of Sonja McCullen to Hawai’i’s Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA). Ms. McCullen is eminently qualified to be our next ICA Associate Judge. She has significant practice experience and appellate experience in particular. Based on public data available from the Hawai’i State Judiciary’s eCourt Kā• kua website, she has handled more than 300 total cases and more than 300 appeals alone. In addition, she has conducted 20 oral arguments before the Hawai’i Supreme Court. This experience would enable her to hit the ground running and immediately help to address the ICA’s significant case backlog. In addition to her litigation experience, Ms. McCullen would contribute invaluable lived experience to the ICA. Her perspectives and lived experiences as a Native Hawaiian woman and mother, as someone who grew up in Hilo, and as a former teacher of Hawaiian language and Hawaiian studies at Wai’anae High School would help enrich and diversify Hawai’i’s appellate courts and enable them to more broadly reflect the society and democracy that they serve. Ms. McCullen is the perfect pick for our next ICA Associate Judge. Please vote to confirm her today. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

**GM2**

**Submitting for Consideration and Confirmation to the Intermediate Court of Appeals as Associate Judge, Gubernatorial Nominee, Sonja M.P. McCullen, for a Term of Ten Years**  
Senate Committee on Judiciary

August 25, 2021

1:00 PM

Videoconference

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The Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA), a member-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to enhance the cultural, economic, political, and community development of Native Hawaiians, **STRONGLY SUPPORTS** GM2, which submits for consideration and confirmation to the Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA) as Associate Judge, Gubernatorial nominee, Sonja M.P. McCullen, for a term of ten years.

Within the last few years, the United States has undergone a tumultuous transformation in forcefully and often reluctantly evaluating its own defective systems of governance, which stem from historical injustices that have and continue to disproportionately and disparately impact people of color, women, and other minority groups, despite legal-political doctrines of the highest order, in this country, that uphold principles of equality. Equity and equality in the United States are still, only, aspirational, and they will remain so until systemic and institutionalized prejudice is extinguished. Change is being demanded.

Here in the State of Hawai'i, Native Hawaiians are disproportionately represented and disparately impacted at various stages of Hawai'i's criminal justice system. The unfair treatment of Native Hawaiians by the Hawai'i criminal justice system has resulted in Native Hawaiians going to prison and serving much lengthier sentences at a much higher rate than people of other races/ethnicities – this correlates with the disproportionately low number of Native Hawaiians in adjudicatory positions. The racial inequity present here is a clear indicator of institutionalized racism.

For well over a decade, advocates for Hawai'i's criminal justice reform have asked for systemic and institutionalized understanding for and the embracing of Native Hawaiian cultural values. Advocates have identified that Hawai'i-based perspectives and understanding are





essential qualifications for a judge, especially one serving in Hawai'i's highest courts, and that courts must reflect the diversity of lived experience in Hawai'i.

CNHA wishes to emphasize that gubernatorial nominee, Sonja M.P. McCullen, has the 'legal skills, knowledge, and temperament to serve the people of Hawai'i on the Intermediate Court of Appeals.' Equally, if not more impactful, McCullen is a Native Hawaiian woman with extensive experience in Hawaiian Studies and work experience within disparately impacted and disadvantaged communities.

It has been 20 years since a Native Hawaiian was appointed to the Hawai'i State Supreme Court, and 30 years since a Native Hawaiian was appointed to the ICA. In a state where the majority of higher court judges/justices are either white or Japanese-American, confirming McCullen would be a significant move in a direction toward achieving racial and gender equity through the dismantling of systemic/institutionalized racism.

For these reasons, CNHA respectfully requests that this measure pass. Mahalo nui loa for this opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

Respectfully,

J. Kūhiō Lewis  
President & CEO  
Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement

David Y. Ige  
GOVERNOR



Dr. Christina M. Kishimoto  
SUPERINTENDENT

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
WAI'ANAЕ HIGH SCHOOL  
85-251 FARRINGTON HWY  
WAI'ANAЕ, HAWAII 96792

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August 23, 2021

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice Chair  
Senate Judiciary Committee, State of Hawaii  
Executive Chambers  
State Capitol  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I am pleased to write on behalf of Sonja McCullen, which I do entirely in my individual capacity. I have known Sonja for the past 27 years. I met her as a teacher colleague when I started my teaching career at Waianae High School in the 1994-1995 school year. Sonja was one of the teachers I turned to when I needed advice on teaching strategies or information on the ins and outs of the school. Over the years, our professional personas morphed into a personal friendship.

Sonja's love for teaching made her a well-respected teacher among her colleagues and especially her students. She didn't show her bias or project her opinions on students; she showed them all sides of an issue. As a Modern Hawaiian History teacher, one topic she taught was the Great Mahele. Sonja created a simulation to make students feel what it was like during that time. Some students understood the lesson, some students were uncomfortable, and some students even got upset. After the simulation was over, Sonja debriefed with them and made them realize that history is emotional. The students had a better understanding of the Great Mahele and its impact; and they developed an appreciation for controversial issues. This lesson made students realize that they need to take into consideration all sides of an issue in order to make an informed decision, validate their opinion, or accept change.

I treasure my twenty-six years of friendship with Sonja. I trust Sonja's advice wholeheartedly because she does not give me advice I want to hear, but what I need to hear. I humbly ask that Sonja McCullen be given serious consideration for selection as Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals for the State of Hawaii.

Sincerely,

*Michelle Shimoda*

Michelle Shimoda  
Teacher  
Waianae High School

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 5:05:12 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Olan Leimomi Fisher	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Aloha mai, I strongly support Sonja McCullen's nomination as a Native Hawaiian attorney with meaningful experience to effectively serve on the ICA, while also understanding the unique nuances and issues facing our Hawai'i community, and herself representing more Native Hawaiian female voices on the bench. As a Native Hawaiian attorney myself, this nomination means so much to me and my newborn daughter to feel truly represented in our governmental leaders. Please vote to confirm Sonja McCullen today. Mahalo nui for considering my testimony, Olan Leimomi Fisher Mililani, O'ahu

August 24, 2021

**Testimony in Strong Support of GM 2**  
**Confirming Sonja M.P. McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals**  
*Submitted via [JDCcommittee@hawaii.capitol.gov](mailto:JDCcommittee@hawaii.capitol.gov)*

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in **strong support** of Governor Ige's **nomination of Ms. Sonja M.P. McCullen to the Intermediate Court of Appeals**. Ms. McCullen embodies integrity, exemplifies the professional standards of the legal profession, and has proven herself to be highly qualified to become a member of the bench.

I've come to know Ms. McCullen over the years through our time together as members of the William S. Richardson School of Law alumni women's football team. She is a caring mentor and teammate both on and off the field. As a dedicated attorney and committed member of the legal community, she has strongly advocated for the law to prevail. Her years of experience as a prosecutor allow her to understand the need for fairness, efficiency, and professionalism within the judicial system, and I know her deep belief in justice will always be at the forefront of any decision she would face.

I respectfully request that you vote to confirm Ms. McCullen to the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Gourley Carter, Esq.  
Policy Counsel, National Council of Nonprofits  
HSBA No. 9754

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 6:03:16 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Shanda DeCosta	Individual	Comments Only	No

Comments: I am in strong support of Sonja P.M. McCullen's nomination to Hawaii's Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA). I have known Sonja for almost our entire lives. Three generations of our 'ohana grew up together on the same street in Kailua, before they moved to Hilo. In Hawaii, that naturally made us 'œcousins.' When she had her children I had the honor of caring for them when she and her husband went to work. We later worked together at the Crime Victim Compensation Commission and I was highly impressed by her integrity, leadership, and work ethic. I learned so much from her! I can say whole-heartedly that Sonja is the most trustworthy and qualified person for this very important position. I know that she will make Hawaii and our future generations proud! I cannot express in words how extremely proud I am to have her in my life! Mahalo for your time! Shanda DeCosta

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 6:11:21 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Sienna DeCosta	Individual	Comments Only	No

Comments: I am in strong support of Sonja P.M. McCullen's nomination to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals. I have known Aunty Sonja for my entire life and I believe that there is nobody more qualified for this position than she is. She will make Hawai'i proud. Sienna DeCosta

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 8:39:27 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Curt S. Oishi	Individual	Support	No

Comments: I am writing in support of Judicial nominee Sonja McCullen. I met Sonja and my wife Michelle, on an educational working trip to Kahoolawe in 1996. Sonja and Michelle were teachers at Waianae High School and eventually both graduated from University of Hawaii Richardson Law School. We have continued our friendship over the years, raising our families together, and visiting as often as we can being on different islands. Sonja is compassionate, trustworthy, honest, hard working, but most important a loving mother, wife, aunt, and friend. I believe that she has all the qualities that will make her a fine addition to the Intermediate Court of Appeals. Thank you for your time and consideration. Respectfully, Curt S. Oishi

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 8:46:57 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Lisa Lee	Individual	Comments Only	No

Comments: I fully support and feel confident about the appointment of Sonja McCullen for Hawaii's Intermediate Court of Appeals. I believe she is a fit and will be a fair judge. She will bring diversity and a needed perspective to the court system. I fully support this.



