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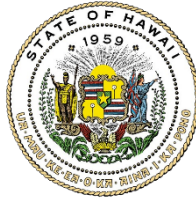
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March 29, 2026

**JC 23: CONFIRMATION OF KIRSHA KAULUKANE MILIANANI
DURANTE TO THE DISTRICT COURT OF THE FIRST CIRCUIT**

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

The Office of the Public Defender (OPD) strongly supports the confirmation of Judicial Nominee Kirsha K. M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit.

Ms. Durante served as a deputy public defender in the O'ahu Branch for sixteen years. During her time at the OPD, Ms. Durante progressed to the level of Deputy Public Defender IV, circuit court attorneys who handle the most serious felony cases, including murders and Class A felonies. Ms. Durante was widely respected in the office, not only for her legal knowledge, acumen and trial skills but also for her ability to manage difficult clients, zealously advocate for her clients' rights with judges and opposing counsel and be fair and measured. In addition to appearing before the district, family and circuit courts in trial matters, Ms. Durante also appeared before the Intermediate Court of Appeals and Hawai'i Supreme Court in appellate cases. After leaving the OPD, Ms. Durante expanded the breadth of her legal experience to the civil area at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation.

Ms. Durante has the academic and professional credentials for the nominated position and, just as importantly, she is widely respected in both the criminal and civil legal fields and possesses the calm demeanor and fair measured temperament which is necessary to uphold the integrity of the Judiciary. Finally, as a Native Hawaiian who is very in touch with her culture and members of the Native Hawaiian community, Ms. Durante will provide important representation for the Native Hawaiian community in the Judiciary.

The OPD strongly supports the confirmation of Judicial Nominee Kirsha K. M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit.



NATIVE HAWAIIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

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

P.O. Box 2339, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96804
contact@hawaiianbar.org

March 27, 2026

To: Senate Chair Karl Rhoads and Members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Hawai'i State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

RE: Hearing on JC23 Confirmation of Kirsha K.M. Durante to the District Court of the First
Circuit, Island of O'ahu; March 31, 2026, 9:30 a.m.

Aloha e Chair Rhoads and Committee Members,

The Native Hawaiian Bar Association (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 **strongly support** the confirmation of Kirsha K.M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit.

Ms. Durante is an experienced trial attorney who has dedicated her legal career to the public interest, representing indigent and underserved individuals. As a Deputy Public Defender from 2005 to 2021, she represented clients who often faced significant economic hardship, housing instability, mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and intergenerational trauma. This experience highlights Ms. Durante's compassion and demonstrated ability to work with those who come from backgrounds that may be diverse from her own.

Her expertise as a trial attorney makes her well suited for judicial appointment and distinguishes her from other judicial nominees. As a Deputy Public Defender, Ms. Durante appeared daily in District or Circuit Court, handling many different legal proceedings including arraignments, motions, bench trials, jury trials, and sentencing hearings. Ms. Durante has also argued before the Hawai'i Supreme Court and the Intermediate Court of Appeals, and clerked for the Honorable Marcia J. Waldorf at the Circuit Court of the First Circuit.

In addition to courtroom advocacy, Ms. Durante negotiated resolutions that balanced legal accountability with the practical realities facing her clients. Her experience required consistent communication with individuals unfamiliar with, and often untrusting of, the legal system. Through that work, she developed the ability to explain complex legal processes in clear terms to ensure that clients understood their rights and obligations.

In Ms. Durante's current role as the Litigation Director for the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, she continues her work on behalf of underserved communities. She oversees litigation involving The Senate Committee on Judiciary

March 27, 2026

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Native Hawaiian rights and community-based interests, further reinforcing her understanding of the cultural, economic, and systemic factors that frequently bring individuals before the courts.

District Court judges preside over a high-volume of matters that directly affect the daily lives of Hawai'i's residents, including criminal cases, traffic offenses, landlord-tenant disputes, temporary restraining orders, and other proceedings. Many litigants appear without counsel and come from economically vulnerable backgrounds. Ms. Durante's career representing indigent defendants and working-class families gives her a practical understanding of the barriers many litigants face including transportation challenges, employment instability, childcare responsibilities, language access issues, and a lack of legal resources. Her experience equips her to maintain firm courtroom management while ensuring that proceedings remain accessible, fair, respectful, and comprehensible to the public.

Her extensive courtroom background has helped to develop Ms. Durante's sound judgment, familiarity with evidentiary standards, and an ability to assess credibility. Equally important, her many years of service to vulnerable populations reflects her patience, composure, and respect for all parties, which are qualities essential for daily District Court operations.

Ms. Durante has also been actively engaged in professional development and legal education forums. After earning her Juris Doctor from the William S. Richardson School of Law, she has remained involved in bar and community leadership opportunities, including serving as the Treasurer of the Native Hawaiian Bar Association. Throughout her career, she has demonstrated integrity, preparation, and adherence to the rule of law.

The NHBA Board supports Ms. Durante's confirmation with confidence. Her sustained commitment to indigent individuals and families, combined with her extensive trial and appellate experience, make her an optimal choice for a District Court judgeship. She would bring to the job legal competence and deep understanding of the communities that she will serve. We respectfully urge you to confirm Ms. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of the NHBA Board of Directors, in strong support of Ms. Durante.

Me ka 'oia'i'o,



Ha'aheo M. Kaho'ohalahala
President, Native Hawaiian Bar Association



King Lunalilo Trust

March 29, 2026

Senate Committee on Judiciary
The Honorable Senator Rhoads, Chair
And Members of the Committee

DATE/TIME: Monday, March 31, 2026, 9:30 AM
PLACE: Conference Room 016 and Videoconference
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Re: JC 23 – Nomination of Kirsha Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit

Aloha e Honorable Senator Rhoads and Members of the Committee:

I am writing in support of Kirsha Durante's judicial nomination to serve on the District Court of the First Circuit. Ms. Durante has served as Litigation Director of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (NHLC) since 2023. As a member of the NHLC Board of Directors, I have watched her bring her deep knowledge of the law to bear on a variety of legal cases. NHLC could not have achieved so many successes without Ms. Durante's knowledge of the law and skill in litigation. Few attorneys practicing in Hawai'i today have had as great a positive impact on the law as Ms. Durante. In my personal interactions with her, I have come to appreciate her professionalism and her commitment to the law. I believe she will be a truly skilled and fair judge on the District Court of the First Circuit.

I wholeheartedly support her appointment.

Sincerely,

J. Keolamaikalani Dean
Chief Executive Officer



Native Hawaiian LEGAL CORPORATION

1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1205 • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
Phone (808) 521-2302 • www.nativehawaiianlegalcorp.org



March 29, 2026

The Hawai'i Senate Committee on the Judiciary
The Hawai'i State Legislature
Submitted Online

Re: Testimony in Support of the Confirmation of Kirsha K.M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit (JC 23)

Aloha e Chair Rhoads and members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary:

I serve as Executive Director of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, known as NHLC, a nonprofit public interest law firm dedicated to the protection of Native Hawaiian legal rights. On behalf of myself and NHLC, I submit this testimony in strong support of the confirmation of Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit.

I want to be clear about the nature of my perspective. I am not here as a colleague offering kind words about a friend. I am here on behalf of NHLC and as someone who has worked alongside Kirsha, and served as her organizational leader, in the trenches of a busy litigation practice for over four years. I have watched her think, decide, advocate, lead, and be tested. What I have seen has left me with no doubt that Ms. Durante is prepared and highly capable to hold this role in our Hawai'i judiciary.

Experience Breadth and Depth

Kirsha has over twenty years of courtroom experience. She spent sixteen of those years as a Hawai'i public defender, trying more than fifty jury trials and over one hundred bench trials. She has appeared before most of the sitting judges in this state. She has argued before the Hawai'i Supreme Court and the Intermediate Court of Appeals. She began her career clerking for the Honorable Marcia J. Waldorf. From these experiences Kirsha has learned what judges need from lawyers in front of them, and she understands the weight of what judges decide and the impact on parties' lives.

Since joining NHLC in 2021, she has successfully transitioned into an effective advocate in complex civil litigation, representing Native Hawaiian clients in matters involving land, water, burials, and cultural rights. Her breadth of experience, across criminal and civil, trial and appellate, defense and impact litigation, is rare and will serve her well in adapting quickly to the demands of the bench.

Judicial Temperament

Over four years of close collaboration, I have observed something in Kirsha that I believe is the true measure of judicial fitness: she can hold the full weight of a legal situation, which can often be the hardest thing happening in parties' lives at that moment, and deliver legal assessments with clarity and integrity.

Kirsha has deep compassion for the people she serves. She is always searching for the fundamental injustice in a situation, and she is creative in finding legal pathways to remedy it. That instinct has earned her a reputation for excellence and integrity that extends well beyond her clients to the broader legal community.

That said, she also knows when an outcome cannot, or should not, be reached through legal and judicial means, and she has the courage and character to say so. For that reason, I believe Kirsha has likely delivered more hard truths, more disappointing assessments, and more honest reckonings to her clients over the course of her career than most of the judges they went on to engage with. For that reason, I know she will operate with integrity and fairness, even when it's hard and when sympathies may lie with a party who, under a fair application of the law, will not prevail.

Access to Justice and Trust in the Rule of Law

Hawai'i's District Courts are the frontline of our justice system. They are where most people encounter the judiciary for the first time. Access to justice and the legitimacy of that encounter depend not only on the law being applied correctly, but on the person applying it being someone who understands and respects the community before them.

Ms. Durante is a Native Hawaiian woman, a graduate of Kamehameha Schools and William S. Richardson School of Law, a longtime hula practitioner who underwent the rights of 'ūniki to be recognized as an 'ōlapa in Hālau i ka Wēkiu. Her cultural practice is not incidental — it is integral to who she is as a leader and a decision-maker. The discipline, the protocol, the sense of kuleana and pono that she carries into every room she enters: these are not soft qualities. They are the architecture of sound judicial character.

For Native Hawaiians and many others in this community who have too often encountered a justice system that did not see them or saw them under a harsh and dispassionate light, a judge like Ms. Durante matters. A judge who carries cultural knowledge and grounding specific to this place. A judge who has spent her career fighting for the rights of local people. A judge who has now committed herself to impartial service of the law. Ms. Durante reflects the people our courts serve, and that will matter to the legitimacy and trust in our courts in ways that extend far beyond any individual case.

Too many people navigate our courts alone, without resources, without voice, and without confidence that they will be treated fairly. Confirming judges of Kirsha Durante's caliber, who

Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation
Testimony in Support of the Confirmation of Kirsha K.M. Durante
March 29, 2026
Page 3 of 3

combine legal excellence, ethical grounding, genuine compassion, and deep roots in this community, is among the most direct investments our government can make in restoring and sustaining that confidence.

NHLC and I offer our wholehearted support for Ms. Durante's confirmation. We are grateful for the Committee's time and consideration.

Me ka ha'aha'a,



Makalika Naholowaa
Executive Director



March 29, 2026

Hawaii State Legislature
Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: Support for Judiciary Comm. No. 23, Appointment of Kirsha Kaulukane Mililani Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit

Aloha Chair Rhoads and Committee Members,

I am writing to offer my strong support for the appointment of Kirsha Kaulukane Mililani Durante to the bench. It is my honor to recommend her based on my professional interactions with her, as well as my observations of her character, leadership, and unwavering commitment to justice.

As a board member of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, I have had the opportunity to engage with Ms. Durante in her role as Litigation Director. From this vantage point, I have observed her consistently demonstrate the highest standards of integrity, fairness, and clear discernment. Her ability to thoughtfully navigate complex legal issues while remaining grounded in principle speaks to her readiness to serve on the bench.

In my role as Co-Executive Director of 'E Kolu Mea Nui, I have had multiple opportunities to work with Ms. Durante, both as a fellow panel member and when seeking legal guidance. These experiences have further affirmed her professionalism, diligence, and reliability. In every instance, she brings not only deep legal expertise but also a genuine care for the people and communities impacted by her work.

While Ms. Durante's professional background reflects a wide range of legal experience, it is her character, judgment, and commitment to justice that truly distinguish her as an exceptional candidate. Equally important is her identity and connection to the Native Hawaiian community. Representation on the bench matters, and her lived experience, cultural grounding, and deep understanding of community needs will strengthen public trust and help ensure that the judiciary reflects the people it serves. I offer my unequivocal support for Kirsha Kaulukane Mililani Durante's appointment and am confident she will serve with honor, wisdom, and compassion.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

Dr. Jamee Mahealani Miller

Co-Executive Director

'E Kolu Mea Nui

jamee@ekolumeanui.org

(808)430-3380



March 31, 2026

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, Judicial Nominee, KIRSHA KAULUKANE MILIANANI DURANTE, for a term to expire in 6 years.

Hearing: Tuesday, March 31, 2026, 9:30 a.m.

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and members of the Committee on Judiciary:

Hawaii Women Lawyers (“**HWL**”) respectfully submits testimony in **support** of the nomination of Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante to **the District of the First Circuit (Oahu)** as District Court Judge for a term of 6 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.

Increasing opportunities for qualified women in the Judiciary is extremely important. As highlighted by the World Justice Project, the rule of law depends on having justice delivered by “competent, ethical, and independent representatives and neutrals who reflect the makeup of the communities they serve.” HWL believes that continuing to include qualified women in the Judiciary is vitally important and appreciates the significant strides made in the past several years to improve the diversity of our bench.

Noting that the HSBA has found Ms. Durante to be qualified for the position of District Court Judge and for the reasons above, HWL supports her appointment.

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

LATE

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 6:36:04 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mark Kawika Patterson	Testifying for Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Kirsha K.M. Durante — Nominee for District Court Judge, First Circuit

March 2026

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senate Committee on Judiciary
Hawai‘i State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96813

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair, and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

I write in my capacity as **President of the Board of Directors of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (NHLC)** to express my **strong and unequivocal support** for the confirmation of **Ms. Kirsha K.M. Durante** as a District Court Judge of the First Circuit.

As the governing body responsible for oversight of NHLC — the oldest and only statewide public-interest law firm dedicated exclusively to the rights, lands, and lifeways of Native Hawaiians — the Board has a unique vantage point from which to evaluate legal leadership, professional integrity, and commitment to justice. In her role as **Litigation Director**, Ms. Durante has demonstrated all the qualities we seek in those entrusted with the protection of our communities and the administration of justice in Hawai‘i.

