



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

Testimony of
Josh Green, M.D.
Governor, State of Hawai'i

Before the
Senate Committee on Judiciary

Friday, February 20, 2026
10:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 016 and Videoconference

In consideration of
Governor's Message No. 684

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary:

I respectfully ask for your favorable consideration of Governor's Message No. 684, the appointment of Stephanie Char to be a Circuit Court Judge of the Circuit Court of the Fifth Circuit (Island of Kaua'i) for a term to expire in 10 years.

Judge Char currently serves as a district family court judge for the Fifth Circuit, which she was appointed to in 2020. In this capacity, Judge Char has presided over a wide range of civil, criminal and family court matters. Prior to her confirmation to the bench, from 2003 to 2020, Judge Char served as a deputy public defender on O'ahu and Kaua'i and later served as the supervising deputy public defender for the Kaua'i Office.

I am confident that Judge Char's work and experience has demonstrated that she has earned this appointment and I am pleased to offer my full support of her nomination.

Mahalo for your consideration.



Testimony of
Derek S.K. Kawakami
Mayor, County of Kaua'i

Before the
Senate Committee on Judiciary
February 20, 2026 at 10:00 AM
Conference Room 016 & Videoconference

In consideration of
GM 684 Stephanie R.S. Char
Gubernatorial Nominee for
Circuit Court Judge of the Circuit Court of the Fifth Circuit

Honorable Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT** of Judge Stephanie R.S. Char's appointment as Circuit Court Judge of the Circuit Court of the Fifth Circuit. Having observed Judge Char's distinguished career and knowing her character over many years, I am fully confident she brings precisely the qualities the people of Kaua'i deserve in a circuit court judge.

Judge Char's credentials speak for themselves. After earning her bachelor's degrees in philosophy and communication, a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Denver, and her Juris Doctor from the University of San Diego School of Law she was admitted to the Hawai'i Bar in 2003 and has dedicated every year since to public service. For seventeen years she served as a deputy public defender — first on O'ahu, then on Kaua'i — before being named supervising deputy public defender for the Kaua'i office in 2017. That arc of service, from line attorney to leader of the office, reflects sustained excellence, sound judgment, and the trust of those who worked alongside her.

Since 2020, Judge Char has presided competently and with distinction over a wide range of civil, criminal, and family court matters with the District/Family Court bench of the Fifth Circuit. She was recently assigned to carry the circuit court caseload of the retiring Honorable Kathleen N.A. Watanabe — simultaneously with her own District/Family Court responsibilities. That she absorbed both dockets without diminishment to either speaks volumes about her capacity and her commitment.

As a Kaua'i native, Judge Char's roots in this community are not incidental to her fitness for this appointment; they are central to it. She has spent her entire adult professional life in service to the people of this island. Beyond the courtroom, she has served on the Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Board of Directors, the Kaua'i Criminal Defense Bar, and the Kaua'i Economic Opportunity Advisory Board for Mediation Program, and has coached youth soccer. She

understands the texture of life on Kaua'i in ways that cannot be imported from the outside, and that understanding will make her a better and more effective circuit court judge.

I respectfully and enthusiastically urge you to **Advise and Consent** to Judge Stephanie R.S. Char's nomination and forward to the full Senate for their consideration. The people of Kaua'i will be well served.

Mahalo for the opportunity to present this testimony.

GM-684

Submitted on: 2/19/2026 8:05:40 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/20/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mehana Vaughan	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai kākou,

I am writing in support of Stephanie Char’s nomination as Circuit Court Judge of the Circuit Court of the Fifth Circuit (Island of Kaua‘i). My name is Mehana Blaich Vaughan, and I am a life long resident of Kīlauea, Kaua‘i. I am a faculty member of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, testifying as a private individual, and am familiar with Judge Char’s work in family court through my volunteer work with ‘ohana land issues on Kaua‘i.

Judge Char is a professional of the highest integrity, skilled at balancing many roles, and well respected on our island. Raised on the East Side, she is a graduate of Kapa‘a High School, University of Denver, and University of San Diego. She has served as public defender and even supervised our County public defenders office, along with serving the Kaua‘i district court as a family court judge since 2025. In this role, Judge Char handled a wide array of civil and criminal cases typical for our small island, requiring her to build and apply knowledge of many areas of the law. She is known on Kaua‘i, not only for her judicial expertise, but for her thoroughness, fairness, and high standard of integrity.

Judge Char is also exemplary as a colleague, leader, and in her care for Kaua‘i and our people. This judgeship is a vital role for our island, and there could be no better individual to fulfill this kuleana and oversee just rule of law on our island for the next decade than Judge Stephanie Char. Mahalo a nui loa for your time and consideration,

Mehana Vaughan

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

Stephanie R.S. Char
Circuit Court Judge of the Fifth Circuit (GM684)

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

FROM: Mark K. Murakami
President, Hawaii State Bar Association

Hearing: Friday, February 20, 2026, 10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 016 and Videoconference
State Capitol

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Hawaii State Bar Association (HSBA) Board of Directors' comments on GM684, Nomination of Stephanie R.S. Char for the Circuit Court of the Fifth Circuit.

After a rigorous process, described below, the HSBA Board of Directors concluded that Ms. Char is **QUALIFIED**. Judge Char is currently a District Family Court Judge for the Fifth Circuit (Kauai). Prior to sitting on the bench, Judge Char was a career public defender with significant experience, both in the First Circuit and Fifth Circuit. She has been admitted to the Hawaii Bar since June 2003. She has also been active in her community, sitting on several boards. In her experience as a District Court Family Judge, she has participated in several trainings and conferences pertinent to the area of family law, child abuse and neglect, forensic interviewing, settlements, and legislative training. She currently sits two days, temporarily assigned, to the Civil Calendar.

The HSBA Board of Directors followed its multi-step process to arrive at its conclusion, which included:

- The nominee was notified of the HSBA appointment review process, which includes a questionnaire requesting educational credentials, legal and other professional work experiences, and personal references; a resume; a copy of the Judicial Selection Commission (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.
- The HSBA membership received an electronic notification of the appointment and a request for comments on the nominee.
- A neutral fact-finding body comprised of three HSBA Board members was called upon to review documentation submitted by the nominee, contact references submitted by the nominee review comments received from the HSBA membership, conduct follow-up for clarification, if necessary, and prepare a report for the HSBA Board.

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- Ms. Char submitted documentation, which 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. Char in all categories of the HSBA criteria, which include Integrity, Diligence, Legal knowledge and ability, Professional experience, Temperament, Financial responsibility, Public service, and Ability to fulfill the responsibilities and duties of the position.
- The Executive Director and I met with Ms. Char on February 19, 2026, to discuss the subcommittee's findings.
- On February 19, 2026, the HSBA Board of Directors interviewed Ms. Char in executive session.
- The HSBA Board deliberated and voted that Ms. Char was qualified.

Thank you for your time and allowing the HSBA to share our process and determination of qualification.