

STAND. COM. REP. NO. **4**

Honolulu, Hawaii

JUN 26 2024

RE: GOV. MSG. NO. 4

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
Thirty-Second State Legislature
First Special Session of 2024
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Judiciary, to which was referred Governor's Message No. 4, submitting for study and consideration the appointment of:

CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FIRST CIRCUIT

G.M. No. 4 STEVEN NICHOLS,
for a term to expire in 10 years,

begs leave to report as follows:

Your Committee reviewed the personal history, resume, and statement submitted by Judge Steven Nichols for service on the Circuit Court of the First Circuit, State of Hawaii.

Your Committee received testimony in support of the appointment of Judge Steven Nichols from the Federal Public Defender of the District of Hawai'i, Governor, Office of the Public Defender, and forty-two individuals.

Your Committee received comments on the appointment of Judge Steven Nichols from the Board of Directors of the Hawaii State Bar Association and one individual.

The Hawaii State Bar Association Board of Directors (HSBA Board) uses a rating system that considers several criteria to assist the HSBA Board in making a recommendation to your Committee on whether the appointee is "qualified" or "not qualified". Specifically, the criteria the HSBA Board employs is the same criteria found in the American Bar Association's Guidelines for Reviewing Qualifications of Candidates for State Judicial Office.

2025-0012 GM SSCR SMA-2.docx



Those guidelines include the following criteria, which are not exclusive: integrity, diligence, legal knowledge and ability, professional experience, temperament, financial responsibility, public service, and ability to perform the responsibilities and duties required of the position for which the applicant has been appointed. Upon review of the established criteria, the HSBA Board found the appointee to be qualified for the position of Circuit Court Judge of the First Circuit.

Judge Nichols received a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where he was a University of Hawai'i Regent's Scholar and graduated summa cum laude. He then received his Juris Doctor from the William S. Richardson School of Law at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where he earned the American Jurisprudence award for Evidence. Judge Nichols has been licensed to practice in the State of Hawaii since 2002.

Since April 2024, Judge Nichols has been a Per Diem Judge in the District Family Court. In October 2023, Judge Nichols established his own law firm, the Law Office of Steven R. Nichols, where he focuses on criminal defense. Previously, for almost twenty years, Judge Nichols worked as a Deputy Public Defender for the Office of the Public Defender, where he practiced criminal defense and protected the rights of indigent defendants. During the last eight years of Judge Nichols' work at the Office of the Public Defender, he focused on the defense of defendants charged with serious felony offenses such as murder, sexual assault, and robbery and his practice consisted of trial work, drafting motions, and legal research. By the time he left the Office of the Public Defender, Judge Nichols was the Felony Division Supervisor, where he assigned cases, mentored younger deputies, and made managerial decisions.

Judge Nichols has also been an active participant in his community. He has participated in the Hawaii Pacific University 2023 Crime in the Chinatown-Downtown Neighborhood Community Roundtable Event and the 2021 and 2019 Courts in the Community events. Judge Nichols also coaches numerous sports, including having been the Head Coach for the Mililani Basketball Association, Head Coach of I9 Basketball, Head Coach of I9 Soccer, Mililani Community Athletic Association Basketball Head Coach, and American Youth Soccer Organization Head Soccer Coach. Additionally, Judge Nichols currently serves as the President of the Mililani Mauka Elementary Parent Teacher Organization.



Testimony submitted in support of Judge Nichols' appointment commends his calm and fair temperament, patience, open-mindedness, courtesy, and tact. Testimony further indicates that throughout his legal career, Judge Nichols has continuously acted with understanding, compassion, humility, and common sense, even while working on the most serious cases and with the most difficult clients. Numerous testifiers also praise his integrity, patience, and excellent legal mind with an acuity for recognizing and analyzing legal and factual issues.

Your Committee finds that, based on the testimony submitted on his behalf, responses to questions asked by the members of your Committee, and your Committee's review of information about him and his qualifications, Judge Steven Nichols has the experience, compassion, and other competencies to be a Circuit Court Judge of the First Circuit, and he has the legal expertise, integrity, and demeanor to fully and faithfully discharge the duties associated with that judicial office.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Judiciary that is attached to this report, your Committee, after full consideration of the background, experience, and qualifications of the appointee, has found the appointee to be qualified for the position to which appointed and recommends that the Senate consent to the appointment.

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

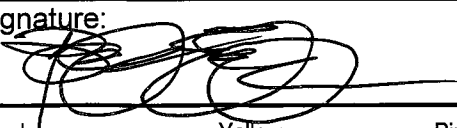


KARL RHOADS, Chair



The Senate
 Thirty-Second Legislature
 State of Hawai'i

Record of Votes
Committee on Judiciary
JDC
Consent

Gov. Msg./Jud. Com. No.:* GM 4	Committee Referral: JDC	Date: 06/26/24		
<input type="checkbox"/> The Committee is reconsidering its decision				
The Recommendation is:				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent 2347 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Consent 2349				
Members	Aye	Aye (WR)	Nay	Excused
RHOADS, Karl (C)	✓			
GABBARD, Mike (VC)				✓
ELEFANTE, Brandon J.C.	✓			
KANUHA, Dru Mamo	✓			
KEOHOKALOLE, Jarrett	✓			
SAN BUENAVENTURA, Joy A.				✓
AWA, Brenton	✓			
TOTAL	5	0	0	2
Recommendation:				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Not Adopted				
Chair's or Designee's Signature:				
				
Distribution:				
Original File with Committee Report	Yellow Clerk's Office	Pink Drafting Agency	Goldenrod Committee File Copy	

***Only one Message/Communication per Record of Votes**