**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 8:49:34 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Michele McCoy	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Mahalo Governor Ige and the committee for listening to the voices of the people. The nomination of such a well qualified individual like Sonja McCullen is the perfect pick. I am testifying in strong support of her nomination to the Intermediate Court of Appeals. It's vital that Hawai'i's people see themselves represented at every level of government, including the ICA. There has not been a Native Hawaiian on the ICA for 27 years and Ms. McCullen's appointment will bring the needed diversity and perspective to our appellate courts. Sonja McCullen has the practice, experience and perspective needed to become the next Associate Judge on Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals. Please vote to confirm her today. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Michelle S.K. Oishi, Esq.  
101 Aupuni Street, Suite 248  
Hilo, Hawaii 96720  
michelle@michelloishilaw.com

August 23, 2021

VIA ONLINE SUBMISSION

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hawaii State Senate  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Re: GM2  
Letter in Support of Sonja M. P. McCullen As  
Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals

Dear Senator Rhoads and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary:

It is my honor and pleasure that I write this letter in strong support of Sonja M.P. McCullen and ask that you consent to her nomination to serve as Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals of the State of Hawaii. I have known Sonja for twenty-seven years and can say with confidence that she has the intellect, character, and wisdom necessary to be an outstanding jurist.

I first met Sonja in 1994 when we both began our teaching careers at Waianae High School. Despite not having a classroom of her own, she was always so well organized and prepared for the day. She was passionate about sharing her knowledge about the Hawaiian culture with the students and even recruited teachers to go along on a work access to Kahoolawe with the students.

Sonja and I later attended law school together and we spent numerous hours a day studying together. She remained the most organized person I know and this translated into her ability to issue spot and lay out arguments in a clear and concise way. I have observed as she perfected these skills in her legal writing as well as oral arguments.

I believe Sonja's ability to examine the issues at hand and do a careful analysis of facts and the law combined with her life experiences, allow her to view issues with a different lens to come to

decisions that are fair and just. Sonja has an ability to look at a record before her, analyze the legal issues and produce an argument that is well reasoned and makes sense to the lay person.

It is for the above reasons; I respectfully offer this testimony in support of Sonja M.P. McCullen and ask that confirm her to serve as Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter

Sincerely yours,

*/s/ Michelle S. K. Oishi*

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/23/2021 9:10:03 PM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Richard Stacey	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Honorable Chair Rhoads and members of the Committee, I write in strong support of Sonja McCullen, nominee for judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals. I first became aware of Sonja when she wrote an excellent legal memoranda for us at the Honolulu Prosecutor's office. I worked with her again based on work she did for the CVCC, and after that other appellate matters. I learned to trust her intelligence, writing ability and common sense. She will make an excellent addition to the bench. I recommend her with no reservations. Sincerely, Richard Stacey, (Hawaii Bar No. 6419).

**SHARON H. NISHI**  
88 Piikoi Street, Apt. 805  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96814

August 23, 2021

Re: Judicial Nomination of **Sonja M. P. McCullen (GM2)**

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to voice my wholehearted support of the nomination of Sonja M. P. McCullen for the position of Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals of the State of Hawaii.

I was admitted to the Hawaii Bar in 1987, and was a partner at the law firm of McCorrison Miller Mukai MacKinnon LLP ("M4") before moving to the position of Counsel to M4 in 2009.

I have known Ms. McCullen since 1999, when as a first year law student, she played as a linebacker on the William S. Richardson School of Law ("WSRSL") women's flag football team against my team, comprised of WSRSL women alumni. Even back then, she was respectful, a fierce competitor, and a rising leader of her team. Upon graduating from law school, Ms. McCullen joined the WSRSL women's alumni flag football team, where she has remained active as a player, a dedicated organizer and a charismatic leader.

The annual battle on the gridiron between the WSRSL women law students and the WSRSL women alumni is known as the "Ete Bowl". What started in 1979 as merely an athletic event has evolved into a vehicle for the mentoring of law students by practicing attorneys and has helped to create an invaluable professional network for WSRSL graduates. The reach of the Ete Bowl's benefits has expanded far beyond the WSRSL community. The multitudes of successful women lawyers and women judges who have participated in the Ete Bowl's tradition have expanded the culture of decency, fairness and excellence in the practice of law throughout the legal community as a whole. And Ms. McCullen, initially as a law student, and now as a seasoned attorney and leader of the WSRSL's "Bruzers" flag football team, exemplifies all of the finest values that the Ete Bowl tradition has come to promote.

Throughout the more than two decades that I have known Ms. McCullen, she has consistently shown that she is diligent, dedicated, inclined to cooperate with and encourage others, and willing to step up to the plate and make hard decisions when appropriate. She is an easy communicator, and is always willing to listen. She is thoughtful, ethical, smart and humble. These are all qualities that we should hope to find in our judges and community leaders. For these reasons, I am certain that Ms. McCullen would be an outstanding choice to fill the existing judicial vacancy on the Intermediate Court of Appeals, and I strongly support her nomination to the Intermediate Court of Appeals of the State of Hawaii.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this submission.

Sincerely,



Sharon H. Nishi

**JOHN Y. YAMANO**

88 Piikoi St., Apt. 805  
Honolulu, HI 96814

August 23, 2021

Re: Testimony in Strong Support of GM2: Judicial Nomination of Sonja M. P. McCullen

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

It is my honor to submit this written testimony in strong support of the nomination of **Sonja M. P. McCullen** for Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals of the State of Hawai'i.

I have been a proud member of the Hawai'i Bar since 1985. I was a partner at the law firm of McCorriston Miller Mukai MacKinnon LLP for almost twenty years before moving to the position of Counsel with the firm. My primary area of practice is litigation: both at the trial court level and at the appellate court level. I have appeared hundreds of times before our Hawai'i Circuit Court Judges and have had dozens of cases before the Hawai'i Supreme Court and the Intermediate Court of Appeals of the State of Hawai'i. In addition, I have served on several HSBA volunteer committees and panels with Hawai'i judges. Those experiences give me tremendous insight as to what makes a "good" judge.

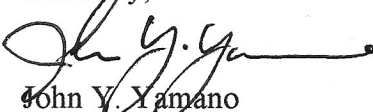
I can attest that Ms. McCullen has all of the necessary qualities to be an excellent judge. I have known Ms. McCullen since she graduated from the William S. Richardson School of Law in 2002. She has developed the highest reputation in our community as to legal acumen, leadership skills, and citizenship. She has a remarkably even temperament, is extremely honest and trustworthy, and has impeccable character, integrity and citizenship. Not only does Ms. McCullen have all of the characteristics necessary to be an excellent judge, but she has a specific skill set that will transfer directly to her duties as a Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals. Specifically, she has been extremely successful as a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney in the Appellate Division, and has extensive experience practicing before the Hawai'i Supreme Court and the Intermediate Court of Appeals of the State of Hawai'i.

Beyond all of her outstanding legal and personal qualifications, Ms. McCullen has an unwavering commitment to our community. This is significant because our judges must use their intellect and their good conscience to shape our society according to the laws of our State. Ms. McCullen has ALWAYS worked for the good of our State. First, she worked tirelessly as a public school teacher at Wai'anae High School. Then, she became an attorney who has dedicated her entire career to public service. Ms. McCullen has dedicated her personal and professional life to public service.

I am proud to know Ms. McCullen, and I am genuinely thankful for her past contributions as a public servant and outstanding member of our legal community. I strongly support her nomination to be our next Associate Judge on the Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this written testimony.