Ms. Durante oversees NHLC’s entire litigation portfolio, supervising attorneys across multiple practice areas including land and water rights, cultural practice, ‘ohana services, and civil rights. Her leadership has strengthened the organization’s legal strategy, improved case management systems, and elevated the quality and consistency of representation provided to Native Hawaiian families statewide. She is a steady, thoughtful, and principled leader whose judgment the Board relies upon when evaluating complex and sensitive matters.

Before joining NHLC, Ms. Durante served for sixteen years as a **Deputy Public Defender**, where she tried more than fifty jury trials and over one hundred bench trials, argued before the Hawai‘i Supreme Court and Intermediate Court of Appeals, and mentored younger attorneys. Her experience spans every dimension of the criminal legal system — from pre-trial litigation to

appellate advocacy — giving her a deep understanding of the realities faced by defendants, victims, families, and the courts.

What distinguishes Ms. Durante is not only her legal skill, but her **cultural grounding and community commitment**. As a haumana of Hālau I Ka Wēkiu who has completed ‘ūniki rites as an ‘ōlapa and is currently pursuing her second ‘ūniki, she brings a depth of cultural discipline, humility, and kuleana that informs her approach to conflict, justice, and leadership. She embodies the values of aloha, pono, and mālama — values that strengthen judicial temperament and enhance public trust.

Her service extends well beyond her professional roles. She is a co-founder of the **Kalana Ola Compassionate Release Coalition**, a gubernatorial appointee to the **Defender Council**, Treasurer of the **Native Hawaiian Bar Association**, and an active contributor to judicial administration committees, legal education programs, and community forums. She is widely respected across the legal community for her clarity, fairness, and unwavering commitment to justice.

From the Board’s perspective, Ms. Durante has consistently demonstrated:

- **Judicial temperament** — calm, balanced, and thoughtful
- **Integrity and professionalism** — trusted by colleagues, clients, and community
- **Cultural competence** — essential for serving Hawai‘i’s diverse population
- **Legal excellence** — proven across trial, appellate, and civil rights litigation
- **Leadership and mentorship** — strengthening the next generation of attorneys

The First Circuit District Court — and the people of Hawai‘i — will be well served by a judge who brings Ms. Durante’s breadth of experience, cultural grounding, and commitment to fairness. Her confirmation would strengthen the judiciary’s capacity to administer justice with compassion, rigor, and cultural understanding.

For these reasons, on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, I offer my **strongest recommendation** for her confirmation.

Mahalo for your consideration and for your continued service to the people of Hawai‘i.

Respectfully,
Mark Kawika Patterson
President, Board of Directors
Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 6:09:52 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marcia J Waldorf	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is with the utmost pleasure and confidence that I write in support of Kirsha Durante for Judge of the District Court of the First Circuit. Kirsha was a law clerk for me as First Circuit Court judge. It was a time when my calendar was diverse, and some of it new to Hawai'i. We were engaged in developing Mental Health Court. We also had the already ongoing drug court, and (criminal) Motions calendar. She was a great researcher, academic. Her legal analyses for motions was always thorough and correct. The human element, in addition to the complex legal issues, of mental health court was completely in her wheelhouse, even as new to criminal justice as she then was.

Her extensive continued service to Hawai'i, which is already in your record, speaks to both her work ethic and her commitment to the people of Hawai'i.

Kirsha Durante will be a tremendous asset to the Judiciary. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Marcia J. Waldorf, Circuit Judge, (ret.)

March 29, 2026

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: Testimony in Support of JC23 - Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante, for a term to expire in 6 years.

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Committee Members,

I write in support of my close friend and colleague Kirsha K.M. Durante's nomination to serve as Judge in the District Court of the First Circuit. I have known Kirsha since we met in law school in 2001. I worked with her at the state public defender's office for 8 years and we socialize on a regular basis. Knowing Kirsha personally and professionally, and having served as a district court judge myself, I am confident Kirsha will fulfill the duties of this judicial position with distinction.

Kirsha is an exceptional trial attorney. She brings to the bench a wealth of diverse experience litigating criminal, civil, and family matters. In addition to her legal skills, she possesses the following attributes that will make her a valuable addition to the district court bench.

Kirsha is the epitome of commitment -- to justice, to her legal work, to her culture, and to her friends and family. Whether preparing for trial, organizing bench-bar conferences, volunteering at her son's school, or practicing for Merrie Monarch, she gives her all. She works late nights regularly, while raising her young son and caring for her parents. As a district court judge Kirsha will over-prepare for court and research unfamiliar areas of the law, without relying on the attorneys. As in every aspect of her life, as a judge she will set the highest standards for herself and meet them.

Kirsha has the fortitude to be a judge. She is accustomed to protecting individual and cultural rights even when faced with great opposition or criticism. She will make independent, fair decisions in accordance with the law and justice. Kirsha will decide the tough cases, and promptly, which is critical for the voluminous district court calendars.

Kirsha emanates aloha. She cares about people and understands Hawai'i's unique history and cultures. Her decades of experience representing clients from all parts of society enable her to communicate clearly and connect with the vulnerable communities who appear in the district courts. Kirsha's emotional intelligence and cultural awareness will be great assets to the district court calendars, from bail hearings to mental health cases to TRO hearings to evictions.

Finally, Kirsha will inspire hope in marginalized communities, including Native Hawaiian men who end up in the criminal justice system. As a Kanaka 'Ōiwi rooted in Hawaiian

ways of knowing, familiar with cultural and generational trauma, and who has represented these men as a public defender and at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, Kirsha is especially suited to preside over their sentencing and probation hearings. She will find ways to motivate them toward rehabilitation, to take pride in who they are and whom/where they come from, and to encourage self and 'ohana healing. This will uplift our O'ahu communities, indeed all of Hawai'i.

I wholeheartedly urge the Committee to recommend confirmation. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of connected loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Summer Kupau-Odo

March 29, 2026

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: Testimony in Support of JC23 - Judicial Appointment of Kirsha K.M. Durante - District Court of the First Circuit

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

Mahalo for the opportunity to express my wholehearted **SUPPORT** of the appointment of Kirsha K.M. Durante as District Court Judge of the First Circuit. My name is Henderson Huihui. I am a Staff Attorney at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (“NHLC”). I have practiced law for five years, but I have had the privilege of working under Ms. Durante’s direction for four of those years. Over these past four years, as a Senior Attorney and later Litigation Director, Ms. Durante has demonstrated the highest levels of legal reasoning, diligence, dedication, and moral integrity. Ms. Durante’s career accomplishments speak for themselves. Based on her resume and distinguished service to the legal community, Ms. Durante is the right choice. To support her appointment as District Court Judge, I wish to share my professional experiences with Ms. Durante and speak to her character and legal ability.

When Ms. Durante first came to NHLC, although she had extensive experience and knowledge in criminal law and criminal procedure, she was not as familiar with Native Hawaiian Rights law or civil procedure. Ms. Durante quickly became intimately familiar with the many areas of legal practice at NHLC, including the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act; protection of natural resources, ‘iwi kupuna, and other sites of cultural significance; land use; quiet title and partition actions; and intellectual property. Ms. Durante later mastered these areas of legal practice, allowing her to provide thoughtful advice and feedback on each of NHLC’s attorneys’ cases. This highlights Ms. Durante’s ability to quickly familiarize herself and understand a wide range of legal issues. While at NHLC, Ms. Durante has shown exceptional legal acumen. Ms. Durante’s ability to dissect legal issues, synthesize complex legal theories, and anticipate practical concerns with the disposition of a legal matter is enviable and what I strive to develop in myself as an attorney. Ms. Durante’s experience in both civil and criminal proceedings makes her well-equipped and well-qualified to serve as a District Court judge.

I have appeared before a handful of district court judges in the First and Third Circuits. I understand how important it is for the public to have a balanced and understanding judge presiding over their cases. I have observed Ms. Durante deal with difficult clients with grace and compassion. When dealing with particularly difficult opposing counsel, Ms. Durante never compromises her civility and professionalism. Ms. Durante has routinely demonstrated her ability to consider the practical implications of legal arguments. I am confident that Ms. Durante will be the kind of judge the people of Hawai‘i expect and need.

If it has not already been made clear, Ms. Durante is someone whom I admire and respect immensely. As Litigation Director at NHLC, Ms. Durante has been kind, caring, and thoughtful.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to learn from Ms. Durante on how to be the best attorney and advocate I can be. Ms. Durante has taught me to strive for excellence in serving our community, and this land we all call home. With Ms. Durante's mentorship, I have learned to be confident in my legal practice and abilities. My time working with Ms. Durante has been invaluable, and I will always credit her with my career success; I am the attorney I am today because of her. I know that, as a District Court judge, Ms. Durante would continue to make great contributions to the bar through her mentorship of law clerks and fledgling attorneys.

I will certainly miss having Ms. Durante as a supervisor and close mentor. However, as an officer of the court, it is my duty to ensure the rule of law is protected and that justice is administered fairly. Ms. Durante's judicial temperament, legal acumen, respect for the rule of law, and commitment to the administration of justice make her an excellent choice for appointment as a District Court judge, and all citizens of Hawai'i will greatly benefit from her appointment. Therefore, it is my honor to wholeheartedly support the appointment of Ms. Kirsha K.M. Durante as a District Court Judge in the First Circuit.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Huihui', written in a cursive style.

Henderson K. Huihui

HAYLEY Y.C. CHENG

First Deputy Public Defender

Office of the Public Defender
1130 N. Nimitz Hwy, Suite A-254
Honolulu, HI 96817
(808) 586-2208

March 30, 2026

JC 23: Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, Judicial Nominee, KIRSHA KAULUKANE MILIANANI DURANTE

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

My name is Hayley Y.C. Cheng, and I submit this testimony in my personal capacity in strong support of the nomination of Kirsha K.M. Durante to serve as a District Court Judge for the State of Hawai'i.

I currently serve as the First Deputy Public Defender for the State of Hawai'i, and through that role, I have spent my career working within our courts and observing, firsthand, the qualities that distinguish a truly effective, fair, and respected judge. I have also had the privilege of knowing Kirsha for over twenty years as a colleague, as a collaborator, and as a close personal friend. It is from this combined perspective that I offer my wholehearted and unequivocal support for her nomination.

During her sixteen years as a Deputy Public Defender, Kirsha handled cases across every level of our court system in the District, Family, Circuit, and Appellate courts. In each of those settings, she demonstrated not only strong legal ability, but also a deep understanding of the human side of the justice system. She approached every case with care, preparation, and a genuine respect for the individuals involved - qualities that are essential for any judge.

What has always stood out to me about Kirsha is her composure and presence, particularly in difficult or high-conflict situations. She has handled complex, emotionally charged, and highly publicized cases, yet she consistently remained measured, respectful, and thoughtful in her advocacy. Even under pressure, she listens carefully, considers all perspectives, and responds with professionalism and clarity. That steady temperament is not something that can be taught, it is something she naturally possesses.

She was also a leader and mentor within the Office of the Public Defender. Other attorneys looked to her for guidance, not just because of her legal knowledge, but because of her judgment, her integrity, and the way she treated people. She brought a sense of purpose to the work, and her commitment to serving others was evident in everything she did.

Since leaving our office, Kirsha has continued her public service as the Litigation Director at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, where she leads complex litigation and works closely with community stakeholders. Her ability to navigate both legal and community-based issues with care and respect reflects a depth of perspective that will serve her well on the bench.

On a more personal level, Kirsha is someone who leads with integrity, humility, and a deep sense of responsibility to her community. She is thoughtful in her decisions, intentional in her actions, and deeply committed to doing what is right even when it is not easy. Those qualities are at the core of what makes a truly great judge.

She also approached this opportunity with great care. Becoming a judge was not something she pursued lightly. She waited until she felt she had the experience, perspective, and readiness to serve in this role. That level of self-awareness and respect for the position speaks volumes about her character.

I want to close by acknowledging that Kirsha is not only a colleague, but also a close personal friend. However, I also want to be very clear: I have a deep respect for the law, for our judicial system, and for the gravity of judicial appointments. Having devoted my career to the practice of law, I understand how important it is that those who serve on the bench are fair, capable, and committed to justice. I would not lend my support to any nominee for this position unless I had full confidence in their qualifications, their commitment to public service, and their ability to serve as a meaningful asset to the bench. Kirsha possesses all of these qualities.

I respectfully urge this Committee to confirm her nomination.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Hayley Y.C. Cheng

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 1:01:22 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tyler Iokepa Gomes	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

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

I am writing in **STRONG SUPPORT** of **KIRSHA K.M. DURANTE** for the vacancy in the District Court of the First Circuit (O‘ahu).

I have known Ms. Durante since 2012, when I began clerking for Judge Dexter D. Del Rosario on the Criminal calendar. Ms. Durante was a standout among attorneys who were revered by Judge Del Rosario. As many know, he was highly critical of practitioners of the criminal defense bar as a former Public Defender himself. It was with the highest levels of praise that he spoke of Ms. Durante in terms of her preparation, knowledge of the law, decorum, and respect.

A year later, I was honored to be hired by the Public Defender’s Office myself, and Ms. Durante immediately presented herself as an attorney whom many of us newer attorneys modeled ourselves after. My first few years at the PD’s office were guided not only by the DPD Durante I witnessed as a law clerk, but also by the effort and time she spent guiding us younger attorneys.

When junior PDs conduct their first jury trial, they are required to ask a senior attorney to be their second chair. It should come as no surprise that Ms. Durante was my first and only choice. To this day, the lessons I learned in that first jury trial with the subtle guidance of Ms. Durante have colored my career well beyond the PD’s office. She became a regular personal mentor, offering guidance and strategy advice on all sorts of cases.

While we both have moved on from the Public Defender’s Office, Ms. Durante is a constant and continued source of inspiration. The reputation she’s built in the civil sector at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation comes as no surprise. We would shortly be reunited, but on opposite sides of issues, during my time at the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, in which Ms. Durante often represented lessees and beneficiaries of the DHHL trust who were at odds with the Department. I count myself fortunate to be the recipient of her respect and decorum while we sat on opposite sides of issues - not because we are colleagues and trusted friends - but because that is the standard to which she holds herself.

