



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

Tuesday, April 21, 2026
10:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 225 and Videoconference

In consideration of
Governor's Message No. 797

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. 797, the appointment of Michael Soong 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 Soong has served as a District Court judge for the island of Kaua'i since 2016, when he was appointed. Recently, Judge Soong has also been temporarily assigned to the Circuit Court and serving as the Chief Judge of the Fifth Circuit. Prior to his confirmation to the bench, Judge Soong served as the Prosecuting attorney for the County of Kaua'i from 1996-2004 and was in private practice from 2004-2016.

I am confident that Judge Soong brings deep experience, integrity and a strong sense of service to the bench and I am pleased to offer my full support of his nomination.

Mahalo for your consideration.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
Tuesday, April 21, 2026 at 10:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

By

Mark E. Recktenwald
Chief Justice, Hawai'i Supreme Court (ret.)

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

GOVERNOR'S MESSAGE NO. 797, Submitting for consideration and confirmation as Circuit Court Judge of the Circuit Court of the Fifth Circuit (Island of Kaua'i), Gubernatorial Appointee, MICHAEL K. SOONG, for a term to expire in 10 years.

Chair Rhoads, Vice-Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Committee, I submit this testimony in strong support of the nomination of Michael Soong as Circuit Judge of the Fifth Circuit.

I had the honor of appointing Judge Soong as a district court judge in 2017. Given his extensive experience as an attorney in private practice, as a deputy prosecuting attorney and then as the elected Prosecuting Attorney on Kaua'i, as a deputy public defender and a deputy corporation counsel, I was confident he had the background and leadership skills to excel. He performed admirably in that role, showing compassion, a strong work ethic, a keen understanding of the applicable law, and a common-sense ability to relate to people and reach a just and fair outcome in each case. I named him Deputy Chief Judge for the District Court later that year, which gave him added administrative and leadership responsibilities, at which he excelled.

He took on many challenging committee assignments in addition to his day-to-day duties in the courtroom, including the Committee on Judicial Education, the Standing Committee on Innovation, Technology and Self-Represented Litigants, the Commission on Professionalism, and the Access to Justice Commission. His work on these committees contributed materially to the judiciary's response to some of the most challenging issues facing us as an organization. He always stepped up even when I added more and more of these responsibilities to his portfolio.

When Judges Watanabe and Valenciano retired in the latter half of 2025, we were without a full-time permanent circuit court judge on Kaua'i. I appointed Judge Soong on a temporary basis to the circuit court bench and designated him as the Chief Judge of the Circuit. At a time when we needed strong leadership on Kaua'i, he came through and brought the team together.

He also has a passion for our treatment courts, including Drug Court and Veterans Treatment Court. These programs offer hope to individuals who are struggling to follow the law. They utilize intensive supervision, counseling and peer mentoring to help justice-involved individuals with substance or mental health issues get back on track to become productive, law-abiding citizens.

I am excited that Judge Soong has decided to seek the opportunity to serve his community on a permanent basis as a Circuit Court judge. I have no doubt that, if he is confirmed, he will serve the people of Kaua'i with honor and distinction.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

GM-797

Submitted on: 4/16/2026 8:12:34 AM

Testimony for JDC on 4/21/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Blaine J. Kobayashi	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Rhoads and Members of the Judiciary Committee, I am writing to express my strong support for the appointment of Michael K. Soong to the position of Circuit Court Judge of the Fifth Circuit.

I have known Michael professionally and socially for over 30 years - from the time we worked alongside each other as deputy prosecuting attorneys to deputy chief judges for our respective circuits. Throughout this entire time, I have consistently been impressed by his integrity, sound judgment, and commitment to fairness. He always approached every situation with thoughtfulness and a deep respect for the law, as well as for the individuals affected by it.

Michael demonstrates the qualities which are essential for judicial service: impartiality, diligence, and a clear ability to listen carefully before making well-reasoned decisions. He also has strong ties to the Kaua'i community which goes back for generations.

I am confident that Michael K. Soong will serve with distinction and contribute positively to the court and the community. I respectfully offer my full support for his appointment.

Mahalo for taking the time to consider my testimony.

Sincerely,

Blaine J. Kobayashi

TRUDY K.T. SENDA
2791 Pikake Street
Lihue, Hawaii 96766
Tel. (808) 652-2450

TO: Honorable Karl Rhoads
Chair, Senate Committee on Judiciary

RE: GM 797 Nomination of Michael K. Soong for Circuit Court
Judge of the Fifth Circuit

I write in very strong and enthusiastic support of Michael K. Soong for the position of Judge of the Circuit Court of the Fifth Circuit. I have known Judge Soong for more than 30 years. I served as a district court judge of the Fifth Circuit for 15 1/2 years. When I decided to retire in December 2016, I encouraged Michael to apply for the vacancy. I was delighted when he was appointed to the bench and have never been disappointed with his performance. Judge Soong is diligent, fair, respectful to attorneys and litigants, patient, calm, erudite, and he has worked well in an administrative capacity as the circuit's deputy chief judge. Of late, he has been sitting on the circuit court bench, handling all calendars, and serving as acting Chief Judge. In my opinion, he was finally convinced to apply for this vacancy because through his actual experience over the past half year, he knows that he is fully qualified to serve as a circuit court judge. He has never been one to seek judicial office (or higher judicial office) for prestige or perceived power. He will not seek a position unless and until he has proven to himself that he can do the job admirably and to the betterment of the public.