Sincerely,

  
John Y. Yamano

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/24/2021 8:06:11 AM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Shanda DeCosta	Individual	Comments Only	No

Comments: Sending a revision of my original testimony: I am in strong support of Sonja P.M. McCullen's nomination to Hawaii's Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA). Sonja and I have known each other our entire lives. Three generations of our 'ohana grew up together on the same street in Kailua, before they moved to Hilo. In Hawaii, that naturally made us family, so we grew up as cousins. When she had her children, I had the honor of caring for them while she and her husband went to work. We later worked together at the Crime Victim Compensation Commission and I was highly impressed by her integrity, leadership and work ethic. I learned so much from her! I can say whole-heartedly that Sonja is the most trustworthy and qualified person for this very important position. I know that she will make Hawaii and our future generations proud! I cannot express in words how extremely proud I am to have her in my life! Mahalo for your time! Shanda DeCosta

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/24/2021 8:11:18 AM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Leighton M. Hara	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Please consider this letter my statement in support of Sonja McCullen's confirmation as a Judge for the Intermediate Court of Appeals, State of Hawaii. I have been a licensed attorney since 2002 and worked in private practice as an attorney specializing in litigation. Since 2009, my practice has focused almost exclusively on employment litigation with the Marr Jones & Wang law firm where I was a partner. Since 2015, I have been involved in general litigation as a founding partner of Ota & Hara, LLLC. I have known Sonja since 1999, my first year of law school at the William S. Richardson School of Law. Throughout law school, Sonja exhibited a maturity and understanding of the law that many of my peers did not possess, and it showed both in her grades and writing. There are some students in law school whom you feel were destined to do great things, and Sonja is one of these people. When we were both law clerks following our graduation from law school, Sonja took the time out of her busy schedule to help acclimate and introduce me to the wonderful people of Hilo, many of whom I maintain friendships with to this day. During my years of practice, I have had the pleasure of working with Sonja and she provided me with some assistance on an appellate issue I had. As a lifelong appellate attorney and former law clerk, Sonja possesses a level of expertise that is invaluable in presenting appeals. Sonja's experience, personality, and demeanor will serve the public well and are qualities which will make for an excellent Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals, State of Hawaii. It is with great pleasure and pride that I submit this letter in support of Sonja McCullen. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.



# Chad Kumagai

(808) 783-9099, [chad.kumagai@gmail.com](mailto:chad.kumagai@gmail.com)

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August 24, 2021

Senate Committee on Judiciary  
Hawai'i Senate  
State Capitol S. Beretania Street,  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Senators,

I write in strong support of Intermediate Court of Appeals nominee Sonja McCullen. I have previously served as a deputy prosecuting attorney in the Appellate Division of the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney for the City & County of Honolulu for a number of years. Over that time, I have had the privilege of working closely with her and am certain she would be an outstanding judge on the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

I believe that Ms. McCullen is a superb appellate attorney. Throughout the years, I have seen Ms. McCullen represent the State of Hawai'i with integrity, skill, and a relentless pursuit of justice. She has always done an excellent job litigating her cases and has demonstrated diligence in her briefs and preparation for her oral arguments.

I have always found Ms. McCullen to be generous with her time and extremely willing to help others in our office. For example, she and others in the division would often organize roundtables for upcoming oral arguments. Ms. McCullen would always attend having read all of the briefs, case law, and had put a lot of time into thinking about the issues, even (or perhaps especially) when another deputy's argument was the topic of discussion. Oftentimes when I was the deputy to argue, she would challenge me and force me to rethink my arguments. Outside of argument preparation, I have always known Ms. McCullen to be extremely approachable and always willing to discuss any legal issue. Her selflessness in dedicating time to others has been a valuable asset to everyone in the department. And in so many ways, Ms. McCullen has made me a better attorney.

Finally, as her resume shows, Ms. McCullen has the professional experience and ability to be an excellent judge on the Intermediate Court of Appeals. The hundreds of appellate cases she has handled over the years demonstrates that Ms. McCullen has a wealth of appellate experience that will be a valuable asset to the court. Of those cases, Ms. McCullen has litigated some of the biggest appeals in the office with extremely complex and novel issues. She has had a particularly busy oral argument schedule over the past few years and has done tremendously in each one.

I believe that Ms. McCullen would be an outstanding judge on the Intermediate Court of Appeals and a great asset to the judiciary.

Sincerely,

/s/Chad Kumagai  
Chad Kumagai

**HEARING OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
ATTN: CHAIR KARL RHOADS & VICE CHAIR JARRETT KEOHOKALOLE**

**Testimony in Strong Support of GM 2  
Confirming Sonja M.P. McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals**

**August 25, 2021, 1:00 p.m.**

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Karynne L. Chong Morgan, and I submit this written testimony in strong support of Governor Ige's nomination of Sonja McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA).

Ms. McCullen is eminently qualified to be our next ICA Associate Judge. She has significant practice experience and appellate experience. Based on public data available from the Hawai'i State Judiciary's eCourt Kōkua website, she has handled more than 300 total cases and more than 300 appeals alone. In addition, she has conducted 20 oral arguments before the Hawai'i Supreme Court. This experience would enable her to hit the ground running and immediately help to address the ICA's significant case backlog.

In addition to her litigation experience, Ms. McCullen would contribute invaluable lived experience to the ICA. Her perspectives and lived experiences as a Native Hawaiian woman and mother, as someone who grew up in Hilo, and as a former Hawaiian language and Hawaiian studies at Wai'anae High School would help enrich and diversify Hawai'i's appellate courts and enable them to more broadly reflect the society and democracy that they serve.

Ms. McCullen is the perfect pick for our next ICA Associate Judge. Please vote to confirm her today.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Norine N. Matanane  
91-263 Namahoe Pl.  
Kapolei, HI 96707

August 24, 2021

Senator Jarrett Keohokalole  
Senate District 24  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
Phone: (808) 586-7215  
Fax: (808) 586-7220

Dear Senator Keohokalole:

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter in support of Ms. Sonja M. P. McCullen.

I have had the privilege of knowing Ms. McCullen for the past 25 years. She was a colleague of mine at Waianae High School in 1994 and has remained a close personal friend of mine.

As an educator, Ms. McCullen was an excellent teacher. She worked in our Social Studies Department. She shared her love of history with her students. Her instructional methods were quite innovative. She not only demonstrated a command of her subject area, but she also interacted with students and staff on such a caring and personal level. The most impressive aspect of Ms. McCullen's teaching was her demeanor and rapport with her students as well as the staff. Students clearly respected her and responded to her proactive approaches to instruction within the classroom.

As a personal friend, Ms. McCullen has always been driven to excel in whatever she has set out to do. It wasn't surprising to me that she left education to pursue a career in law. For as long as I've known her, she has always looked into doing the right thing, which is part of her character. She has never been quick to judge, and has always looked at any situation with an open mind. Based on my personal interactions with her over the past 25 years, I have come to see Ms. McCullen as an intelligent, hardworking, and dedicated person. She is a born leader. She continuously pushes herself to grow professionally. She has also been an important community contributor, always giving of her time and energy.

In the context of which I have had the pleasure of working with and knowing her, Ms. McCullen has demonstrated her leadership skills, collaborative abilities, and genuine passion to pursue her goals. I personally believe her greatest asset is her dedication and perseverance. She will never give up. For all the years that I have known her, I can confidently say that she is an excellent wife, mother, teacher, lawyer and a great friend. If given the opportunity to excel, she will definitely succeed. These attributes allow me to give Ms. Sonja M. P. McCullen my highest regards.

Sincerely,

Norine N. Matanane  
Vice Principal  
Waianae High School

Taryn Tomasa  
1130 N. Nimitz Hwy. A-254  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96817  
(808) 586-2080

August 24, 2021

Committee on Judiciary and Labor  
Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice Chair  
415 S. Beretania Street  
Judiciary Committee  
State Capital  
Honolulu, HI 96813  
via email: [JDCtestimony@capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:JDCtestimony@capitol.hawaii.gov)

Re: GM2 Intermediate Court of Appeals Judge Nominee Sonya M.P. McCullen  
Hearing: August 25, 2021, 1:00 PM

Dear Chair and Committee Members:

This letter is in support of the nomination of SONYA M.P. MCCULLEN to the Intermediate Court of Appeals. I have known Ms. McCullen both professionally and personally for over ten years.

Over the years, Ms. McCullen has been opposing counsel on a number of cases as a deputy prosecuting attorney. Although we were on opposing sides of cases, Ms. McCullen has always conducted herself in a professional and ethical manner. I am also acquainted with Ms. McCullen and her family. She is a dedicated mother of two school aged children and a devoted wife to her husband Isaac Moriwake. Ms. McCullen and Mr. Moriwake are upstanding citizens and caring and loving parents.