I wholeheartedly support Ms. Durante’s appointment to this judicial vacancy and know that her knowledge of the law, her respect for others in the practice of law, and the fairness she has demonstrated in her practice from the outset make her an excellent candidate.

Me ka ha‘aha‘a-

Tyler Iokepa Gomes

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/26/2026 9:54:25 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Noa Dettweiler-Pavia	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Committee Members,

This testimony is in SUPPORT of Kirsha Durante's nomination to the District Court of the First Circuit. I have known Ms. Durante for over 20 years as a friend, mentor, and colleague. She possesses all of the qualities essential to be an outstanding judge and I can think of no one who is presently more deserving. You do a great service to our community by supporting Ms. Durante's nomination.

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/26/2026 10:52:52 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Radji Tolentino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

RE: Strong Support for the Confirmation of KIRSHA DURANTE to the District Court of the First Circuit

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the confirmation of Kirsha Durante as a Judge for the District Court of the First Circuit. Having known Ms. Durante through various professional and personal chapters of her career, I am confident she possesses the intellect, temperament, and heart required for the bench.

My professional relationship with Ms. Durante began during her tenure as a Deputy Public Defender, where I first witnessed her dedication to the principles of justice and the protection of individual rights. More recently, I had the privilege of working alongside her on the Maui Wildfire Recovery Legal Working Group. Her contributions as an attorney with the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation were instrumental to the group's success, which was recently recognized with the HSBA President's Award. In these high-stakes environments, she proved herself to be a consummate professional and a true public servant.

Beyond her legal acumen, I know Ms. Durante personally and have supported her journey as a dancer with the award-winning Hālau i ka Wēkiu. Her deep passion for her Hawaiian culture is not merely a personal interest; it is a foundation that deepens her care for our community and informs her perspective on equity and heritage.

Ms. Durante is exceptionally intelligent, compassionate, and fair. She has the calm and steady temperament necessary to manage a courtroom with dignity. I have no reservations regarding her appointment; she is the ideal candidate for this role.

I strongly urge the Committee to confirm Kirsha Durante for a six-year term. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Aloha,

Radji Tolentino

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 6:50:20 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
JAVIER GARCIA	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee,

I'm writing to personally endorse Kirsha Durante for judicial appointment.

I had the pleasure of personally working with Kirsha for over two years on a pro bono matter in which we obtained a favorable resolution for our clients. Our team relied heavily on Kirsha's intricate knowledge of the court rules and procedures.

From my experience in working with Kirsha, I can personally attest that she is an excellent and seasoned attorney with great judgment and integrity. Notably, Kirsha is an experienced trial attorney which makes her uniquely qualified to be a judge.

In short, I fully support her appointment and would be happy to provide additional information upon request.

Mahalo!

Javier F. Garcia

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 7:17:28 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Aaron Ver	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support the appointment of judicial nominee Kirsha Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit. I had the privilege of working closely with Kirsha as cocounsel on a case where we obtained an injunction against a law unconstitutionally restricting Native Hawaiian birthing practices.

Kirsha was a primary reason we won our case. She captained our large legal team, she earned the trust and respect of our many clients and she mentored our less experienced cocounsel. During the course of the litigation, Kirsha's talents shone brightly as our lead trial counsel, she gave our witnesses courage on the stand and exposed logical flaws on cross examination. Our judge relied on Kirsha's knowledge of evidentiary and procedural rules, even our opposing counsel from the State's Attorney General's Office sought out Kirsha with questions on evidence and procedure, a high professional compliment, knowing that she would not lead them astray.

From my personal experience with Kirsha, I am confident that she will serve the judiciary with highest level of integrity. I fully support her appointment to the District Court of the First Circuit.



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March 27, 2026

Senate Judiciary Committee
Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 409
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Kaela Shiigi
KShiigi@perkinscoie.com
D. +1.415.344.7064
F. +1.415.344.7050

Re: Letter of Support for Judicial Nominee Kirsha Durante

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for Judicial Nominee Kirsha Durante for appointment to the District Court of the First Circuit.¹

I had the privilege of serving as co-counsel with Kirsha, her team at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, and a team from the Center for Reproductive Rights over the course of a two-year litigation concerning the constitutionality of the state's midwifery licensing law. While cross-firm co-counseling was new to Kirsha when we first approached her about the project, Kirsha quickly adapted to working with our over 12-person cross-country team. She ensured that we met deadlines, complied with local procedures, and stayed organized across three different time zones.

Kirsha is also an outstanding teacher and mentor. She led our team in a 4-day preliminary injunction hearing in Circuit Court, which resulted in a favorable injunction that allowed our clients to continue practicing Native Hawaiian birthing practices. In preparation for the hearing, Kirsha coached several members of our team through their first Hawai'i court appearances and through their first cross examinations. Kirsha also showed patience and compassion as she prepared our clients to serve as witnesses on difficult and emotional topics. As a junior attorney on the case, I couldn't have asked for a better mentor for my first evidentiary hearing and first time working with witnesses.

Following the hearing, Kirsha patiently explained the complicated legal issues with the previous midwifery licensing law to state legislators, which led to new legislation that provided more pathways for midwives to become certified and increased access to midwifery care for all.

Kirsha is someone I trust to approach complicated and controversial issues with an open mind and to lead with compassion. As a member of the Hawai'i bar, I would feel lucky to have her as a judge.

I am confident that Kirsha would serve the judiciary with integrity and fully support her appointment to the District Court of the First Circuit.

¹ This letter is written in my personal capacity and not on behalf of the firm.

March 27, 2026

Page 2

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kaela" followed by a stylized flourish or initials.

Kaela Shiigi
Bar No. 11383

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 8:39:00 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha nui kakou Honorable committee members.

I am writing this letter in support of Kirsha Durante's nomination. My name is Mehana Blach Vaughan and I come from Kīlauea, Kaua'i. I have known Kirsha Durante for five years and have had the great fortune to be represented by Kirsha in a contested case hearing to protect our sacred crater, Nihoku.

She is an immensely capable attorney with a brilliant grasp of the law and its implications. While our case focused on native Hawaiian rights and land use law, her expertise spans a wide variety of jurisprudence including family and criminal law. Further, Kirsha is gifted at applying, interpreting and explaining the law. In our case, she was always the most prepared individual in the room, taking time to digest, understand and organize volumes of information, then distill it in ways relied upon by all the attorneys present as well as the hearing officer. As citizen plaintiffs we have been so grateful to have her on our Team.

Her ability to work with community and everyday people with compassion, humility, humor, clarity and dignity is unmatched and will serve her well on the bench as will her innate sense of justice and fairness which extends to her treatment to all. I could not recommend Kirsha Durante more highly for this judgeship.

me ke aloha nui no,

Dr. Mehana Blach Vaughan

Jacqueline R. Dyer

1067 Lunaai Street • Kailua, HI 96734 • dyerj@hawaii.edu

March 27, 2026

To: Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: Letter of Support for Kirsha K.M. Durante

I write in strong support of the nomination of Kirsha K.M. Durante for appointment to the District Court of the First Circuit. I submit this letter in my personal capacity. I currently work as a Deputy Public Defender, and my views are based on more than a decade of firsthand professional experience with Kirsha.

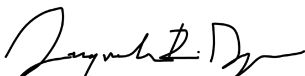
I first met Kirsha in the fall of 2013 when she was a Deputy Public Defender and I was an intern at the Office of the Public Defender through the Political Science Internship Program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. From the beginning, she distinguished herself as both an exceptional advocate and a dedicated mentor. At that time, she was the sole attorney in her office assigned to the HOPE probation caseload in Circuit Court, which consisted of hundreds of cases. I observed her manage an extraordinarily demanding docket with preparation, discipline, and zealous advocacy on behalf of her clients. Observing her work had a lasting impact on me and played a significant role in my own decision to attend law school and pursue a career in public defense.

After law school, I returned to the Office of the Public Defender and worked alongside Kirsha as a colleague until she left to become the Litigation Director of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation. Seeing her work from the perspective of a colleague gave me an even clearer appreciation of her skill and judgment. She was consistently prepared and thoughtful in her approach, and she remained deeply committed to fairness in every case. She advocated firmly while maintaining professionalism and respect toward the court and opposing counsel.

In addition to her advocacy skills, Kirsha possesses the temperament and judgment essential for judicial service. She listens carefully, treats people with dignity, and understands the real consequences of court decisions. She has demonstrated integrity, fairness, and a strong work ethic throughout her career. I am confident that she would bring those same qualities to the bench.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to give Kirsha's nomination your strongest consideration. She will serve with distinction and contribute meaningfully to the administration of justice in our courts.

Respectfully,


Jacqueline R. Dyer

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF JC 23
SUBMITTING FOR CONSIDERATION AND CONFIRMATION TO THE DISTRICT
COURT OF THE FIRST CIRCUIT, JUDICIAL NOMINEE, KIRSHA KAULUKANE
MILIANANI DURANTE, FOR A TERM TO EXPIRE IN SIX YEARS
Committee on Judiciary
Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 9:30 a.m.

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

My name is Elmer K. Ka'ai, and I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of the confirmation of Ms. Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante to serve as a Judge of the District Court of the First Circuit.

I offer this testimony based on my professional experience serving as a member of the Board of Directors for the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (NHLC), where Ms. Durante serves as the Lead Litigation Attorney. In this capacity, I have had the opportunity to observe her work, leadership, and professional conduct in matters of significant importance to our community.

Ms. Durante consistently demonstrates the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and legal excellence. She approaches each matter with diligence, thoughtful analysis, and a deep respect for the legal process. Her ability to navigate complex legal issues while maintaining clarity, composure, and purpose is a testament to her qualifications for judicial service.

Equally important, I have observed Ms. Durante's unwavering commitment to fairness. She engages with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders with respect and impartiality, ensuring that all perspectives are considered with care and without bias. Her demeanor reflects a strong sense of judicial temperament—measured, respectful, and grounded in principles of justice.

Beyond her technical legal expertise, Ms. Durante brings a profound sense of kuleana (responsibility) to her work. Her service reflects a genuine dedication to the people of Hawai'i and to the equitable administration of justice. These qualities, in my view, are essential for a member of the judiciary.

Based on my observations and professional interactions, I am confident that Ms. Durante will serve with distinction and uphold the integrity of the District Court.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support and confirm Ms. Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante for appointment to the District Court of the First Circuit.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Date: March 27, 2026

To: Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: JC 23, Testimony in Support of the Confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante

Hearing: Thursday, March 31, 2026, 9:30 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 016 & Videoconference
415 South Beretania Street

I write to you in support of Kirsha K. M. Durante, a nominee for the judicial office of District Court of the First Circuit Court. I have come to know Ms. Durante in both a professional and a personal capacity. I first met Ms. Durante as a Law Clerk to the Honorable Judge Fa‘auuga L. To‘oto‘o. As a law clerk, I had the fortunate chance to observe many attorneys and their practice. Ms. Durante always showed up prepared, knowledgeable, and with a lot of confidence. Ms. Durante always treated me with kindness and respect as a Law Clerk.

After my clerkship I was hired as a Deputy Public Defender. Ms. Durante was a senior felony attorney when I first started. In my growth as a young attorney, Ms. Durante was one of the few senior female felony attorneys in our office that I can go to for help in honing my practice. She was very generous with her time in answering questions and helping to brainstorm my cases. Additionally, she did not make me feel incompetent. She equipped me with the tools I needed to have confidence in myself and in my practice. When I was going to have my first jury trial at the 8th Floor of the Family Court, Ms. Durante is one of the first people I asked to second chair my first jury trial. She willingly cleared her court calendar and made herself available to help me.

On a personal level, I got to see Ms. Durante step up and volunteer for many events. Whether it was a retirement party, a birthday party, or a Christmas party, Ms. Durante was there planning and executing. We were lucky to be graced with a hula performance every now and then. She is an active member of her Halau, and I have been fortunate to see her perform and immerse herself in her culture. When I became a mom, Ms. Durante is one of those people that reached out and checked in on me as a new mom. She finds a way to be supportive in every way she can be. Whether it is as an attorney or as a mom.

Even after Ms. Durante left our office, she has always reached out to help whenever she can. She has been able to volunteer her time to come and present or participate at our Public Defender Seminars every year since she has left. Ms. Durante is someone who carries with her the values of aloha, integrity, and respect. These are qualities that I humbly ask that you consider.

Sincerely,

Saisamoa F. Chee
Deputy Public Defender
State of Hawaii

March 27, 2026

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

Re: JC 1, Testimony in Support of Nomination of Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani
Durante

Hearing: Tuesday, March 31, 2026, 9:30 a.m., Conference Room 016

I am a member of the Hawaii State Bar Association and a partner with the law firm of Goodsill Anderson Quinn & Stifel LLP. I wholeheartedly support Kirsha K. M. Durante for the position of Judge of the District Court of the First Circuit.

I first became acquainted with Ms. Durante while attending law school, over twenty years. In that time, I have known her to be an intelligent, dedicated and hardworking individual. Ms. Durante listens thoughtfully and considers the view of others carefully. She treats others with civility and courtesy. She has been committed to the community as a Public Defender and in her role as Litigation Director at Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation. Her experience reflects her ability to excel in both the criminal and civil arena.

I am confident that Ms. Durante will evaluate all matters before her objectively, fairly, and with an open mind. I had no doubt that she will make an excellent Judge and her appointment will be of great benefit to our community and the bar.

Very Truly Yours,

/s/ Rosemarie S. J. Sam

Rosemarie S. J. Sam

March 27, 2026

The Senate Committee on Judiciary
Chair Karl Rhoads
Ka 'Aha'ōlelo Moku'āina 'O Hawai'i
Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 228
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Re: Kirsha K.M. Durante's Confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit

Dear Chair Rhoads and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am writing to express my support for Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante in regard to her confirmation for the District Court of the First Circuit (island of O'ahu). In support of her nomination by Acting Chief Justice McKenna, I feel compelled to mention why I personally believe that she is the best candidate to preside as a District Court judge.

I have had the privilege of knowing Ms. Durante for over 20 years. I was first introduced to her keen legal mind when we were both Deputy Public Defenders. At the time, I was impressed with Ms. Durante's work ethic, high moral standard and uncanny ability to recall facts and the law. More importantly, however, I was able to witness firsthand her passion for the rights of the indigent accused and ensure that everyone has equal access to fair and just representation.