I humbly ask for passage of GM797. Kauai will be well served by the confirmation of Michael K. Soong as a circuit judge of the Fifth Circuit. Thank you for your consideration.

Kathleen N. A. Watanabe
6130 Lokomaikai Place
Kapaa, Hi. 96746

April 19, 2026

Senator Karl Rhoads
Chair, Committee on Judiciary
415 S. Beretania St.
Honolulu, Hi. 96813

Re: GM 797 - Nomination of Michael K. Soong for Circuit Court Judge of the 5th Circuit

Honorable Chair Rhoads and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

Please accept this letter in strong support of Michael K. Soong to the Circuit Court bench on Kauai. I submit this testimony as a former colleague and as a recently retired judge who has presided over the Circuit Court on Kauai for the past 20 years.

Seven months ago, Kauai had an unprecedented situation with the retirement of both circuit court judges. Having completed two 10-year terms and facing an upcoming mandatory retirement age requirement, I volunteered for two months assisting the District and Family court judges with their temporary handling of circuit court cases. In that capacity, I had the pleasure of working closely with District Court Judge Michael Soong in his capacity as Acting Circuit Court Judge.

In the over 30 years that I have known Judge Soong as an attorney and judge, what has remained constant is his compassion, fairness, dedication to the law and his commitment to public service. This, coupled with his unquestionable ability and experience as a judge, including the circuit court bench during tumultuous times, clearly make him ideal for the job as Kauai's newest Circuit Court Judge.

I humbly request your favorable consideration in confirming Governor Green's nomination of Michael K. Soong as a Circuit Court Judge of the 5th Circuit,

Respectfully Submitted,

/s/ Kathleen N. A. Watanabe
Retired Judge, 5th Circuit Court

Riley W. Smith, P.E.

Hawaii Island Member - BLNR

LATE

April 20, 2026

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
Committee on Judiciary
State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Via email: senrhoads@capitol.hawaii.gov

**Re: Strong Support of Michael K. Soong – GM797
Circuit Court Judge, Fifth Circuit**

I have known Mr. Soong, for almost 50 years. We attended the Kamehameha Schools around the same time, our families were very close. Since that time, I have interacted with Mr. Soong on more of a social basis, working on various community projects together.

During our interactions, Mike has always impressed me as someone who is very thoughtful, does not rush into decisions, without being fully prepared, having done his homework and research. He is hard working, always the last one to leave an assignment, making sure that everything has been properly addressed. He has been a mentor to young attorneys that I know on Kauai. Always guiding them, being a good role model.

His experience with the County's Office of the Corporation Counsel, as a Public Defender, Prosecuting Attorney, an attorney in private practice and most recently as both a District Court Judge and Circuit Court Judge, make him very well suited for this current position.

For these reasons I wholeheartedly support Michael K. Soong to be approved by this Committee!

Mahalo for your consideration. Very truly yours,



Riley W. Smith, P.E.



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

Michael K. Soong
Circuit Court Judge of the Fifth Circuit (GM797)

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: Tuesday, April 21, 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 GM797, Nomination of Michael K. Soong for the Circuit Court of the Fifth Circuit.

After a rigorous process, described below, the HSBA Board of Directors concluded that Judge Soong is **QUALIFIED**. Judge Soong has been a sitting district court judge for the Fifth Circuit since 2017. Prior to sitting on the bench, he practiced a variety of types of law, including criminal, personal injury, general civil litigation, real estate and land use, and also worked as both a prosecutor and public defender. He sits on multiple commissions and committees, including the Hawaii Access to Justice Commission, the Judiciary Committee on Judicial Education, and the Kauai Multi-Agency Committee on Chapter 704 Issues. Additionally, he sits on multiple volunteer boards and is active in his community.

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.

OFFICERS

Mark K. Murakami, President
Kristin E. Izumi-Nitao, President-Elect
Erin M. Kobayashi, Vice President
Lanson K. Kupau, Secretary
Jessica R. Domingo, Treasurer

DIRECTORS

Jocelyn W.C. Chong
Steven J.T. Chow
Michelle K. Correia
Geraldine N. Hasegawa (East Hawaii)
Chastity T. Imamura
Amanda M. Jones
Ronette M. Kawakami
Andrew M. Kennedy (West Hawaii)
Jacob K. Lowenthal (Maui)
Simeona L.L.A. Mariano
Emiko Meyers (Kauai)
Robert S. Miyashita
Arsima A. Muller
Paul W. Naso
Zale T. Okazaki

YLD PRESIDENT

Lauren K. Watanabe

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

Mark M. Murakami

HSBA/ABA DELEGATE

Leslie A. Hayashi

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Catherine A. Betts

- Judge Soong 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 Judge Soong 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 Judge Soong on April 16, 2026, to discuss the subcommittee's findings.
- On April 17, 2026, the HSBA Board of Directors interviewed Judge Soong in executive session.
- The HSBA Board deliberated and voted that Judge Soong was qualified.

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