Thank you for taking my comments into consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Taryn Tomasa

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/24/2021 9:59:18 AM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Remote Testimony Requested
Christilei Hessler	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee: My name is Christilei Hessler, and I am testifying today in strong support of Governor Ige’s nomination of Sonja McCullen to Hawai’s Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA). I know Sonja both personally (Bruzer football sister!) and professionally (I worked as a law clerk for the Honorable Judge Trader and was lucky to witness Sonja work tirelessly as a State Prosecutor). Ms. McCullen is eminently qualified to be our next ICA Associate Judge. She has significant practice experience and appellate experience in particular. Based on public data available from the Hawai State Judiciary’s eCourt Kā• kua website, she has handled more than 300 total cases and more than 300 appeals alone. In addition, she has conducted 20 oral arguments before the Hawai Supreme Court. This experience would enable her to hit the ground running and immediately help to address the ICA’s significant case backlog. In addition to her litigation experience, Ms. McCullen would contribute invaluable lived experience to the ICA. Her perspectives and lived experiences as a Native Hawaiian woman and mother, as someone who grew up in Hilo, and as a former teacher of Hawaiian language and Hawaiian studies at Wai’anae High School would help enrich and diversify Hawai’s appellate courts and enable them to more broadly reflect the society and democracy that they serve. If confirmed, in addition to being the only Native Hawaiian on the appellate court, she will be the first Hawaiian studies grad and UH Law Ulu Lehua Scholar/Pre Ad on the ICA. Ms. McCullen is the perfect pick for our next ICA Associate Judge. Please vote to confirm her today. Mahalo for your time and consideration. Christilei Hessler, Esq. Attorney at Hawaii Office Christilei.Hessler@gilsondaub.com, Corporate Headquarters 3005 S El Camino Real San Clement, CA 92672 Toll Free: (844) 256-7786 | Cell: 360-901-1493 www.gilsondaub.com Confidential/Proprietary Mail to PO Box 75645, San Clemente, CA 92673 Serving all WCAB venues in California, Nevada, Arizona, Kansas, Missouri, Hawaii and Utah Christilei Hessler, Esq. Attorney at Hawaii Office Christilei.Hessler@gilsondaub.com, Corporate Headquarters 3005 S El Camino Real San Clement, CA 92672 Toll Free: (844) 256-7786 | Cell: 360-901-1493 www.gilsondaub.com Confidential/Proprietary Mail to PO Box 75645, San Clemente, CA 92673 Serving all WCAB venues in California, Nevada, Arizona, Kansas, Missouri, Hawaii and Utah

*Testimony from Kimi Murphy Ide-Foster*

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary:

I respectfully submit testimony in **strong support** of the confirmation of Sonja M.P. McCullen to the Intermediate Court of Appeals (“ICA”) as Associate Judge for a term of 10 years.

Sonja is an incredible lawyer, upstanding individual, and dear friend. She has a proven and qualified record – having handled hundreds of appeals and given 20 oral arguments before the Hawai‘i Supreme Court – and is recognized as being fair and even handed by her colleagues. Sonja also brings a depth of lived experience to the ICA as a Native Hawaiian who was raised in Hilo, a public school teacher at Wai‘anae High, and a mother of two children.

The judicial bench should be adequately balanced and reflect the composition of Hawaii’s citizens. Significant strides have been made in the past several years to improve the diversity of our bench, but I believe that more can and should be done to appoint qualified women to fill judicial vacancies to bring balance to the bench. It is vital that Hawai‘i’s people see themselves represented at every level of government, including the ICA. There has not been a Native Hawaiian on the ICA for 27 years and Sonja’s appointment will bring needed diversity and perspective to our appellate courts.

The current appointment for associate judge of the ICA is to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of The Honorable Derrick H.M. Chan. Ms. McCullen is extremely qualified and has a good reputation in the legal community and would be an ideal pick for this role. Please vote to confirm her today.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this confirmation.

August 24, 2021

**HEARING OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY**

**ATTN: CHAIR KARL RHOADS & VICE CHAIR JARRETT KEOHOKALOLE**

**Testimony in Strong Support of GM 2**

**Confirming Sonja M.P. McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals**

**August 25, 2021, 1:00 p.m.**

**Via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

I write in strong support of the confirmation of Sonja M.P. McCullen as Associate Judge to the Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA). Ms. McCullen is extremely qualified and is well-respected in the legal community.

I personally know Ms. McCullen through my experience in playing flag football at the annual Ete Bowl, which involves female law students at the William S. Richardson School of Law (WSRSL) playing against the graduates of the WSRSL. While I was in law school and Ms. McCullen was on the opposing team, I respected her as a fierce competitor who also carried herself with grace and humility. After I graduated from law school, I was able to join Ms. McCullen as her teammate, and I had the opportunity to learn more about her generous, caring, and positive spirit. I have no doubt that Ms. McCullen is qualified to serve as an ICA judge. Ms. McCullen possesses many of the characteristics you want in an excellent judge; she is level-headed, hard working, intelligent, kind, fearless, humble, and empathetic, to name a few.

Ms. McCullen has significant practice experience and appellate experience in particular. Based on public data available from the Hawai'i State Judiciary's eCourt Kōkua website, she has handled more than 300 total cases and more than 300 appeals alone. She has also conducted 20 oral arguments before the Hawai'i Supreme Court. This experience more than enables Ms. McCullen to immediately help address the ICA's significant case backlog.

In addition to her litigation experience, Ms. McCullen would contribute invaluable life experience to the ICA. Her perspectives as a Native Hawaiian woman and mother, as someone who grew up in Hilo, and as a former teacher of Hawaiian language and

Hawaiian studies at Wai‘anae High School would help enrich and diversify Hawai‘i’s appellate courts, and enable our judicial system to more broadly reflect the society and democracy that they serve.

I respectfully request that you vote to confirm Ms. McCullen to the ICA. Her confirmation will help to ensure diversity, fairness, and efficiency in our judicial system and the betterment of our community at large.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit support on this nomination.

Mahalo nui,

Pōhai Nu‘uhiwa Campbell



**HEARING OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
ATTN: CHAIR KARL RHOADS & VICE CHAIR JARRETT KEOHOKALOLE**

**Testimony in Strong Support of GM 2  
Confirming Sonja M.P. McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals**

**August 25, 2021, 1:00 p.m.  
Via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Katherine Vessels, and I am testifying today in strong support of Governor Ige's nomination of Sonja McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA).

I know Sonja through the William S. Richardson School of Law Alumni Association and the Ete Bowl. She is the epitome of a team player and truly strives to do what is right for the community. Her dedication to serving her organization is unparalleled.

Ms. McCullen is eminently qualified to be our next ICA Associate Judge. She has significant practice experience and appellate experience. Based on public data available from the Hawai'i State Judiciary's eCourt Kōkua website, she has handled more than 300 total cases and more than 300 appeals alone. In addition, she has conducted 20 oral arguments before the Hawai'i Supreme Court. This experience would enable her to hit the ground running and immediately help to address the ICA's significant case backlog.

In addition to her litigation experience, Ms. McCullen would contribute invaluable experience to the ICA. Her perspectives and lived experiences as a Native Hawaiian woman and mother, as someone who grew up in Hilo, and as a former teacher of Hawaiian language and Hawaiian studies at Wai'anae High School would help enrich and diversify Hawai'i's appellate courts and enable them to more broadly reflect the society and democracy that they serve.