Having worked with many native Hawaiian clients while at the Office of the Public Defender, Ms. Durante seized the opportunity to utilize her litigation and advocacy skills to protect and advance Native Hawaiian rights, identity, and culture in the civil arena through the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation. As the Litigation Director, Ms. Durante manages all attorneys as they represent cultural practitioners, families, and communities in legal matters impacting their ability to maintain pilina (or connection) to the 'āina (land), perpetuate Native Hawaiian traditional and customary practices, and protect the natural environment that Hawaiian culture depends upon.

Motivated by her deep humanitarian values, Ms. Durante co-founded the Kalana Ola Coalition in 2025 to assist incarcerated elderly, near end of life, or critically ill individuals who may be eligible for compassionate or medical release. Her engagement in the community also extends to her service on the Hawai'i State Bar Association's Judicial Administration Committee (where she helps to organize the Bench-Bar Conference and the Criminal Law Forum), Director and Treasurer of the Native Hawaiian Bar Association, board member of the Mālama Honua Public Charter School Foundation, and as a gubernatorial appointee to the Defender Council. Outside of her career involvements, Ms. Durante has been a dedicated student of Hālau I Ka Wēkiu, where she has studied hula for 23 years from Kumu Hula Karl Veto Baker and Michael Lanakila Casupang. In 2021 she participated in 'ūniki (graduation) ceremonies and achieved the rank of 'ōlapa (dancer); she continues her commitment to mastery of hula and is currently working toward her next level 'ūniki in 2027.

Since leaving the Office of the Public Defender in 2007, I explored different careers, but eventually returned to the legal field and to the Judiciary in 2018. In 2020, our career paths intersected again when I joined Judge Trish Morikawa's staff at Ka'ahumanu Hale. Ms. Durante, who by that point

was a senior Deputy Public Defender, had several cases in our courtroom. At that time, I had a front row seat for all proceedings in the courtroom. I observed Ms. Durante zealously advocate on her client's behalf during the pretrial, trial, sentencing, and post-sentencing phases of cases, while also displaying the utmost respect to the Court, her clients (and their families), as well as her adversaries. She was always prepared, thoroughly knowledgeable about her case, and willing to consider many different options to ensure her client received the best outcome. In 2023, I was fortunate to join the staff of Judge Kevin Morikone and work on a civil trials calendar. Again, I had the opportunity to observe Ms. Durante in court – this time as an attorney with Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation – as she navigated the myriad of legal issues presented in the civil context. With her depth of experience, aggressive spirit, dedication to her client, and commitment to open communication, she has been able to achieve superior results for her clients. In all the times that I have witnessed Ms. Durante on various criminal and civil cases, Ms. Durante not only demonstrated her ability to analyze complicated legal issues and apply the law appropriately, but she also displayed her commitment to finding justice in every situation while maintaining the highest degree of professionalism. I believe these traits will serve her well as a just and patient judge.

Those who know Ms. Durante can attest that she is a woman of integrity and moral character who treats those around her with the highest level of kindness and consideration. As an attorney, she embodies each of the traits that a judge should possess: diligence, temperance, hard work and attentiveness. Born and raised in Hawai'i, Ms. Durante is the consummate public servant as evidenced by her work as a Deputy Public Defender, her commitment to the legal community through her involvement in various HSBA committees, and her dedication to the Hawaiian community through her work at Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation. On a personal level, she also has a sharp rapier wit and great sense of humor, self discipline, and varied interests outside the law (which I think is extremely important).

I hope it is obvious that I hold Ms. Durante in the highest regard and firmly believe that she has all of the credentials, experience, and wisdom to be a fine addition to the bench. I urge you to confirm Ms. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit bench. If I can answer any questions about my knowledge of Ms. Durante, I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you. Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide my comments.

Sincerely,



Dayna-Ann A. Mendonca

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/27/2026 7:47:21 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sat Freedman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing to support the confirmation of Kirsha Durante's nomination for District Court judge. I've known her for approximately 20 years, and was her co-worker when she was a deputy public defender. She will make a terrific judge.

Thank you,

Sat Freedman

Robert K. Merce
2467 Aha Aina Place
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96821

TO: Committee on Judiciary
RE: JC 23
HEARING: March 31, 2026
TIME: 9:30
ROOM: 016
POSITION: **Strongly Support**

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

My name is Bob Merce. I am a retired lawyer and former member of the Board of Directors of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corp. I am honored support the confirmation of Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante serve to as a Judge of the District Court of the First Circuit. I have worked with Kirsha on several projects and have come to know her well, both professionally and personally.

Judges must possess and demonstrate integrity, honesty, compassion, and humility. Kirsha embodies each of these qualities, and more. She is intelligent, knowledgeable, insightful, and approaches complex issues with careful thought and sound judgment. She is generous with her time, and gracious, kind, and humble in her interactions with others.

In 2023 I was part of a group of attorneys who had published a paper urging the State to adopt a framework for the new jail to replace OCCC that prioritized treatment, reserved jail for the highest-risk individuals, and most importantly, established a comprehensive, community-based continuum of alternatives to incarceration.

I met with Kirsha and other NHLC staff and asked them to support our paper. I was impressed by Kirsha's probing and thoughtful questions, her insights on the criminal legal system, and her commitment to system reform as a way to reduce the jail population and help people who are poor, homeless, mentally ill, and suffering from substance use disorders. Kirsha supported our work and helped us secure the support of the NHLC Board of Directors.

Kirsha is a founding member of the Kalana Ola Coalition, a group of attorneys, including me, who came together in January, 2025, to improve Hawaii's compassionate release process. Kirsha quickly emerged as one of the leaders of the group, and played an important role in drafting the compassionate release bills that are now before the Hawaii Legislature (HB 1625 and companion bill SB 2688). She has also helped to recruit and train attorneys to represent incarcerated men and women seeking compassionate release.

Kirsha has an impressive record of protecting Native Hawaiian rights. She worked with the Center for Reproductive Rights and Perkins Coie law the firm to successfully challenge the constitutionality of a state midwifery law that threatened civil and criminal penalties for those who teach or engage in traditional and customary Native Hawaiian birthing practices. The

lawsuit was the catalyst for a legislative amendment during the 2025 session that resulted in the creation of an exemption to midwifery licensing requirements for Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners.

Kirsha has successfully defended Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners facing criminal charges for exercising their traditional and customary rights, and she is lead counsel in an ongoing case on behalf of cultural practitioners seeking to revitalize traditional practices at Nihokū on the North Shore of Kauaʻi. In addition to her litigation work, Kirsha is a dedicated mentor and role model to the next generation of NHLC attorneys.

Despite an exceptionally demanding schedule, Kirsha is committed to public service. She is member of the Defender Council (as a gubernatorial appointee), the Mālama Honua Public Charter School Foundation Board of Directors, the Native Hawaiian Bar Association, and the Judicial Administration Committee.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Kirsha is a devoted wife and mother. In her personal time, she helps care for a loʻi in Kāneʻohe and practices hula—both reflections of her education at Kamehameha Schools, and her deep connection to Native Hawaiian culture and values.

Kirsha's character, work ethic, and long-standing commitment to service make her exceptionally well qualified to be a District Court judge. She would be an asset to the judiciary, and I urge you to confirm her appointment.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on this important appointment.



Carrie Ann Shirota, Esq.
P. O. Box 22967
Honolulu, HI 96823

Committee on Judiciary
Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 9:30AM
Conference Room 016 & Videoconference

Support: [JC23](#) Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, Judicial Nominee, KIRSHA KAULUKANE MILIANANI DURANTE

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

I am writing to recommend **Kirsha K.M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit on O‘ahu**. I have been following Ms. Durante’s distinguished career in public service and can attest to her profound commitment, integrity, and exceptional legal acumen. This makes her an outstanding candidate for the bench.

I met Ms. Durante when I worked for the Office of the Public Defender. Ms. Durante served as a Deputy Public Defender for sixteen years, where she developed extensive trial experience and managed a high volume of complex cases under intense pressure. This not only honed her legal ability and decisiveness but also deepened her compassion and fairness, as she connected with clients facing the most difficult moments of their lives. Her advocacy extended to every courtroom on O‘ahu, including the Intermediate Court of Appeals and the Hawai‘i Supreme Court.

Her professional foundation was built upon her early experience as a law clerk for Judge Waldorf. In this capacity, Ms. Durante gained invaluable insight into judicial temperament and the importance of clarity in decision-making. She notably contributed to the creation of sample court forms for mental health proceedings and witnessed firsthand the innovation and compassion that led to the establishment of the Mental Health Court.

More recently, I have had the opportunity to work with Ms. Durante in her role as Litigation Director at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation. I have been impressed with her leadership skills and ability to oversee legal work for NHLC while also managing her own active civil caseload.

In addition to litigation, I have observed Ms. Durante participating in the legislative process at the Hawai‘i Legislature. Ms. Durante carefully analyzed proposed legislation

that impacted NHLC's mission, and active litigation. Lawmakers requested Ms. Durante's critical technical assistance. As a result of Ms. Durante's legal acumen, *she* wove the lower court's preliminary injunction decision in *Kahoohanohano vs. State* into her testimony relating to a reproductive justice and midwifery licensure bill, ultimately contributing to its successful passage.

Currently, I have the honor of working alongside Ms. Durante as a member of the Kalana Ola Coalition. The Coalition is comprised of Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, the Hawai'i Correctional System Oversight Commission, Hawai'i Office of the Public Defender, University of Hawai'i at Manoa Richardson School of Law Pro Bono Program, Waikiki Health Center and Families Against Mandatory Minimums. Collectively, we are advocating for the passage of a Compassionate Release law in Hawai'i. Ms. Durante's support of this proposed legislation is rooted in her belief in a system of justice that is not only consistent but also reflects cultural values of aloha, kuleana, pilina, wisdom and compassion.

In closing, Ms. Kirsha K.M. Durante possesses over twenty years of legal experience and has an unwavering dedication to fairness and public service. She is committed to upholding the law impartially and compassionately, and to ensuring that all who enter the courtroom are treated with respect and dignity. I wholeheartedly recommend Ms. Durante without reservation and believe she will serve the people of Hawai'i with honor and distinction.

Sincerely,

Carrie Ann Shiota

Carrie Ann Shiota, Esq.

Melody Kapilialoha MacKenzie, Esq.
Kailua, Hawai'i 96734

Senate Committee on Judiciary
Chair, Sen. Carl Rhoads
Vice-Chair, Sen. Mike Gabbard
Hearing: Tuesday, March 31, 2026, at 9:30.m.

**Testimony in Support of JC 23 - Confirmation of Judicial Nominee,
KIRSHA KAULUKANE MILIANANI DURANTE,
to the District Court of the First Circuit**

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice-Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Committee:

I write to express my **strong support** for the confirmation of Kirsha Durante to serve as a Judge in the District Court of the First Circuit. I am a Professor Emerita at the William S. Richardson School of Law and the Founding Director of Ka Huli Ao Center for Excellence in Native Hawaiian Law at the Law School.

I have known Ms. Durante for a number of years and, most recently, have worked closely with her on the Board of the Native Hawaiian Bar Association (NHBA). She stepped into the role of Treasurer for the NHBA, when one of our founding members and treasurer passed away. I supported Ms. Durante in the transition and was always impressed by her commitment and dedication. She has also been instrumental in helping to organize and facilitate educational panels for the NHBA to increase the knowledge and skills of our members and the broader legal community.

As you know, Ms. Durante has spent many years working to address the needs of underserved communities and is currently the Litigation Director at Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation. She began her legal career as a law clerk to First Circuit Judge Marcia Waldorf. She has extensive experience in criminal law from her many years at the Office of the Public Defender and has also practiced civil law. Most recently, she has worked on Native Hawaiian issues focusing on rights and entitlements, land acquisition and claims, and trust law. Her work has included environmental law, complex civil litigation, and land use issues. Ms. Durante has tried over sixty jury cases, litigated more than a hundred trials and substantive motions, and practiced before all levels of our Judicial system, including both the Intermediate Court of Appeals and the Hawai'i Supreme Court.

Ms. Durante is deeply engaged in the legal and Native Hawaiian communities. She serves on the Hawai'i State Bar Association's Judicial Administration Committee, where she helps organize the Bench-Bar Conference and the Criminal Law Forum. She is also a board member of the Mālama Honua Public Charter School Foundation, and a gubernatorial appointee to the Defender Council.

With her years of experience in numerous areas of law and her deep commitment to Hawai'i and to justice, Ms. Durante is an excellent choice to be a District Court Judge. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in strong support of the confirmation of Kirsha Durante to be a Judge of the District Court of the First Circuit.

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/28/2026 3:04:45 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karl Baker	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

March 28, 2026

Chair Karl Rhoads & Vice Chair Mike Gabbard and all on the Judiciary Committee to approve Kirsha Durante as a District Court Judge for the First Circuit.

I am writing to express my strong support for the nomination of Kirsha Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit. Having known Kirsha for many years, I believe she possesses the temperament, integrity, and the dedication of justice required for this position.

Kirsha's professional history demonstrates a steadfast commitment to serving those in need. Since graduating from the William S. Richardson School of Law and passing the bar in 2004, she has dedicated her career to public service, including over a decade as a public defender and her current role as a manager for the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation.

Beyond her legal expertise, Kirsha embodies the spirit of Aloha in its truest sense. As a Hawaiian cultural practitioner for 50 years and a Kumu Hula for 30 years, I have observed Kirsha as my student in my Uniki class. She is a true Mana Wahine--a strong woman who leads with both passion and humility. In Hawaiian culture, Aloha signifies being Ha'aheo (proud but not pompous) and Ha'aha'a (humble but not meek). Kirsha lives these values daily, offering Aloha Aku freely and receiving Aloha Mai in return.

Our judiciary needs a leader who can approach complex legal matters with compassion and resilience. Kirsha has the unique ability to handle the pressures of the court with the grace and steady leadership necessary to serve all the people of Hawaii.

Thank you for your time and for considering my support for Kirsha Durante's nomination.

