

STAND. COM. REP. NO.

3429

Honolulu, Hawaii

APR 06 2026

RE: JUD. COM. NO. 23

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
Regular Session of 2026
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Judiciary, to which was referred Judiciary Communication No. 23, submitting for study and consideration the appointment of:

DISTRICT COURT OF THE FIRST CIRCUIT

J.C. No. 23 KIRSHA KAULUKANE MILIANANI DURANTE
for a term to expire in 6 years;

begs leave to report as follows:

Your Committee reviewed the personal history, resume, and statement submitted by Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante for service on the District Court of the First Circuit.

Your Committee received testimony in support of the appointment of Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante from the Office of the Public Defender, Native Hawaiian Bar Association, King Lunalilo Trust, Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, 'Ekolu Mea Nui, Hawai'i Women Lawyers, and fifty-six individuals.

Your Committee received comments on the appointment of Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante from the Hawaii State Bar Association.

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

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

Ms. Durante earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Spanish Language and Literature from Brandeis University, where she also earned certificates in Legal Studies and Women's Studies. Ms. Durante earned her Juris Doctor from the William S. Richardson School of Law at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, where she also received a Pacific Asian Legal Studies certificate. Ms. Durante has been licensed to practice law in the State of Hawai'i since 2004.

Ms. Durante currently works at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, where she has been the firm's Litigation Director since 2023. As the firm's Litigation Director, Ms. Durante manages all of the firm's attorneys and assists the Executive Director with providing updates on the firm's litigation efforts to the Board of Directors. She also supervises and manages the firm's litigation work. Before becoming the firm's Litigation Director, Ms. Durante was the 'Ohana Services Team Litigation Director and a Senior Staff Attorney.

Ms. Durante has also dedicated a significant portion of her legal career to public service. From 2005 to 2021, she was a Deputy Public Defender for the Office of the Public Defender. As a Deputy Public Defender, Ms. Durante drafted appellate briefs and presented oral argument before the Hawai'i Supreme Court and the Intermediate Court of Appeals. She also gained significant trial experience, raised novel legal issues in motions, negotiated fair plea agreements, and obtained acquittals in jury and bench trials. Ms. Durante's experience at the Office of the Public Defender included more than sixty jury trials and more than one hundred bench trials, and she used this experience to mentor younger attorneys by serving as second-chair in those attorneys' first jury trials.



Ms. Durante is also an active member of her community and is affiliated with numerous community organizations. She is a founding member of the Kalana Ola Compassionate Release Coalition and is a gubernatorial appointee to the State's Defender Council, where she has served since 2025. Ms. Durante also serves as a member of the Mālama Honua Public Charter School Foundation's Board, Treasurer of the Native Hawaiian Bar Association's Board of Directors, and on the Judicial Administration Committee. Previously, Ms. Durante served on the Hawaii State Bar Association's Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being and the Japanese American Citizens League.

Testimony submitted in support of Ms. Durante notes her sound judgment, familiarity with evidentiary standards, patience, composure, and respect for all parties due to her extensive courtroom experience. Testimony also commends Ms. Durante's deep compassion for the people she serves, integrity, and fairness.

Your Committee finds that, based on the testimony submitted on her behalf, responses to questions asked by the members of your Committee, and your Committee's review of information about her and her qualifications, Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante has the knowledge, dedication, and other competencies to be a District Court Judge of the First Circuit, and possesses the legal expertise and integrity to fully and faithfully discharge the duties associated with that judicial office.

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

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



KARL RHOADS, Chair