Ms. McCullen is the perfect pick for our next ICA Associate Judge. Please vote to confirm her today.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,  
Katherine Vessels

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/24/2021 10:28:47 AM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Letani G Peltier	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Aloha. My name is Letani Peltier. I am a Native Hawaiian attorney from He'eia, O'ahu, and I am testifying in STRONG SUPPORT of Governor Ige's nomination of Sonja McCullen to the Intermediate Court of Appeals. Ms. McCullen has significant practice experience, and appellate experience in particular. Based on public data available from the State Judiciary, she has handled more than 300 total cases and more than 300 appeals alone. She has also conducted 20 oral arguments before the Hawai'i Supreme Court. This experience is invaluable and will help her to address the ICA's significant case backlog. Ms. McCullen also has significant and invaluable lived experience. As a Native Hawaiian woman and mother, as someone who grew up in Hilo, and as a former public school teacher, Ms. McCullen will help to enrich and diversify Hawai'i's appellate courts and enable them to more broadly reflect the society and democracy that they serve. Ms. McCullen will be a great ICA Associate Judge. Please vote to confirm her. Mahalo nui for the opportunity to provide this testimony. - Letani Peltier

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/24/2021 10:59:35 AM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Lauren Ballesteros-Watanabe	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Aloha Chair Rhoads and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, It is with great pleasure that I submit testimony in strong support of ICA appointee Sonja Mccullen. I always want to commend and extend thanks to the committee members who voted in recognition of the overwhelming testimony from the public oppose the previous candidate. Mccullen is an undeniably strong and qualified candidate for this important position in Hawai'i's judicial system. Her extensive experience in handling appeals and lived experience as a Hawaiian woman, mother, and educator will bring a balanced and genuine perspective to the appellate court. I strongly encourage you to vote to confirm this nomination. Mahalo, Lauren Ballesteros-Watanabe Makiki

LAW OFFICE OF CRYSTAL GLENDON, LLC

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1130 N. Nimitz Hwy., Ste. B-229  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96817

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F (808) 206-9948  
E crystalglendonlaw@gmail.com

**August 24, 2021**

TO: The Honorable Karl Rhoads  
Senator, District 13  
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 204  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

**RE: GM2, Consideration and Confirmation of Intermediate Court of Appeals  
Associate Judge Nominee Sonja M.P. McCullen, Hearing Date: 8/25/2021.**

Dear Sir,

I strongly support the nomination of Ms. Sonja M.P. McCullen as Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals. Ms. McCullen's wealth of experience, prolific practice in the appellate courts, dedication to our community, demeanor and overall character make her the best candidate for this position.

Ms. McCullen's career as an appellate attorney is unparalleled. I am impressed by the sheer number of appeals and oral arguments she has personally handled. I served as a Deputy Public Defender for 14 years. Within the Office of the Public Defender, the appellate division carries the distinction of an "exclusive club" that not all deputies are invited to join. The appellate attorneys are the legal masterminds behind much of our caselaw. Like the PD's appeals division, the prosecutor's appeals division commands similar respect. They are the go-to attorneys that trial deputies consult on complicated legal issues, setting a record up for appeal, and overall advice when in the midst of trial. While the trial attorneys are key to the normal functioning of each office, the appellate attorneys are the backbone of each respective office's legal repertoire. Ms. McCullen's wealth of experience will serve her well on the ICA.

I am a staunch believer that representation matters. To quote the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg, "women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It shouldn't be that women are the exception." I am excited to see Ms. McCullen's contribution to the appellate courts through her perspective not only as a woman, but as a local girl who grew up on the Big Island, who worked hard through more than one public service career, and who has shown an unwavering dedication to our unique island community.

I fully support Ms. McCullen's nomination for Intermediate Court of Appeals judge. She will make an excellent addition to the bench. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email [crystalglendonlaw@gmail.com](mailto:crystalglendonlaw@gmail.com) or at (808) 532-3802.

Thank you kindly for your time.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Crystal K. Glendon'.

Crystal K. Glendon

**HEARING OF THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
ATTN: CHAIR KARL RHOADS & VICE CHAIR JARRETT KEOHOKALOLE**

**Testimony in Strong Support of GM 2  
Confirming Sonja M.P. McCullen to Hawai‘i’s Intermediate Court of Appeals**

**August 25, 2021, 1:00 p.m.  
Via Zoom**

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Senate Judiciary Committee Members:

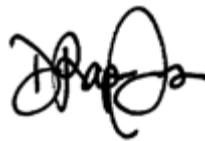
I am honored to offer my full and unconditional support for Sonja M.P. McCullen, Governor Ige’s nominee to Hawai‘i’s Intermediate Court of Appeals (“ICA”). I have known Ms. McCullen for nearly 20 years – we played football together in the UH Law School’s annual and historic Ete Bowl. In my old age, I have retired, but Ms. McCullen continues to play a significant role organizing the event and participating on the playing field.

Ms. McCullen is an excellent pick for an ICA associate judge. She has significant practice experience, and litigation and appellate experience in particular. She also brings important perspective and lived experience as a Kanaka Maoli woman and someone who has spent a significant amount of time in a rural, neighbor island community. The ICA will be enriched by her ‘ike and benefit from her phenomenal work ethic.

I regret that I will miss tomorrow’s confirmation hearing, but have a work commitment that I am unable to reschedule. I would nonetheless welcome the opportunity to further discuss Ms. McCullen’s eminent qualifications. Please don’t hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Mahalo for your time and consideration!

Me ka ha‘aha‘a



D. Kapua‘ala Sproat  
e: kapua.sproat@gmail.com

**TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF  
G.M. 2**

TO: Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Judiciary

FROM: Troy J.H. Andrade, Ph.D., J.D.

RE: TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF G.M. 2

DATE: Wednesday, August 25, 2021  
TIME: 1:00 P.M.  
PLACE: Via Videoconference

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of G.M. 2 (Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Intermediate Court of Appeals (“ICA”) as Associate Judge, Gubernatorial Nominee, SONJA M.P. MCCULLEN, for a term of 10 years). I submit this testimony in my individual capacity as a member of the Hawai‘i bar, a legal education, and a proud member of our Hawai‘i community.

I applaud Governor David Ige for his selection of Ms. McCullen as she is eminently qualified to be our next ICA Associate Judge and adds a rich diversity to our appellate courts.

A graduate of the William S. Richardson School of Law, Ms. McCullen is a shining example of what it means to be a Richardson lawyer: she strives for integrity, aloha, joy, compassion, and generosity.<sup>1</sup> While in law school, she mastered the law and skills needed to be a successful advocate. Following law school, she served a two-year term in the highly competitive a coveted position as a law clerk for Associate Justice Paula A. Nakayama of the Supreme Court of Hawai‘i. During this time, Ms. McCullen immersed herself in the intricacies of appellate decision-making. She learned from one of the greatest legal minds and helped to craft decisions of the State’s highest court. Following her clerkship, Ms. McCullen engaged in a successful career as a lawyer that had her working as an investigator for victims of violence crimes and evaluating arbitrated labor-related grievances. For the last decade, as a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney, she has handled more than 300 appeals and conducted over twenty oral arguments before the Supreme Court of Hawai‘i. She advised trial deputies on complex legal issues and responded to complex Writs of Habeas Corpus in various courts of the federal judicial system, including the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court. This litigation experience, particularly in criminal matters, will enable Ms. McCullen to help address the ICA’s case backlog.

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<sup>1</sup> Mari J. Matsuda, *A Richardson Lawyer*, 33 U. Haw. L. Rev. 61, 65-69 (2010).

Importantly, in addition to her legal experience, Ms. McCullen contributes invaluable lived experience to the appellate bench. Her perspectives and experiences as a Native Hawaiian woman and mother, as someone who grew up in Hilo, and as a former Hawaiian language and Hawaiian studies at Wai‘anae High School would help enrich and diversify Hawai‘i’s appellate courts and enable them to more broadly reflect the society that they serve. To say that this nomination is groundbreaking is an understatement. The last Native Hawaiian female to serve as an appellate court judge was a member of the royal family in the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. I am unaware of any current appellate judge that was raised on a neighbor island. Ms. McCullen’s nomination and confirmation reaffirms our commitment to a more just and equitable society that is reflective of our entire community.

As a law professor I interact extensively with law students on a daily basis. Ms. McCullen’s nomination has created a buzz with my law students, particularly our Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island students in the Ulu Lehua Scholars Program—a program that brings in and supports law students from underserved and underrepresented communities. These students have approached me reinvigorated about their studies and a future that they can now see for themselves as lawyers and judges. Ms. McCullen is already a pathbreaker and her confirmation will make visible the promises of equity in our legal system.

Ms. McCullen is the perfect pick for our next ICA Associate Judge. Mahalo again for the opportunity to submit testimony.





August 24, 2021

To: Senator Karl Rhoads  
Chair, Senate Committee on Judiciary

Senator Jarrett Keohokalole  
Vice Chair, Senate Committee on Judiciary

**RE: GM 2: Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Intermediate Court of Appeals as Associate Judge, Gubernatorial Nominee, SONJA M.P. MCCULLEN, for a term of 10 years**

**Hearing: Wednesday, August 25, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. via videoconference**

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary:

Hawaii Women Lawyers (“HWL”) respectfully submits testimony in **support** of the confirmation of Sonja M.P. McCullen to the Intermediate Court of Appeals (“ICA”) as Associate Judge for a term of 10 years.