Mahalo,

Karl Veto Baker

DAVID L. WILLIAMS

5881 S. 152ND STREET, APT. D302 | TUKWILA, WA 98188
808-554-7132 | DLWONOHU@GMAIL.COM

MARCH 29, 2026

Senate Committee on Judiciary
The Thirty-Third Legislature
Regular Session of 2026

Re: JC 23 Circuit Judicial Nominee KIRSHA K.M. DURANTE – Written Testimony

Chairs Rhoads and Gabbard and Members of the Committee:

Please accept these comments in STRONG SUPPORT of Ms. Durante (“Kirsha”). Briefly, my prior legal history, all in good standing, includes working for the State as a Deputy Attorney General in the Criminal Justice Division for 12 years (retired in August, 2025). Prior to that, I was a Deputy Public Defender for over eight years (five of those last years as a felony Deputy Public Defender).

When I started at the Office of the Public Defender, Kirsha was there to greet me on my first day. She was entrusted to take me around the office, introduce me to everyone, and take me to District Court. This first glimpse of Kirsha proved to be a clear foreshadowing of what I was to witness close-up and first-hand in the years to follow.

Regarding her *qualifications*, after observing Kirsha in court conducting bench trials, jury trials, and evidentiary hearings, I learned quickly that she had a superior grasp of the rules of evidence, spotting of legal issues, and the posing of legal questions in her cases, including and resulting in the admission and preclusion of evidence, as well as having great foresight of potential appeal issues. Her organization, work ethic, intelligence, and oral articulation in court were all VERY impressive.

I was also fortunate enough to watch her present oral argument to the Hawaii Supreme Court. She was very prepared in the case law and facts, and able to offer satisfactory responses to the Justices.

All of these first hand observations over the years led me to one conclusion: that her impeccable organization, preparation, ability to think in real time and on her feet, ability to insightfully assess the law and facts, her insight into legal questions, and her awareness of legal precedent and its effects to the legal questions at hand, will all transfer well to the bench.

Even later as I had prosecuted defendants in criminal cases as a Deputy Attorney General in the Criminal Justice Division, Kirsha represented defendants that I prosecuted. To no surprise, Kirsha handled her clients' cases with professionalism, great temperament, was thoroughly prepared to discuss her cases, was very devoted to her clients, advocated her clients' cases with the highest level of professionalism, and presented compelling and convincing legal and factual issues that resulted in fair and just settlements of the cases as approved by both myself and my division supervisor.

Regarding her *character*, as mentioned above, not only did Kirsha take me in and help me as a young attorney, but she also mentored many other young lawyers in the Office of the Public Defender over the years. It was always second nature to her to assist younger lawyers - always an open door. I can say from first-hand experience that she will always be there someday for younger judges needing guidance and assistance when they are new to the bench.

I also know Kirsha to be a devoted mother, daughter, friend, and legal colleague. Given her impeccable stature, ethic, and temperament, both in her professional and private life, you will not find any unfairness, corruption, immorality, discrimination, or spite. In fact, you would be hard pressed to find a person and professional that surpasses Kirsha's great character.

In conclusion, Kirsha was made for the bench and the bench was made for Kirsha. A truly exceptional legal mind carrying both impressive criminal and, as I learned later, civil litigation experience as well. Based on my professional experiences and knowledge of her, she presents one who will be unquestionably ready and qualified to bring the highest standards and ethics to the legal bench in Hawaii. Without any pause or hesitation, I submit my STRONG support to Kirsha's consideration and confirmation. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

/S/ DAVID L. WILLIAMS

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 4:26:04 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Colette Honda	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Rhodes and Committee on Judiciary Members,

It is my distinct pleasure to submit testimony **IN SUPPORT** of JC 23, the consideration and confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, Judicial Nominee, KIRSHA KAULUKANE MILIANIANI DURANTE.

I've known Kirsha for over 20 years since our days at the William S. Richardson School of Law. I first coached Kirsha for the Hispanic Moot Court Team, and coached alongside her for several years. Kirsha was always prepared, thoughtful, and worked well with her teammates and later coaches. Her writing skills and oral argument were outstanding and she was easily one of the top oralists I coached in over 10 years.

One of the qualities I admire in Kirsha is her fundamental fairness and care for the "little guy" and it's no surprise to anyone who knows her that she chose to first become a Deputy Public Defender, and later on at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation where she is the Director of Litigation.

I wholeheartedly support Kirsha's confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, without reservations.

Colette Honda

Date: March 29, 2026

To: Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: JC 23, Testimony in Support of the Confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit,
Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante

Hearing: Tuesday, March 31, 2026, 9:30 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 016 & Videoconference
415 South Beretania Street

It is my honor to write this testimony in support of the confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante.

Kirsha was a role model for many young attorneys when she worked at the Office of the Public Defender. She's an intelligent, compassionate, and fierce attorney in the courtroom, but she also understands the value of the less-glamorous, behind-the-scenes office work necessary to advocate for her clients. Kirsha was always generous with her time and skilled at sharing her knowledge through informal brainstorming as well as official office-wide training sessions. I believe that Kirsha will be a fair and thoughtful district court judge based on her patient temperament and years of courtroom experience.

Again, I support the confirmation of Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante. Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my testimony.

Sincerely,

Antoinette Lilley
Deputy Public Defender
State of Hawai'i

Date: March 29, 2026

To: Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: JC 23, Testimony in Support of the Confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit,
Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kalakand Mulinane Durante

Hearing: Thursday, March 31, 2026, 9:30 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 016 & Videoconference
415 South Beretania Street

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

It is my honor to write this testimony in support of the confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kalakand Mulinane Durante.

I support Kirsha's nomination because I believe she possesses the necessary experience, intelligence, character, and demeanor to serve on the bench. I first met Kirsha when I started working at the Office of the Public Defender in 2014. She has mentored many young attorneys while at the Office of the Public Defender and was second chair for many of our first jury trials. Her practice and preparation are something that I aspire to emulate. Kirsha always put in the work and time to make sure she is prepared to zealously advocate for her clients and practices with a client-centered approach. I was inspired by her then and continue to be inspired by her.

Kirsha is an amazing trial attorney but an even better person. Kirsha's legal career is flooded with accomplishments and accolades, yet Kirsha remains humble. She exemplifies the legal profession's ideals of public service. Through the years I have known Kirsha in both a professional and personal capacity and her character has never wavered. I have seen Kirsha interact with fellow attorneys, clients, and members of the community and she is equally fair and respectful to all. Kirsha has the rare gift of being both compassionate and candid in her communication. She will be able to speak with the people who come through district court in a manner that will make them feel heard.

Kirsha has spent her career in the service of others and has carried herself in a way that inspires others to join her. Kirsha has been an inspiration to so many people, and not just to those of us in the legal profession. As someone who has gotten to know Kirsha over the years and has the privilege of calling her my mentor and friend, I can say with the utmost confidence that the State of Hawai'i would benefit greatly from her service as Judge of the District Court of the First Circuit. It is my great honor to submit this testimony in support of a leader that I admire and believe in. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,


Jessica R. Domingo

March 29, 2026

Testimony in Support of Judicial Nominee Kirsha Kaulukane Mililani Durante (JC23)

Aloha Chair and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Kelley Uyeoka, and I am the President of the Puhi Family Land Trust. I am writing in strong support of the nomination of Kirsha Kaulukane Mililani Durante to serve as a judge in the District Court of the First Circuit (JC23).

I have had the privilege of working directly with Ms. Durante in her role as our legal counsel with the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation for the Puhi Family Land Trust. Over the past year, she has advised our 'ohana in our ongoing efforts to protect our kuleana lands in Hāna, Maui, and to secure lawful access to these ancestral lands. Through this work, I have witnessed Ms. Durante's professionalism, integrity, and commitment to fairness. She is very patient and takes the time to explain complex legal matters in clear, accessible ways to our 'ohana. She ensures that our 'ohana understands not only what the law says but also our options and how to move forward thoughtfully.

Ms. Durante is incredibly knowledgeable and knows the law inside and out. At the same time, she approaches her work with humility and care. She consistently makes time to meet with our 'ohana, answer questions, and walk through different options so that decisions are made with full understanding and intention.

Our case involves sensitive and challenging issues, including land access, historic preservation, and the protection of cultural resources such as iwi kūpuna. Ms. Durante has shown a deep respect for our lāhui and a genuine commitment to protecting our cultural resources and practices. She carries herself with aloha and truly cares for the people she serves. Ms. Durante balances her strong legal expertise with compassion. She is respectful and grounded, qualities essential for someone who will serve on the bench. She does not rush to judgment, but instead takes the time to understand the full context of each situation.

In working with our 'ohana, Ms. Durante has shown a commitment to justice that extends beyond the technical application of the law. She understands that for many in Hawai'i, legal issues, especially those involving our 'āina are deeply tied to identity, culture, and generational kuleana.

I have full confidence that Ms. Durante will bring these same qualities to her role as a judge. She will serve with integrity and a strong commitment to upholding the law while treating all individuals with dignity and respect. For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to support her nomination. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

Kelley Uyeoka
President, Puhi Family Land Trust

Dina Shek
Honolulu, HI 96822

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: March 31, 2026 at 9:30am (Room 016)

RE: Support for Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante, Judicial Nominee for the District Court of the First Circuit (O‘ahu) (JC 23)

Dear Committee Members,

I am pleased to share my strong support for Kirsha Durante to serve as a judge for the District Court of the First Circuit (O‘ahu). I am a licensed attorney in Hawai‘i and a tenured Faculty Specialist at the William S. Richardson School of Law (University of Hawai‘i). My primary role is serving as the Legal Director of the Medical-Legal Partnership for Children in Hawai‘i (MLPC), a unique collaboration to provide free, direct legal services in community health settings. I have known Ms. Durante for over twenty years since my 1L year at the William S. Richardson School of Law, and she has always been a model of diligent legal practice, ethical service, and community leadership.

As a first year law student and new to Hawai‘i, I had the privilege of learning from Ms. Durante who was a 3L and already deeply engaged in community justice work. Ms. Durante took the time to help me understand the history, land, and place of Hawai‘i in a way that shaped my legal understanding and practice in Hawai‘i over the years to come. I have subsequently followed and admired her path from her distinguished career as a Deputy Public Defender and now as the Litigation Director at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation. Throughout, she has worked diligently to identify and address pressing community needs from within her professional roles. For example, Ms. Durante recognized the additional burdens placed on public defenders serving immigrant clients, and she helped organize “crim-imm” trainings for public defenders in collaboration with local immigration law experts. More recently, she was a critical, on-the-ground legal advocate for victims of the Maui wildfires, and she served as a connector to other attorneys seeking to support Maui recovery. Ms. Durante clearly demonstrates the highest qualities for judicial service, and she would serve Hawai‘i with great integrity and distinction.

Thank you for your consideration of my strong support for Ms. Kirsha Durante to serve the people of Hawai‘i as a judge of the First Circuit.

Respectfully submitted,



Dina Shek, Esq.

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 8:25:39 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacquelyn Esser	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I write in **strong support** of Kirsha Durante’s appointment to the District Court of the First Circuit. Having worked closely with Kirsha during her tenure at the Office of the Public Defender, I had the opportunity to observe firsthand her exceptional legal ability, unwavering work ethic, and deep commitment to justice. She is precisely the kind of lawyer who will serve the people of Hawai‘i with distinction on the bench.

As a Deputy Public Defender, Kirsha distinguished herself as a fierce advocate and exceptional trial attorney. What always stood out to me was her confidence in the courtroom and her ability to identify and thoughtfully litigate novel, well-researched legal issues in her motions practice. She approached each case with intellectual rigor and strategic clarity and always went above and beyond what was expected.

Beyond her skill as an advocate, Kirsha has consistently demonstrated leadership and a deep commitment to mentorship. She routinely second-chaired first jury trials for younger attorneys, guiding them through preparing, strategy, and courtroom presentation with patience and generosity. She stood out within the Public Defender’s office not only because of her talent, but because she invested in the next generation of lawyers and strengthened the institution as a whole.

Her subsequent leadership at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, where she now serves as Litigation Director, further reflects her versatility and professional growth. In that role she has successfully learned and navigated new areas of law, managed complex litigation, supervised attorneys, and engage thoughtfully with community stakeholders.

Perhaps most importantly, Kirsha possesses the temperament essential for judicial service. She is intelligent, thoughtful, and measured. She listens carefully before speaking. She treats opposing counsel, clients, court staff, and judges with respect, even in contentious circumstances. Her calm, confident demeanor under stress, coupled with her sharp legal mind and strong moral compass, make her ideally suited for the demands of District Court.

I wholeheartedly and without reservation support Kirsha Durante’s judicial appointment and I am confident she will serve the bench with integrity, fairness, and distinction.

Respectfully,

Jacquelyn Esser

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 9:04:53 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Voltaire Gansit, Esq.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I'm writing to support the confirmation of Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante, to the District Court of the First Circuit. It is a privilege to have worked alongside Ms. Durante as a trial attorney when she was at the Office of the Public Defender. Ms. Durante has the necessary skills, knowledge, and judicial temperament to serve as Judge of the District Court of the First Circuit.

Date: March 29, 2026

To: Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: JC 23, Testimony in Support of the Confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit,
Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante

Hearing: Tuesday, March 31, 2026, 9:30 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 016 & Videoconference
415 South Beretania Street

It is my honor to write this testimony in strong support of the confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante. I have known Ms. Durante for over twenty-three (23) years. A span which includes our time as law students at The William S. Richardson School of Law, serving as judicial law clerks at the Circuit Court of the First Circuit, and serving as deputy public defenders at the State Office of the Public Defender for over fourteen (14) years.

Ms. Durante possesses a great analytical mind with extensive knowledge of criminal law. She is a diligent and meticulous worker. As a senior deputy public defender, she conducted numerous jury trials. She defended individuals at trial accused serious and violent felony offenses. She freely shared her knowledge and expertise with others. She took the time to advise and mentor junior attorneys. Her peers sought her assistance for case analysis and trial preparation.

Even with her breadth and depth of legal knowledge and her ability to recall case law, she did not make others feel inferior. She took the time necessary to ensure attorneys understood what she was explaining. She followed up with the attorneys she helped to see how the attorneys were progressing with their trial preparations. She assisted attorneys during the workday as well as after hours.

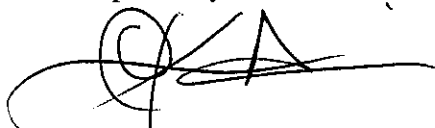
After leaving the State Office of the Public Defender, she continues to make time for the training and development of deputy public defenders. Ms. Durante has volunteered as a presenter and an instructor for annual public defender training seminars. She has assisted with *voir dire* training exercises and provided feedback to new deputy public defenders. Ms. Durante continues to be both an encourager and a motivator of attorneys in our office.