HWL is a nonprofit organization with members including approximately 300 attorneys. HWL’s mission includes improving the status of women in the legal profession, increasing the number of women attorneys in positions of authority and responsibility, and promoting the advancement of all women. HWL believes that increasing opportunities for, and improving the visibility of, qualified women in the Judiciary is extremely important. The judicial bench should be adequately balanced and reflect the composition of Hawaii’s citizens. Significant strides have been made in the past several years to improve the diversity of our bench, but HWL believes that more can be done to appoint qualified women to fill judicial vacancies to bring balance to the bench.

The current appointment for associate judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals is to fill the vacancy created by the retirement of The Honorable Derrick H.M. Chan. Ms. McCullen is extremely qualified and has a good reputation in the legal community. HWL supports the confirmation of Ms. McCullen to the ICA, which will help to ensure that the number of women on the bench better represents the number of women in the legal profession and the community at large.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this confirmation.

Very truly yours,

Hawaii Women Lawyers

**HEARING OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY  
ATTN: CHAIR KARL RHOADS & VICE CHAIR JARRETT KEOHOKĀLOLE**

**Testimony in Strong Support of GM 2  
Confirming Sonja M.P. McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals**

**August 25, 2021, 1:00 p.m.  
Via Videoconference**

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokālole, and Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Pi'ilani Kai, and I am testifying today in **strong support** of Governor Ige's nomination of Sonja McCullen to Hawai'i's Intermediate Court of Appeals.

I've known Sonja McCullen and her 'ohana for over thirty years as our families both attended St. Joseph School in Hilo. Years after our upbringing in Hilo, I admired her as she returned to college to attend William S. Richardson School of Law after a worthwhile experience teaching in Wai'anae. And now, I continue to be blessed to know her as a supportive friend, role model and wonderful mother to two beautiful children.

There will be many who can testify to Ms. McCullen's solid litigation experience and many more who can verify her unflappable demeanor in the courtroom. While I do not possess a judicial background to make judgeship recommendations to the Intermediate Court of Appeals, I can attest to Ms. McCullen's personal qualities and characteristics. These qualities which stem from her small-town upbringing and her real-world experiences would make her an outstanding Intermediate Court of Appeals judge. A few of her many exceptional qualities are listed below.

- **Respectable** – I've always admired Ms. McCullen's ability to interact with others experiencing hardships in a calm, tactful and respectful manner. She has the ability to engage with all members of our community and from all realms of educational backgrounds. She impresses in her ability to make decisions thoughtfully and deliberately so others know her decisions come from a place of good intentions and built on trust.
- **Hardworking** - While I know Ms. McCullen to be hard-working in a personal setting, I also know without a doubt that she is suitable to the workload of the courts. As a mother myself, I understand the sacrifices a mother makes to juggle her career and the demands of her husband's career while still being an engaged parent raising well-adjusted children. Ms. McCullen knows and has proven that it takes diligence and efficiency. She would make an outstanding judge not *despite* being a mother but *because* she is a mother.
- **Relatable** - Whether Ms. McCullen was a man or a woman, Caucasian or Asian, she will make an exceptional judge. But, as a Native Hawaiian woman working for twenty years in one of the most concentrated populations of Native Hawaiians, I can say that representation matters. Those life experiences that mold who we are help us to relate to those we are honored to serve and preside over.

There isn't a better candidate to become the first Native Hawaiian in nearly thirty years to serve on the Intermediate Court of Appeals. The State of Hawai'i would greatly benefit by your vote to confirm Ms. McCullen as she would serve as a role model and inspiration to countless others in our community.

Mahalo nui loa for your consideration.

Pi'ilani Kai  
Honolulu, Hawai'i

# KA LĀHUI HAWAI'I KŌMIKE KALAI'ĀINA

BEFORE THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

AUGUST 25, 2021

GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE 2

RELATING TO NOMINATION OF SONJA MCCULLEN TO THE HAWAI'I INTERMEDIATE COURT OF APPEALS

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Members of the Committee,

Ka Lāhui Hawai'i Kōmike Kalai'āina **STRONGLY SUPPORTS** Governor's Message 2 nominating Sonja McCullen, a highly qualified Kanaka Maoli woman, to the Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA). Ensuring there is Kanaka Maoli representation on the second highest court in Hawai'i is important to addressing the systemic racism in Hawai'i's criminal justice system that has resulted in the chronic over-representation of Kanaka Maoli in Hawai'i's prisons, jails and juvenile detention centers.

According to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs report entitled "The Disparate Treatment of Native Hawaiian in the Criminal Justice System" dated September 29, 2010, Kanaka Maoli are "disproportionately impacted at various stages of Hawaii's criminal justice system" (<https://justicepolicy.org/research/the-disparate-treatment-of-native-hawaiians-in-the-criminal-justice-system/>). The report states that Kanaka Maoli are more likely to be incarcerated for drug offenses than any other race in Hawai'i even though our people do not use drugs at drastically different rates. Furthermore, given a determination of guilt in the courts, Kanaka Maoli are more likely to receive a prison sentence that is much longer than other races.

Breaking the biased judicial system that historically has worked against (and not for) the native people of this land is a long road which starts with Kanaka Maoli representation in court positions that can make a difference. Having a native woman who is versed in our traditions and political history and who was raised in the largest Kanaka Maoli community in the world will definitely bring an important perspective and insight to the plight of Kanaka Maoli that has been missing for three decades to the ICA.

For these reasons and more we humbly ask that this committee approves GM 2 .

Me ka oiai'o,

M. Healani Sonoda-Pale  
Public Affairs Officer, Ka Lāhui Hawai'i Kōmike Kalai'āina

## Testimony on GM2

Jocelyn Doane <jocelynmdoane@gmail.com>

Sat 8/21/2021 12:02 PM

Aloha Kakou,

My name is Jocelyn Doane and I strongly support the confirmation of Sonja McCullen to the Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Ms. McCullen's legal practice experience, including her litigation and in particular her appellate experience, as well as her personal and other professional experience make her an ideal candidate for this position. She has been a public servant since the start of her career as a public high school teacher, and I admire her willingness to continue to serve the public on the ICA.

The fact that she is Native Hawaiian and that her confirmation would make history --she would be the first Native Hawaiian woman to serve on the State's ICA--is a HUGE bonus, and a win for those of us seeking equity in appointments to our judiciary.

I hope that you will also support Ms. McCullen's appointment.

Mahalo,

Jocelyn Leialoha Doane, J.D., M.B.A.

||

From: Susan Wong <viennawong53@gmail.com>  
Sent: Tuesday, August 24, 2021 12:42 PM  
To: webmaster <webmaster@Capitol.hawaii.gov>  
Subject: Support Sonja P.M McCullen nomination to Hawaii ICA

I am in strong support of Sonja McCullen nomination to Hawaii ICA. I have known Sonja since she was a Baby, we have been neighbors for many years she is part of my Ohana. I am very proud of her achievements and I trust she will do a good

job. Mahalo  
for Your Time,  
Susan Wong

Sent from my iPhone

**LATE**

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/24/2021 2:22:06 PM  
Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Shannon Rudolph	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, & Members of the Judiciary Committee, I strongly support Sonja McCullen as a well qualified nominee for the ICA. I am a 40 year Hawai`i resident who understands that we definitely need more diversity in our court system. Mahalo! Shannon Rudolph-Kona

**LATE**

August 24, 2021

To: Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair  
Senate Committee on Judiciary

RE: GM 2, TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF NOMINATION OF SONJA MCCULLEN

HEARING: Thursday, August 26, 2021, 1:00 P.M., via Videoconference

Chair Rhoads and Committee Members:

I'm writing in strong support of Sonja McCullen.

I have known Sonja for 22 years—wow seeing that in print is a little daunting. I can't believe it's been that long since we entered law school as classmates!

Prior to entering law school, Sonja served as a teacher at Waianae High School. Looking at her then, I wondered how she wasn't scared off from that assignment. Within minutes of meeting her the answer was clear, she was no pushover. She was tough yet simultaneously very thoughtful. I imagine her students saw her as one not to mess with but very much appreciated her empathy and ability to empower.

In law school we participated in study groups together regularly. We wanted our entire group to feel supported and be successful. We also played on the law school's ETE women's football team. The annual game's design was to assist women with networking within the legal profession. The game is flag but it's by no means a powderpuff match-up. That tiny girl sitting before you is one tough Defensive Back! I know she will not shy away from challenges, confrontation, or tough decision-making.