Ms. Durante is trustworthy. I have confided in her when I have dealt with professional and personal matters. I trust her to keep my confidences. I have never witnessed her behave or speak inappropriately. She treats everyone with dignity and respect.

Ms. Durante is a brilliant attorney, but more importantly she is a caring individual. She has a heart for people, especially for the people of the State of Hawaii. As a judge she will exercise sound judgment when it comes to individuals that appear before her. She will balance compassion with accountability. She will be both firm and fair.

I strongly support the confirmation to the District Court of the First Circuit, Judicial Nominee, Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante. Ms. Durante possesses the character and skills necessary to be an exceptional judge. Her confirmation will be a positive reflection on the State of Hawaii. She will not disappoint. Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my testimony in support of Judicial Nominee Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'OKA', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

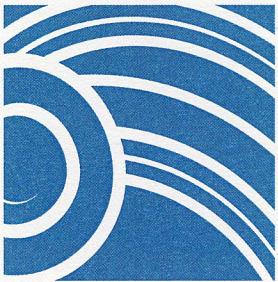
Okechukwu "Okie" Amadi
Deputy Public Defender
State of Hawaii



KEALI'I REICHEL

P.O. BOX 450
KULA, HAWAII 96790

KEALIIREICHEL@ICLOUD.COM



March 29, 2026

Senate Committee on the Judiciary

RE: STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE CONFIRMATION OF KIRSHA DURANTE TO THE DISTRICT COURT OF THE FIRST CIRCUIT

Aloha kākou

My name is Keali'i Reichel. I am a Kumu Hula, a cultural practitioner, and I serve on the Board of Directors of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation. I write to express my strong support for the judicial nomination of Kirsha Durante to serve on the District Court of the First Circuit.

Now more than ever, our leadership must be grounded in pono—a commitment to what is right, just, and balanced, carried out with integrity and a clear sense of kuleana. Kirsha has been trained in what pono means for this place and our myriad communities, through cultural practice as well as legal practice.

I know that she will carry that grounding to the bench. In doing so, she will help make justice more real—more reflective of Hawai'i, and more reflective of the people who come before the court seeking to be heard, to be seen, and to be treated fairly, in defense of people and place.

Kirsha is the pride of many communities: the Native Hawaiian community, the hula community, the Kamehameha Schools community, and so many others who have watched her grow and serve with aloha. She represents the best of what we strive to raise our young people to be.

I believe Kirsha will serve with distinction and will be an asset to all of us.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your consideration.

Keali'i Reichel

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/29/2026 9:58:59 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Amanda Donlin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Rhoads and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support of Kirsha Durante for the position of District Court Judge.

I have known Ms. Durante for over thirteen years from my former work as a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney and as a fellow Director for the Native Hawaiian Bar Association. I submit this testimony in my individual capacity.

Ms. Durante is smart, level-headed, and hardworking. She has devoted her career to helping the underserved, even though she could have easily excelled in more lucrative advocacy roles in the private sector.

Ms. Durante has the knowledge and demeanor to be an excellent District Court Judge. She has a strong command of the courtroom and a mastery of the rules of evidence. Her experience up to this point has prepared her to be a judge and I have no doubt she will discharge her duties with distinction.

I respectfully urge the Committee to recommend Ms. Durante for confirmation. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Amanda Donlin

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 12:06:25 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Doris Lum	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Senators,

I am writing to support Kirsha Durante's nomination to the district court. I have known Ms. Durante since she was in law school. Even back then she displayed leadership, serving as a teaching assistant. I also worked with Ms. Durante while at the Public Defender's office. She was a lawyer that I looked up to and learned from. Ms. Durante always gave back, whether it was to the office, to her fellow attorneys, or to her clients.

She is the type of attorney that didn't just go home at 4:30 pm. Ms. Durante is incredibly hard working and can handle the toughest of situations. She will undoubtedly be an asset to the judiciary, making intelligent and informed decisions. I believe as a judge, she will strive to find ways to continually improve our judicial system. Mahalo for taking the time to read my thoughts on Ms. Durante.

Thank you,

Doris Lum

Thank you,

Doris Lum

March 29, 2026

Senate Committee on Judiciary
State Capitol, Conference Room 016
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: Support for the Confirmation of Kirsha K.M. Durante, Esq. as
Judge of the District Court, First Circuit (Tuesday, March 31,
2026, 9:30 a.m. hearing)

Honorable Committee Members:

I write in wholehearted support of nominee Kirsha K.M. Durante as Judge of the District Court of the First Circuit. I met Kirsha when she joined the Public Defender's Office as a new deputy in 2005, where she was first assigned to the Appellate Section, then later moved to the District Court and Family Court (misdemeanor) sections, and finally to the Felony Section. Kirsha is incredibly smart and a quick study. I was impressed that she and her law school friend, the Honorable Summer M.M. Kupau, partnered to win a national moot court competition. While handling her felony caseload, Kirsha volunteered for (I believe a few) oral arguments before the Hawaii Supreme Court.

Although sad to lose her as a PD colleague, I was happy for her decision to join the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (NHLC) to advocate for Native Hawaiian legal issues. I was not surprised to learn that she advanced from a Senior Staff Attorney to her current (firmwide) Litigation Director position.

As a result of her public defender practice, Kirsha gained an excellent knowledge of criminal law and practice, as well as a superb working knowledge of the Rules of Evidence (a necessity for a District Court Judge). As a result of her NHLC career, Kirsha gained experience in civil law practice, so I am confident that she can perform well in either area. Kirsha has great logic and reasoning skills that will serve her well as a judge.

As a person, Kirsha is very down-to-earth, approachable, and humble. She also has the following characteristics: good morals, honesty, respect for others, self-reliance/responsibility, willingness to help others (e.g., community service or just giving on-the-spot assistance to someone in obvious need), and a willingness to work hard. I have no doubt that as a judge, Kirsha will treat all counsel and parties respectfully.

As to integrity, I know Kirsha is an honest person, who will conduct herself ethically on and off the bench. Although her initial trial training was in the criminal defense arena, I am certain that as a judge, she will not favor the defense over the prosecution/plaintiff. Kirsha will make decisions fairly, based on the law and the

Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: Support for the Confirmation of Kirsha K.M. Durante, Esq.

as Judge of the District Court, First Circuit

Page Two

March 29, 2026

facts before her. She is also practical and would work hard to resolve cases, rather than allowing them to drag on through repeated hearings.

In short, I believe Kirsha would make a great District Court Judge, who would be an asset to the Judiciary in all respects. Thank you for considering my comments in your decision.

Sincerely,

/s/Phyllis J. Hironaka

Phyllis J. Hironaka, Esq.

Deputy Public Defender, Ret.

email:

retiredpublicdefender@gmail.com

The Hawai'i State Legislature
Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Re: Recommendation for Kirsha K.M. Durante

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members of Committee,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide comments regarding judicial nominees for the First Circuit. **Most enthusiastically, I recommend Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante for the First Circuit vacancy.** Ms. Durante has dedicated her life to public service, and her legal acumen, her cultural awareness, and her commitment to fairness and justice uniquely equip her for this important role in the Judiciary.

My name is Molly Crane, and I am an attorney at FAMM. FAMM is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to create a more fair and effective justice system that respects individual accountability and dignity while keeping our communities safe. For over 25 years, FAMM has worked on compassionate release in research and policy, and I came to know Ms. Durante through FAMM's compassionate release work in Hawai'i. Although I met Ms. Durante through my work at FAMM, I am writing this recommendation in my personal capacity as our organization does not provide judicial endorsements.

Although FAMM has national expertise in compassionate release, we were eager to learn from individuals in Hawai'i about the local context. Ms. Durante was the first person I spoke with about compassionate release in Hawai'i. During that conversation, I was struck by her thoughtfulness about how all stakeholders are impacted by the incarceration of people who are critically ill. She articulated the challenges incarcerated people and their families face, including to engage in cultural practices and to receive adequate medical care. She explained the variety of perspectives of victims and their families regarding compassionate release, and the high cost and burden on correctional staff of caring for the medically complex. Her ability to hear and consider all stakeholders reflects her commitment to fairness for both individuals and systems.

In this dialogue, Ms. Durante elucidated the unique sentencing structure in Hawai'i, and the complexity of incarcerating some of the population on the mainland in Arizona. After sixteen years of working in public defense, Ms. Durante impressed me with her thorough and nuanced understanding of criminal law, and the people interacting with criminal courts. Her incisive perspective on compassionate release within this landscape reflected not only her grasp of statutes and caselaw, but also the real human stories of those impacted.

One barrier Ms. Durante raised to compassionate release in Hawai'i was access to counsel. She explained how challenging it can be for an individual who is critically ill in custody to find representation when applying for compassionate release, as many cannot afford counsel and may also be incapacitated as a result of their diagnoses. She demonstrated an attentiveness to those who are uniquely vulnerable in the criminal justice system, and the importance of counsel to ensuring procedural fairness. As the Judiciary continues to work on innovative projects to increase access to justice for those who cannot afford representation, as discussed in the most recent annual report of the Judiciary, Ms. Durante will be an asset to these efforts.

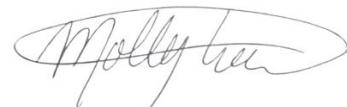
Ms. Durante also discussed the importance of re-entry planning for people who are critically ill. From her years of expertise in public defense, she shared stories of how individuals succeeded or recidivated upon release, and the role of courts, correctional systems, and communities in these outcomes. For people who are medically frail, access to suitable care is of unique importance. Ms. Durante's focus on re-entry reflects her commitment to public safety for communities, and to ensuring that those who come before the Court are set up for rehabilitation and success.

Although Ms. Durante was incredibly busy with her work as Litigation Director at Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, she generously gave of her time and expertise to try to change compassionate release for the better in Hawai'i. She is a person who does not solely identify problems – she works to resolve them. Over the last year, I've worked closely with Ms. Durante through the Kalana Ola Coalition to increase access to counsel and appropriate re-entry placements for people who are critically ill. She helped develop a CLE training for lawyers, reflecting her commitment to ongoing legal education and pro bono service. She brought stakeholders from all relevant fields to the table improve efficiencies in the process, demonstrating her collaborative and impartial approach to problems. She helped recruit social workers to supply release plans for people being considered for compassionate release, exhibiting her dedication to reducing recidivism. It is because of Ms. Durante that there is now a team of lawyers and social workers who are actively working to transform compassionate release in Hawai'i from words on a page to a functional and fair process.

Throughout the course of working alongside Ms. Durante over the past year, I have also seen her incredible expertise in other areas of law. Through the Ola Nā Iwi program, Ms. Durante program provides cradle-to-grave support for families whose connection is at risk due to legal processes posing a barrier to their health and wellness. Her I Koe ke Kuleana program protects sacred places, advocating in courts and administrative agencies. And the Ho'ohua Hou prevents cultural appropriation and abuse of Native Hawaiian culture and knowledge. Ranging from tangible and intellectual property to family law, Ms. Durante's legal proficiency is vast, equipping her to address matters of all kinds that may come before the Court. Her cultural expertise will also aid in the vitality of Native Hawaiian practices in the Judiciary, including pono, ola, mālama, and kuleana.

Ms. Durante's integrity, compassion, and commitment to fairness embody the Judiciary's mission: to administer justice in an impartial, efficient, and accessible manner in accordance with the law. I wholeheartedly recommend her for the First Circuit vacancy. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Molly Crane", enclosed within a large, loopy oval flourish.

Molly Crane

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 7:46:28 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lynda Camarao	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

This testimony is being submitted in Strong Support of the nomination of Kirsha K.M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit. I have worked with and for Ms. Durante while at the Office of the Public Defenders. She will make an outstanding Judge and we as a community will be fortunate to have her as one of our District Court Judges.

Thank you for your time,

Lynda H. Camarao

Senate Judiciary Committee
State of Hawai'i

RE: Support for the Nomination of Krisha Kaulukane Milianani Durante to serve in the District Court of the 1st Circuit

March 30, 2026

Aloha nui e Senate Judiciary Commissioners,

I am submitting testimony today in strong support for the confirmation of Krisha Durante to serve as a justice in the District Court of the 1st Circuit, Island of O'ahu.

I work with several local non-profits as well as a local social enterprise that operate across the pae 'āina. I am originally from O'ahu and now live on Kaua'i. We are fortunate there are such patient and competent candidates for the judiciary as Ms. Durante.

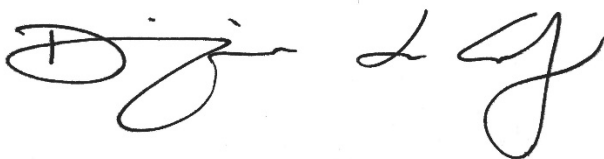
Ms. Durante has worked across the State of Hawai'i, in many different communities, across an astounding range of legal practice. I have had the opportunity to see Ms. Durante testify, and answer questions multiple times over the years at various commissions, boards, in workshops and in small meetings in communities. She is intelligent, articulate and fair. In tense situations she has the enviable talent of being able to explain legal implications in a digestible manner. Most recently I have been impressed by Ms. Durante's rare ability to explain multiple complex legal pathways to community members without her opinion driving decisions; this is no small task. She is patient and an excellent listener.

Ms. Durante clearly has a diverse range of litigation experience across many communities in our State and a strong grasp of the current and historical legal landscape in Hawai'i. How fortunate we are to have such an intelligent, patient, considerate and experienced candidate for the 1st circuit judiciary.

Please strongly consider the candidacy of Krisha Kaulukane Milianani Durante for confirmation

Mahalo nui loa for your time and leadership.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Leu Cordy', written in a cursive style.

Dominique Leu Cordy

Deputy Director, [Huliauapa'a](#)
Principal, [Nohopapa Hawai'i](#)

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 8:31:36 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kawena Beaupre	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To: Chair Rhoads and members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary

I submit this testimony in strong support of Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit. I have known Ms. Durante for over 30 years and have experienced firsthand her incredible work ethic, loyalty, practical and impartial reasoning, and overall aloha for Hawaii and its people and places. Ms. Durante brings many years of courtroom and complex civil litigation experience as well as private practice in her leadership role at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation. I have no doubt that Ms. Durante is ready and capable of leading from the bench and wholeheartedly support her confirmation.

Aloha,

Kawena Beaupre

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 8:27:39 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
William Bento	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in strong support of the judicial nomination of Kirsha Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit. Ms. Durante will be an excellent judge as she possesses the necessary attributes to be successful on the bench: experience in the law, patience, empathy, understanding, decisiveness as well as the knowledge of applicable law and procedure. Ms. Durante will be a valuable member of the District Court bench.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this judicial nomination.

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 8:31:39 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Allison Carkin	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am writing in strong support of judicial nominee Kirsha Durante. I am a former colleague of Kirsha's from the Office of the Public Defender. Not only was Kirsha an accomplished trial attorney and advocate—prepared, organized, and diligent, she was a mentor to me. Kirsha was my second chair at my first jury trial and has helped to shape my practice. I know that Kirsha will bring the same skills—preparedness, organization, and diligence as well as impartiality, competence, and integrity to the bench if selected for a judicial position. Additionally, Kirsha's work at the Public Defenders Office and Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation demonstrates her career long commitment to the community which will continue, if appointed. Kirsha is undoubtedly qualified will make an excellent District Court Judge.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Allison Carkin

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 8:32:07 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Liula Christensen	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

I write in **STRONG SUPPORT** of the appointment of Kirsha K.M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit.

I am a Senior Staff Attorney at Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (“NHLC”), but am writing in my individual capacity in support of Ms. Durante. I have had the honor of working with Ms. Durante at NHLC since she joined in 2021, first as a staff attorney, then as Litigation Director. While she has made herself such an asset to our organization that I would mourn her departure, I would be deeply proud to see her become a District Court Judge.

Ms. Durante is the best combination of intelligent, compassionate, personable, dedicated and efficient, making for an excellent coworker and manager. Over the years, Ms. Durante has contributed to both my personal and professional development. As a coworker and a person, her communication skills and personality make her a joy to be around. As an attorney, her logic and reasoning skills are complemented by her comfort in the courtroom learned from her many years as a deputy public defender. As a manager and mentor, she regularly supplies support and technical guidance in a manner that builds confidence in my own skills and abilities. Her endless energy and dedication allows her to meet the many competing needs of our organization while maintaining her commitments to serve the larger community.

When Ms. Durante joined NHLC, she was well-versed in criminal law, criminal procedure, and the rules of evidence. At the time, NHLC primarily handled civil cases. She was a quick study and adapted quickly to civil procedure. She was able to apply her knowledge and experience from her time as a deputy public defender, especially regarding evidence, to better our civil practice and later to manage our burgeoning family law practice. Ms. Durante’s uniquely diverse experience of handling both civil and criminal cases, and of managing NHLC’s family law attorney, puts her in a perfect position to be a District Court Judge.

Ms. Durante’s many skills and experiences will guide her to be a dedicated, fair, and deliberate judge. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Li‘ulā Christensen

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 8:35:13 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Robert D Reynolds	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is with the utmost pleasure and confidence that I write in support of Kirsha Durante for Judge of the District Court of the First Circuit. I have known Kirsha for over 15 years through our shared involvement with Halau I Ka Wekiu (hula school), as well as through mutula friends during her time at the Public Defenders office.

Kirsha is a true pillar for our community - consistently respectful, knowledgable, and generous with her time and expertise. She is deeply committed to making our society better, contributing meaningfully through her work with such non-profits as Kauakoko Foundation, and always making herself available as a trusted resource to those in need.

Kirsha is a strong advocate for the law and a compassionate communicator. She approaches her work and personal life with integrity and conviction, while also demonstrating genuine empathy and understanding. Kirsha has a remarkable ability to uphold the law while ensuring that people feel heard, respected, and treated with dignity.

I wholeheartedly support Kirsha Durante and am confident she will serve with fairness, wisdom, and compassion.

Mahalo

Robert Reynolds

March 30, 2026

The Hawai‘i Senate Committee on the Judiciary
The Hawai‘i State Legislature

Re: Testimony in Support of the Confirmation of Kirsha K.M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit (JC 23)

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

I am a senior litigation attorney at the Center for Reproductive Rights, the only global advocacy organization dedicated to advancing reproductive rights. I write in my personal capacity to offer my wholehearted support for the nomination of Kirsha K.M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit (O‘ahu). Having had the opportunity to work alongside Ms. Durante, I can say with confidence that she would bring to this role an uncommon combination of legal excellence, personal integrity, and genuine commitment to the communities the court serves. Her appointment would be a tremendous asset to Hawaii’s judiciary.

I came to know Ms. Durante beginning in 2023, through work examining how a midwifery law was affecting Native Hawaiian families and other communities across the state. In her capacity as Litigation Director for the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, Ms. Durante joined our team as co-counsel—alongside the Center for Reproductive Rights and Perkins Coie—in *Kaho ‘ohanohano v. State of Hawai‘i*, No. 1CCV-24-0000269, before the District Court of the First Circuit. That litigation concluded with a settlement in 2025.

Throughout our collaboration, Ms. Durante’s command of the law was immediately apparent. Her specialized knowledge of Native Hawaiian rights, combined with her grounding in criminal law, proved indispensable at every stage of the case and in the broader public conversations it generated. What set her apart, however, was not simply her legal intellect. Ms. Durante approached every decision with careful deliberation, weighing risks and consequences with a level of objectivity that earned the trust of clients, co-counsel, and the court alike.

Ms. Durante understood when to advocate forcefully and when to seek practical resolution, navigating those moments with skill and grace. Her written and oral advocacy was consistently compelling, and her proactive communication—with both the court and opposing counsel—helped keep proceedings moving productively even when difficulties arose. As out-of-state attorneys, my colleagues and I benefited enormously from her patient guidance on Hawai‘i court rules and local practice. Her respect for the judicial process—and for every individual involved in it—set the tone of our entire team.

As a colleague and a leader, Ms. Durante was equally impressive. She carried herself with a calm, assured presence that steadied the team during demanding stretches of litigation. Despite the intensity of the work, she consistently made herself available to junior attorneys, offering mentorship with patience and generosity. She listened carefully in every interaction and invited perspectives from all corners of the team.

Perhaps most distinctively, Ms. Durante never lost sight of the human dimension of the law. As a member of the community she represented, she brought cultural knowledge and sensitivity that meaningfully shaped how our clients experienced the legal process. As just one example, she provided both the court reporter and the presiding judge with a glossary of Hawaiian terms likely to arise during the hearing, ensuring that language would not become a barrier to understanding or dignity. These are not small gestures; they reflect a lawyer who understands that justice is not only about outcomes, but also about how people are treated along the way.

Ms. Durante is, in every sense, the kind of judge the District Court of the First Circuit deserves—thoughtful, principled, and grounded in a strong commitment to those the court serves. I recommend her without reservation.

Respectfully submitted,



Hillary Schneller
Senior Counsel

Center for Reproductive Rights*
199 Water Street
New York, NY 10038

* Affiliation provided for identification purposes only

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 8:53:13 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Craig Jerome	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my strong support for Kirsh K.M. Durante to serve in the position of District Judge for the District Court of the First Circuit. I have known Ms. Durante since 2008, when I went to work for the State of Hawaii’s Office of the Public Defender. As a brand-new public defender, I quickly came to see Ms. Durante as *the* model of excellence in the criminal defense profession. Her dedication and competence were immediately apparent, and she was a leader in the office who quietly mentored many of her fellow attorneys.

Ms. Durante served her clients with grace, accountability, and compassion. Her impressive skills as a litigator are the result of countless hours of tireless work on behalf of the people that are lucky enough to have her represent them. She has always remained client-focused in her advocacy. To this day, she is one of the few public defenders that I can remember who made the time every day to check in with all of her clients.

I am certain that Ms. Durante would be an excellent district judge. She has always displayed the traits that I believe make her an ideal candidate for this position—legal acumen, diligence, and, perhaps most importantly, courage. The people of the State of Hawai‘i would benefit greatly from her service. I am happy to give Ms. Durante my highest recommendation.

Aloha,

Craig W. Jerome

March 31, 2026

The Honorable Karl Rhoads, Chair
The Honorable Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: Nomination of Kirsha Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit

I am writing to express my strong support for the nomination of Kirsha Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit.

Kirsha's career reflects a deep and sustained commitment to public service. After graduating from the William S. Richardson School of Law and being admitted to the bar in 2004, she dedicated more than a decade to serving as a public defender, gaining extensive courtroom experience and a firsthand understanding of the legal system's impact on individuals and families. She currently serves as Litigation Director of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, where she provides strategic leadership, supervises complex litigation, and mentors attorneys engaged in high-stakes legal advocacy.

Beyond her legal career, Kirsha is deeply committed to Hawaiian culture and community leadership. As my hula sister in Hālau I Ka Wēkiu, I have had the privilege of working alongside her for more than 20 years. We completed a rigorous 'ūniki (graduation class for hula) process together, earning the honor of graduating as 'ōlapa (dancer), and are currently engaged in a second 'ūniki to continue our cultural education and growth. This demanding two-and-a-half-year process requires commitment, discipline, humility, leadership, and resilience; qualities Kirsha consistently demonstrates. She has emerged as a respected leader within our hālau, generously supporting younger haumāna (students) through mentorship, additional instruction, and cultural practices, always giving her time and ike (knowledge) without expectation of recognition.

Kirsha's commitment to service extends beyond the legal and cultural realms. She serves on multiple boards and regularly volunteers her time caring for our 'āina through work in the lo'i. In all that she does, she exemplifies the value, "Ua hana 'ia a pono a pololei, ua ha'i 'ia a kunou iā 'oe" (to act rightly and speak truthfully). I have witnessed her live this principle daily, and I am confident it would guide her conduct and decision-making on the bench.

Kirsha is hardworking, principled, and deeply committed to fairness and justice. I believe she possesses the integrity, judgment, passion and dedication required to serve with distinction as a judge of the District Court of the First Circuit.

Thank you for your time and for considering my support for Kirsha Durante's nomination.

Sincerely,

Moani Wright-Van Alst



CRYSTAL K. GLENDON, ESQ.
GLENDON & PONCE, LLLC
1001 Bishop Street, Suite 710
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Telephone: (808) 762-7643
Fax: (808) 753-5258
Email: crystal@glendonponce.com

March 30, 2026

TO: Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: JC23, Testimony in Support of the Confirmation as District Court Judge of the
First Circuit, Judicial Nominee Kirsha Durante

Hearing: Tuesday, March 31, 2026 at 9:30 a.m.
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

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

I support the confirmation of Kirsha Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit. I have known Ms. Durante both personally and professionally for over 25 years, and I have seen firsthand her diligence and commitment to her craft. You will not find a more dedicated, talented and deserving candidate. She is one of the best trial attorneys I have seen in action during her time as a Deputy Public Defender. When she left the office and started as the Litigation Director at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, she brought an immense amount of experience to the position. She was able to apply her knowledge as a criminal defense attorney and capably pivot to handling civil matters. I have no doubt that she has elevated their practice. Everywhere she goes, she elevates the room and those around her.

I believe she will bring the same approach to the District Court judge position. She is smart and kind, two important qualities a judge should possess. As a judge in the "people's court," she will bring a balanced approach to handling the demanding calendar while being mindful of the people who will come before her. I look forward to her contributions to the State of Hawaii Judiciary. I strongly urge this committee to consent to Ms. Durante's appointment and recommend her confirmation to the full Senate. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,


Crystal K. Glendon

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 9:01:03 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Madelyn McKeague	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

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

I am writing in **STRONG SUPPORT** of Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani for the vacancy in the District Court of the First Circuit (O‘ahu).

I met Ms. Durante when I was still a law student at the William S. Richardson School of Law while she was Litigation Director at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (NHLC). In my experience, many attorneys of her caliber and experience pay little mind to students just beginning their legal career. Ms. Durante, on the otherhand, was exceptionally kind, measured, and brilliant in all of the ways that she worked with us. Even after graduation, Ms. Durante has continued to be an encouraging presence to new attorneys.

I wholeheartedly support Ms. Durante’s appointment to this judicial vacancy and know that her knowledge of the law, her respect for others in the practice of law, and the fairness she has demonstrated in her practice from the outset make her an excellent candidate.

Me ke aloha,

Madelyn McKeague

LATE

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 9:54:13 AM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Soong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Rhoads and the members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary:

I am writing to express my strong support for Kirsha Durante's nomination to the District Court of the First Circuit. As a director of the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, I have seen first hand Ms. Durante's deep knowledge and understanding of the law and her ability to clearly identify and define complex legal principles. Furthermore, I believe she has the temperament and personal experience to review matters from all perspectives and provide just and equitable resolutions to the matters that will come before her. Ms. Durante in my opinion is an ideal candidate to represent the court not only because of the factors listed above, but also because she has a deep personal commitment to the rule of law and the foundation it provides us to live in a stable and fair-minded society.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my thoughts and support for Ms. Durante's nomination.

Aloha,

David K. Soong

Director - Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation

Senate Committee on Judiciary
Sen. Carl Rhoads, Chair
Sen. Mike Gabbard, Vice-Chair



Tuesday, March 31, 2026, at 9:30.m.

Testimony in Support of JC 23:
Confirmation of Judicial Nominee, KIRSHA KAULUKANE MILIANANI DURANTE,
to the District Court of the First Circuit

Aloha nui e Chair Rhoads, Vice-Chair Gabbard, and Members of the Committee,

Please accept this testimony in **strong support** of the confirmation of Kirsha Durante to serve as a Judge in the District Court of the First Circuit. My name is U'ilani Tanigawa Lum and I am a hula practitioner and an Assistant Professor of Law at the William S. Richardson School of Law. I humbly submit this testimony in my personal capacity.

I have known Ms. Durante for a number of years, having worked together on various issues affecting both our legal and cultural community. I have long admired her commitment and aloha not only to the rule of law, but especially its effects on the individuals within our community itself. In all my interactions with her, Ms. Durante operates with aloha and excellence. She carries with her a deep sense of justice. In Hawai'i, where our history is complex, delivering justice can be difficult. Ms. Durante's background and experience uniquely positions her to be a highly effective judge.