Since graduation, we've continued to play in the ETE Bowl as Bruzers. In fact, Sonja is an inductee of the Bruzer Hall of Fame. She's been instrumental in working to maintain the tradition of the game.

We also worked together at the Honolulu Prosecutor's Office. At the Prosecutor's Office, Sonja has participated in several oral arguments and submitted countless briefs to our appellate courts. Sonja has always been brilliant at research and writing. In law school, she served as a Research Assistant to the very selective WSRL Professor Eric Yamamoto. She also served as a Law Clerk to the Honorable Justice Paula Nakayama.

Although she has spent the bulk of her career in the criminal arena, she also has experience in the civil arena when she served as counsel to a union.

Sonja is not one to be swayed by political influence or pressure. She will decide cases based on the confines of the law without passion or prejudice. Her actions and decision-making have been and will continue to be firmly rooted in principles of law.



August 24, 2021

Page 2

Sonja is precisely what our appellate bench needs right now. This hard-working Hawaiian Mom is strong but receptive. As a Judge she will be uncompromising in all the right ways.

Mahalo for considering my testimony.

/s/ Michelle M.L. Puu

**Fwd: Comment in Support of Gubernatorial Nominee Sonja M.P. McCullen**

rochelle vidinha &lt;iwalani808@hotmail.com&gt;

Tue 8/24/2021 4:08 PM

To: JDC Committee &lt;JDCCommittee@capitol.hawaii.gov&gt;

**LATE**

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** rochelle vidinha <iwalani808@hotmail.com>**Date:** August 24, 2021 at 3:55:23 PM HST**To:** senrhoads@capitol.hawaii.gov**Subject: Fwd: Comment in Support of Gubernatorial Nominee Sonja M.P. McCullen**

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** rochelle vidinha <iwalani808@hotmail.com>**Date:** August 24, 2021 at 3:23:20 PM HST**To:** JDCcommittee@capitol.hawaii.gov**Subject: Comment in Support of Gubernatorial Nominee Sonja M.P. McCullen**

Aloha Senate Judiciary Committee,

It is an honor and a privilege to submit my comments in strong support of the nomination of my friend, colleague, and fellow Bruzer linebacker, Sonja M.P. McCullen, for the position of Intermediate Court of Appeals, Associate Judge. Born and raised in Hawai'i, having served as a Hawaiian Studies teacher for students on the Wai'anae Coast, and equipped with extensive appellate experience and knowledge of the law and the judicial process, Sonja will be a strong, community-minded, well-rounded addition to the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Sonja and I attended the William S. Richardson School of Law together. After law school, we connected on the football field as Bruzers, and at the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney as Deputy Prosecuting Attorneys (DPA). Both on the field and in the office, Sonja is known to be a person of integrity who is committed to doing the right thing. She treats others with

compassion, kindness and respect, and is passionate about issues that affect our community.

Sonja has been an invaluable asset to the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney. In addition to her exemplary work on appellate briefs and oral arguments, Sonja has always welcomed opportunities to go above and beyond to help the trial DPAs. Without hesitation, Sonja assisted other DPAs with drafting of legal memoranda and crafting of legal arguments. She also accompanied DPAs to Court to be on hand when novel legal issues were being addressed. Once when we went to Court together, a well-respected Circuit Court Judge referred to Sonja as my "Brain Trust." I will never forget that day. Sonja and I laughed about it, and Sonja humbly dismissed the Judge's comment. I reassured her that it was true. For years, Sonja has been an incredible source of support and non-judgmental legal counsel for myself and many other DPAs.

Sonja is a dedicated public servant with exceptional legal knowledge and experience. These qualities, coupled with her ability to understand and effectively communicate with people, and her sincere desire to positively impact our community, make Sonja the perfect candidate for the position of Intermediate Court of Appeals, Associate Judge.

If I can provide any other information, please feel free to contact me at (808)258-5508.

Mahalo,  
Rochelle Vidinha

**LATE**

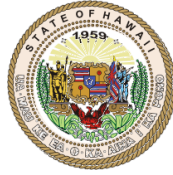
**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/24/2021 4:29:51 PM  
Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Cheryl Burghardt	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Writing in support of Sonja McCullen for confirmation to the Intermediate Court of Appeals as Associate Judge. Her qualifications make her a strong candidate for this position. This confirmation is an important step in our path to a more equitable process. Quoting Ka Lahui "Breaking the biased judicial system that historically has worked against (and not for) the native people of this land is a long road which starts with Kanaka Maoli representation in court positions that can make a difference. Having a native woman who is versed in our traditions and political history and who was raised in the largest Kanaka Maoli community in the world will definitely bring an important perspective and insight to the plight of Kanaka Maoli that has been missing for three decades to the ICA. " Thank you for taking this step and confirming Ms.McCullen.

David Y. Ige  
GOVERNOR



Keith Hayashi  
Interim SUPERINTENDENT

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
WAI'ANAЕ HIGH SCHOOL  
85-251 FARRINGTON HWY  
WAI'ANAЕ, HAWAII 96792

**LATE**

Ryan Y. Oshita  
Waianae High School, Vice Principal  
85-251 Farrington Hwy.  
Waianae, HI 96792

August 24, 2021

Chair Rhodes;  
Vice-Chair Keohokalole:  
Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

Chair Rhodes, Vice-Chair Keohokalole & Honorable Members of Senate Judiciary Committee,

Hope and Purpose! It is my honor and privilege to recommend Sonja McCullen for Associate Judge to the Intermediate Court of Appeals. I have known Sonja for over two decades as we began our teaching careers at Waianae High School in the mid-1990s. Sonja is driven by these two attributes. Hope and Purpose.

Sonja began teaching Hawaiian Language to students at Waiahole Elementary School. Until then, she had not considered becoming a teacher, but the excitement the kids imbued, and their eagerness to learn motivated her to pursue a teaching degree at the University of Hawaii. Making a difference in her kids' lives was her goal. She also taught Hawaiian Language at Windward Community School for Adults because she felt it was her purpose to teach the parents and grandparents of the students she was teaching at Waiahole Elementary because they wanted to learn and support their children and grandchildren in the Punanaleo Program. Once she earned her teaching degree, she was hired at Waianae High School as a Social Studies teacher and this is where we met.

Sonja taught Hawaiian Studies and Modern History of Hawaii. Sonja was fair and firm and held her students to high standards. I recall a trip we chaperoned to the Big Island. We had just finished lunch at a park and had gotten into our minivans to leave. As we proceeded to drive off, I threw a can out my window and told the students in my van, "Watch, Ms. McCullen was going to stop and pick it up". Sure enough, she stopped her van and picked up the soda can. This seemingly trivial gesture speaks volumes to the character of Sonja and what she believes. Hope and Purpose. She could've easily driven off and justified it by thinking she wasn't the one who threw the can out the window, but she didn't. She stopped and picked up the can because she

AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

knew it was the right thing to do. Maybe she understood the impact it made in the perception of the kids to see people doing what's right rather than what's convenient, or maybe that's just her. On that day, in our vans, she demonstrated hope and purpose.

After five years of teaching, Sonja decided to take a bold step and change careers to make an impact in a different arena. She decided to go back to school to become a lawyer. Being of Hawaiian descent, Sonja was frustrated with the mismanagement in the Department of Hawaiian Homelands. The injustice created by the mismanagement led to many Hawaiians waiting and even dying on the wait-list for a homestead. Looking out for our most vulnerable by giving them a voice and championing their cause was why she decided to become a lawyer. Making a difference, providing hope and fighting for a purpose is what drives Sonja.

For the past nine years, Sonja has worked in the Prosecuting Attorney's office to ensure victims' rights were upheld and justice served. Making a difference by ensuring victims were heard and their case fought for to the full extent of the law; providing them hope! Sonja wants to make an even bigger impact by serving as an Associate Judge on the Intermediate Court of Appeals. Her purpose is to do more to serve the people of Hawaii in all areas of law.

Sonja is thoughtful, fair and just. This past year she undertook a home renovation project. Her plans called for relocating an electrical outlet and asked if my brother could do it since he's an electrician. It wasn't a difficult job for my brother and it wouldn't have cost anything. However, the permit called for the work to be done by a licensed electrical contractor. Although my brother is a licensed electrician, he doesn't have a contractor license. Sonja ended up paying hundreds of dollars to have the job done to ensure she was complying with the requirements of the permit. This again demonstrates Sonja's willingness to do what's right rather than what's convenient.

In this era of "Fake News", scandals and corruption, the people of Hawaii deserve and need someone who will be their champion. Sonja has the drive, determination and purpose to meet and surpass this need. It is with the highest regard that I recommend Sonja McCullen for the position of Associate Judge to the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan Y. Oshita". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ryan Y. Oshita  
Vice Principal

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/25/2021 9:27:00 AM  
Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

**LATE**

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Stephen Teves	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice-Chair Keohokalole and members of the Senate Judiciary committee, I am writing today in strong support of the nomination of Sonja McCullen's nomination as a Judge to the Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals (ICA). I have known Sonja for over 25 years from her days as a public school teacher, then as a law student, and now as a practicing attorney. (I also know Sonja as her coach on the UH Law School Alumni team/ Da Bruzers, and Sonja's hard work on and off the field in playing and organizing the annual Ete Bowl game.) Sonja has always exhibited the attribute of hard work and determination, first as a public school teacher, and now as a leading member of the Hawai'i Bar. I always found Sonja to be thoughtful and intelligent in her work product, while always keeping her compassion for the people she serves. Most of all, I'm always impressed by Sonja's willingness to serve to help make Hawai'i a better place for all of us. Sonja will be an outstanding Judge as a member of the ICA, and she will make the legal community and the State of Hawai'i proud. I humbly ask that you advise and consent to the nomination of Sonja McCullen as the next Judge of ICA. Mahalo for your consideration, Stephen Teves, Esq.

**GM-2**

Submitted on: 8/25/2021 11:26:25 AM

Testimony for JDC on 8/25/2021 1:00:00 PM

**LATE**

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Remote Testimony Requested</b>
Sharde Freitas	Individual	Support	No

Comments: Support



August 24, 2021

**LATE**

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole & members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

I am writing in STRONG SUPPORT of the Senate's confirmation of Ms. Sonja McCullen, to the position of Associate Judge of the ICA. For the past 10+ years, it has been both a pleasure and an honor to work alongside Ms. McCullen, and I strongly believe that she would make an outstanding judge, in terms of her legal acumen, temperament and objectivity.

Over the years, I have sought Ms. McCullen's advice and assistance on countless occasions, when analyzing caselaw, legislative history, proposed legislative amendments, and other legal matters. Despite carrying a heavy caseload, Ms. McCullen never failed to provide her undivided attention to any question that I brought to her, and she has always been exceptionally adept at pivoting from one complex legal matter to the next with apparent ease and accuracy.

While I have only known Ms. McCullen in her role as a Deputy Prosecutor, she has never been unreasonable or over-zealous in her views, and I believe she has a heart for finding the true meaning of the law, based on diligent research and analysis. Indeed, Ms. McCullen is truly dedicated to and passionate about appellate law, which is much different from trial advocacy, litigation, or other areas of law, and that is yet another reason why she would be so well-suited to the current opening for an ICA judge.

Although I am just learning now about the "past hats" that Ms. McCullen has worn--and I am impressed by the span of her professional and life experiences--I am not entirely surprised. Now I understand that it is THAT breadth of experience that has served to inform and temper Ms. McCullen's view of the world, the manner in which carries herself and the manner in which she practices law. While I have utmost confidence that Ms. McCullen always has and always will base all of her decisions squarely on the rule of law and precedent, every judge brings their own inherent qualities to the bench. In Ms. McCullen, I am so heartened to know that--if confirmed--we would have the perspective of someone who has personally worked with crime victims, worked with unions, worked with schools, is a Hawaiian, is a woman, is a mother, and so many other valuable qualities that she brings with her.

Thus, although I'm sad that the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney would be losing Ms. McCullen as a deputy, I know the Department's loss would be a remarkable gain for the State of Hawaii, and I fervently hope that you will vote to confirm her appointment to the ICA.

Sincerely,



Tricia Nakamatsu



Testimony of the  
HAWAII STATE BAR ASSOCIATION  
relating to the nomination of

**Sonja M.P. McCullen**  
**Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals (GM2)**

TO: The Honorable Karl Rhoads, Chair  
The Honorable Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice-Chair  
and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

FROM: Levi Hookano  
President, Hawaii State Bar Association

Hearing: Wednesday, August 25, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.  
Via Videoconference  
State Capitol

The Board of Directors of the Hawaii State Bar Association (HSBA) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on the nomination of Sonja McCullen for the position of Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

The HSBA Board of Directors followed its multi-step process to inform the confirming authority of its findings on this appointment.

- Notification to the nominee of the HSBA appointment review process, which includes a questionnaire requesting educational credentials, legal and other professional work experiences, personal references; a resume; a copy of the JSC application; a form authorizing disclosure from the Office of Disciplinary Counsel of any disciplinary action; and an interview with the HSBA Board of Directors.
- Notification via electronic transmission to the HSBA membership of the appointment and a request for comments on the nominee.
- Appointment of a three-person review subcommittee of HSBA Board members by the President which serves as a neutral fact-finding body to: review documentation submitted by the nominee, contact references submitted by the nominee, review comments received from the HSBA membership, and conduct follow-up member contact for clarification, if necessary, for presentation to the HSBA Board.

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Leslie A. Hayashi

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Patricia A. Mau-Shimizu

- Submittal of a report by the three-person review subcommittee to the President, and subsequently to the entire Board.
- Meeting of the President, the Executive Director, and the nominee prior to the scheduled interview of the nominee by the Board.
- Interview of the nominee by the HSBA Board.
- Deliberation of the HSBA Board to determine if the nominees is qualified or unqualified.
- Submittal of the HSBA Board's recommendation to the confirming authority.

The HSBA President and the Executive Director met with Ms. McCullen on August 20, 2021 to discuss the subcommittee's findings. On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, Ms. McCullen was interviewed by the HSBA Board of Directors in executive session.

Documentation submitted by Ms. McCullen was reviewed and the references listed were contacted for their personal opinions and observations. The comments and letters received from HSBA members reflected an affirmation of Ms. McCullen in all categories of the HSBA criteria which include:

- Integrity
- Diligence
- Legal knowledge and ability
- Professional experience
- Temperament
- Financial responsibility
- Public service
- Health
- Ability to fulfill the responsibilities and duties of the position

The task of the HSBA was to determine the qualifications and suitability of the Appointee utilizing in large part, the judicial appointments criteria of the American Bar Association. The criteria are not ranked in terms of importance as it is used universally to review the qualifications of appointees for trial and appellate positions. The determination of qualified or unqualified is based on a totality of the documentation received, member and reference comments, and the interview of the individual appointed.

Prior to pursuing a legal career, Sonja Pualeialoha McCullen was a social studies, Hawaiian language, and Hawaiian studies teacher at Waianae High School for five years. As an educator Ms. McCullen acquired extraordinary organizational skills, and communication abilities to convey to her students the significance of the curriculum prepared.

Ms. McCullen has focused her legal career on public service as a Supreme Court law Clerk, a Judicial Education Specialist, an investigator for the Crime Victim Compensation Commission, and as a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney for the City and County of Honolulu in the Appellate Division for over 12 years. In this position, it has been reported that Ms. McCullen was counsel of record in over 170 cases before the Hawaii Intermediate Court of Appeals and over 70 cases before the Hawaii Supreme Court as well as around 10 cases in Federal Court. To date, she has argued 20 cases before the Hawaii Supreme Court.

Colleagues in the Prosecutor's Office and opposing counsel note that she has always been able to present the State's position in a calm manner and without becoming emotional. She was assigned to some of the most complex cases, some with novel issues. As a Deputy in the Prosecutor's Office, Ms. McCullen was required to research and analyze areas of family and civil law such as employment law, environmental law and the Water Code in conjunction with her prosecutorial responsibilities.

Ms. McCullen's proven legal skills and ability to analyze issues from all perspectives, and professional record of being fair, straightforward, hard working and even-keeled are evidence of her ability to fulfill the responsibilities for the judicial position to which she has been appointed.

After a review of all documentation submitted and the interview of the nominee, which included dialogue and questioning relating to her background, experiences, and reasons for pursuing the position of Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals, the Board of the Hawaii State Bar Association found Ms. Sonja McCullen to be **QUALIFIED** for the position of Associate Judge of the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments for consideration during the deliberations and decision making of our Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Levi Hookano", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Levi Hookano  
HSBA President