While at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, Ms. Durante's work reverberated throughout Hawai'i; uplifting cultural practices, cultural practitioners, 'ohana, 'āina, and more. As this committee may well know, her career as an attorney is indeed impressive. While she is a brilliant attorney and advocate, she also remained active in her own cultural practices. This grounding and sense of responsibility will guide her to be a dedicated, fair, and deliberate judge.

Mahalo nui for your time and for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in strong support of the confirmation of Kirsha Durante.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

U'ilani Tanigawa Lum
anelauilani@gmail.com

LATE

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 1:36:17 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Christin M. Johnson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair and Members of the Committee:

I respectfully offer my strong support for the confirmation of Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante to serve as a Judge of the District Court of the First Circuit.

Ms. Durante's career reflects a clear and consistent dedication to a fair, just, and equitable legal system. As Litigation Director at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, she has worked to ensure that legal protections are meaningfully applied, particularly in cases involving land, environmental stewardship, and Native Hawaiian rights. Her work demonstrates a commitment not only to the rule of law but to ensuring that the law serves **all** communities with integrity and respect.

Her prior service as a Deputy Public Defender further underscores this commitment. In that role, she represented individuals navigating the criminal legal system, often at their most vulnerable, while safeguarding constitutional rights and advocating for fair outcomes. This experience reflects a deep understanding that justice requires both legal rigor and humanity.

Ms. Durante's background across both civil and criminal law equips her with a balanced perspective on how legal decisions impact individuals and communities. Her career shows a sustained focus on accountability, access to justice, and the equitable application of the law.

I believe Ms. Durante will bring this commitment to fairness and justice to the bench. For these reasons, I strongly support her confirmation.

LATE

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 5:15:44 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Frederick Manansala Macapinlac	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

30 March 2026

To: Senate Committee on the Judiciary

My name is Frederick Manansala Macapinlac. I have been a licensed attorney for the State of Hawai'i since 2014.

I am writing in support of the confirmation of Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante for the position of District Court Judge for the First Circuit. I met Ms. Durante while I was a Deputy Public Defender. During my time handling felony cases as a Deputy Public Defender, Ms. Durante took the time to brainstorm issues and provide advice on some of my cases despite my practicing on another circuit.

I can affirm that she is not only a knowledgeable and skilled trial practitioner, but carries a deep respect and care for the rights of all people. Her desire to uplift those in need took her to the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation to fight for the rights of the still marginalized Native Hawaiian people.

Kirsha Kaulukane Milianani Durante is an exceptional attorney and person, I believe she will be a great District Court Judge and support her confirmation.

Sincerely

Frederick M. Macapinlac, Bar No. 10113

LATE

JC-23

Submitted on: 3/30/2026 6:14:25 PM

Testimony for JDC on 3/31/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Trisha Nakamura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

To the Honorable Judiciary Committee--Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Members:

Please send JC 23 to the floor to confirm Ms. Kirsha Durante as a District Court Judge of the First Circuit. It is without question that Ms. Durante possesses the integrity, discipline, passion for the law, and commitment to the Constitutions and rule of law required of a judge. I am licensed to practice law in the State and work as an Assistant Specialist Faculty at the William S. Richardson School of Law. (Please note this testimony is offered in my personal capacity and does not represent the views of the Law School or University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.) Kirsha is a staunch public servant, sharp practitioner, and dedicated contributor to our communities.

I have known Kirsha Durante since our time at the William S. Richardson School of Law. We served on the board of the Japanese American Citizens League Honolulu Chapter together. And I was fortunate to work with her at the Office of the Public Defender. While at the Public Defender's Office ("Office"), Kirsha was an important mentor. For my first felony trial—a juvenile case in Family Court—Kirsha graciously agreed to observe and walk me through the case. Despite having a busy caseload of her own, she understood the importance of showing up for younger attorneys--and she understood her investment meant the next group of attorneys would understand their role and work on behalf of clients and their rights.

I imagine that this foresight and genuine care for others will work synergistically with Kirsha's legal savvy and skill. Kirsha will see individual cases and truly listen to all parties before her. She will also see the cases as contributing to these individuals' families and communities. And she will see that these matters impact our State. The hard work of sitting at the "People's Court" day-in and day-out with a busy calendar, perhaps in other courthouses throughout O'ahu, would be taken seriously every day by Kirsha and she would not lose sight of the importance and privilege of this role as District Court Judge.

Kirsha in law school, at the Office, and now at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation has taken on a diversity of work experiences that showcase her intellectual sharpness and skilled legal acumen. Pivoting from criminal defense work to working on individual and impact litigation cases in the civil context highlights the intelligence and smarts Kirsha will bring to her work as a District Court Judge. Kirsha's service to the Bar and also on the Defender Council highlights her work as a connector and commitment to our State. She can fill many roles on the bench and also take on unique committee and administrative work that is asked of judges. We are at a time in history when the rule of law and a commitment to seeing and hearing people, particularly those

without or with less voice, are extremely important. The Courts and our people will benefit greatly from Ms. Durante serving on the District Court bench.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

LATE

March 30, 2026

To: Chair Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair Mike Gabbard and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee
Hawai'i State Capitol
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Re: Hearing on JC23 Confirmation of Kirsha K.M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit, Island of O'ahu; March 31, 2026, 9:30am

Aloha pumehana,

I am very proud to share my enthusiastic support for the judicial nomination of Kirsha Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit. We have been students of Hālau I Ka Wēkiu together for over 20 years so my relationship with Kirsha has many beautiful layers as our lives have intertwined.

My personal commitment to hālau is on a foundation of kuleana. Being a student of hula is one of my greatest privileges and it comes with many responsibilities, so it demands a lifelong effort in balance alongside kuleana to my 'ohana and career. I have seen Kirsha uphold her various kuleana through our shared commitment and increasing leadership roles in hālau, and in caring for multiple generations of her family. I deeply believe that Kirsha's career of public service is her expression of carrying out her kuleana to our community. Moreover, we went through 'ūniki training while we were both hāpai and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those combined stressors could truly reveal the deepest priorities of a person, and Kirsha was resilient through it all to navigate the areas in our lives that were quickly changing but steadfast pillars for us: 'ohana, community, and hula.

Kirsha also regularly helps our 'ohana at a lo'i that we care for in He'eia. Over the course of nearly 6 years, she has brought her family and welcomed visiting colleagues and interns to help us, and she has such a joy for sharing the opportunity with others to engage with 'āina and cultural practice. Our keiki were also in Hawaiian language immersion childcare together and she continues to explore ways to integrate 'ōlelo Hawai'i in her son's life. Her perspectives are uniquely grounded by the history, language, and culture of this special place, and in these ways, she lives out a vision to uplift a sense of identity in Hawai'i, not just for Native Hawaiians, but for all who live here.

When I heard about Kirsha's nomination, I recalled an experience I had in a courtroom. During jury selection, I was unexpectedly overwhelmed by emotion because I thought of when my sister was badly injured in a car crash. The judge was quick to acknowledge my trauma and excuse me from the room. I was so grateful for their discernment and grace, but it was such a vivid experience that I feel the emotions even now, and I realize that any interaction in court is a very personal and vulnerable experience. Kirsha is diligent and she would excel in all technical aspects of this new kuleana. She is self-aware and can read a room, and she communicates in a way that aims for understanding. But importantly to me, she is compassionate and strives to treat people well, and that is what I hope people experience in our judicial system. I wholeheartedly support her nomination for appointment to the District Court of the First Circuit.

Mahalo nui,



Brenda P.A. Lima

ANGELA-PEI, ESQ.

1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1205 | 808-521-2305 | angela@nhlchi.org

LATE

March 30 , 2026

Committee on Judiciary
Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Mike Gabbard, Vice Chair

Re: JC 23 – KIRSHA KAULUKANE MILILANI DURANTE
Nominee for District Court of the First Circuit

Aloha Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and Committee Members:

I write in strong and unequivocal support of Krisha K. M. Durante, nominee for the judicial office of District Judge of the First Circuit. I have known Ms. Durante for nearly twenty years as a fellow graduate of the William S. Richardson School of Law. During my twelve years serving as a Family Court–Appointed Guardian Ad Litem, I became well aware of her outstanding reputation as a Deputy Public Defender, particularly on the Family Court Juvenile Division calendar.

Over the past five years, I have had the privilege of working closely with Ms. Durante through our shared work at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation (NHLC). I first worked with her in my capacity as a member of the NHLC Board of Directors when she joined the organization in 2021. Ms. Durante regularly provided litigation reports to the board, and I was impressed by how swiftly and effectively she transitioned from criminal to civil practice. She immediately became an integral member of the organization, contributing to the elevation of its work, its internal collaboration, and its overall spirit of kuleana and aloha.

In February 2024, I stepped down from the NHLC board to join the firm and assist in launching its Ola Nā Iwi Program (Family Legal Services). Ms. Durante played a key role in the development of this program, drawing on her deep understanding of the legal needs of Native Hawaiian ‘ohana involved in family court proceedings, particularly in child welfare matters. She has consistently supported my practice, especially in trial preparation related to strategy and evidentiary issues. Her mastery of the rules of evidence and her ability to rapidly craft cogent arguments for or against admissibility have been invaluable.

I have witnessed firsthand Ms. Durante’s remarkable legal acumen. She possesses a thorough and sophisticated command of the law across numerous practice areas. She analyzes cases with clarity, identifies issues efficiently, anticipates challenges, and consistently upholds the highest ethical standards. She is articulate both in writing and in oral advocacy. Her diligence and attention to detail are exemplary.

I have experienced Ms. Durante's servant leadership to her team as well as our clients. As NHLC's Litigation Director, she maintains an impressive command of all active cases within both our Lāhui Services and 'Ohana Services teams. She knows the details of each case and offers meaningful, well-reasoned guidance regarding litigation strategy and resolution. She provides proactive support to attorneys and staff, assisting with both casework and office operations. In her work with clients, she treats every individual with respect and aloha. She communicates clearly and compassionately, ensuring clients understand the processes affecting them. When NHLC cannot take a case, she ensures clients receive appropriate referrals or resources.

Ms. Durante embodies all qualities necessary to serve as an outstanding District Court Judge. Her legal expertise is exceptional; her work ethic and professionalism are widely recognized; and she has dedicated her career to promoting access to justice and uplifting the community. She is also a respected Hawaiian cultural practitioner who is deeply grounded in the values of aloha, kuleana, and pono. These values ensure that all who appear before her—attorneys and parties alike—will be heard and treated with fairness and respect. These values also guide her in holding individuals accountable when required. To top it off, Ms. Durante has a great sense of humor and it is well known that a sense of humor has many benefits, for one's own well-being and the well-being of those around you.

I am fully confident that Ms. Durante will fulfill the duties of District Court Judge with excellence, diligence, and unwavering integrity. She will administer the law with both precision and compassion.

Me ka ha'aha'a,



Angela Correa- Pei

LATE

March 30, 2026

RE: Hearing on JC23 Confirmation of Kirsha K.M. Durante to the District Court of the First Circuit, Island of O‘ahu; March 31, 2026, 9:30 a.m.

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

It is with great enthusiasm that I write in support of Kirsha Durante’s nomination for the District Court of the First Circuit (O‘ahu). Ms. Durante is an exceptional lawyer, a compassionate and principled leader, and a hardworking professional dedicated to justice. If selected for this position, I am confident that she will have a profound and positive impact on Hawaii’s legal system.

I first met Ms. Durante in 2023. In my role as a *Senior Staff Attorney* at the Center for Reproductive Rights, I was investigating the impact of a midwifery law on Native Hawaiian families and other communities. Ms. Durante was the Legal Director for the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, and she joined the Center for Reproductive Rights and Perkins Coie as co-counsel in *Kaho ‘ohanohano v. State of Hawai‘i*, No. 1CCV-24-0000269, litigated in the District Court of the First Circuit. The case settled in 2025.

From the very beginning, Ms. Durante impressed me with her deep knowledge of the law. Her expertise in Native Hawaiian rights and her experience with criminal law were critical to the success of the case, and to the important public dialogues that accompanied it. In addition to her sharp legal analysis and strategic thinking, Ms. Durante consistently demonstrated respect for the legal process and for all involved in it. Ms. Durante is a thorough, thoughtful decision-maker, and her commitment to professional responsibility is evident in her approach to her cases, clients, and colleagues. She carefully considers the potential impacts of every decision and assesses the risks and benefits with notable objectivity. She ensured that our legal team and our clients were thoroughly prepared at every stage of the legal process. As an out-of-state attorney, I appreciated her patient instruction on Hawai‘i court rules and practices.

And, while serving as a fiercely competent advocate for her clients, she found appropriate moments to encourage efficiency and cooperation between the parties and the Court. It was clear that she had the respect of the court and our opposing counsel in the Attorney General’s Office. Indeed, Ms. Durante’s skillful communication was a consistent source of pride for our legal team as she persuasively presented arguments, proactively communicated with opposing counsel and the Court, and respectfully problem-solved when issues arose.

Ms. Durante’s calm, capable courtroom presence and compassionate client counseling skills made her a beloved and admired leader throughout our litigation. While working long hours, she still made time to generously share her wisdom and experience with junior attorneys and peers alike. In every interaction, she listened with care and considered every viewpoint.

Finally, Ms. Durante stands out for her genuine appreciation of the real-world impact of laws and legal proceedings. Ms. Durante is deeply engaged in the community to which she both belongs and represents professionally. In this role, I observed how her cultural competency

strengthened community trust in the legal proceedings, which concerned issues of deep personal and cultural significance for our clients and their communities. In countless ways, Ms. Durante reinforced the dignity of her clients—including when she arranged Hawaiian-language lessons for their out-of-state lawyers and when she provided the court reporter and the judge with a glossary of Hawaiian terms frequently used during the hearing.

Ms. Durante is a model of integrity, authenticity, and intellectual rigor that can only strengthen the District Court of the First Circuit. If I can be of assistance in any way, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Respectfully submitted,
Pilar Herrero, JD, LLM
Pilar.s.herrero@gmail.com



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

Kirsha K.M. Durante
District Court Judge of the First Circuit (JC23)

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, March 31, 2026, 9:30 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 JC23, Nomination of Kirsha K.M. Durante for the District Court of the First Circuit.

After a rigorous process, described below, the HSBA Board of Directors concluded that Ms. Durante is **QUALIFIED**. Ms. Durante has over two decades of litigation and trial experience, both in criminal law and most recently, in complex civil litigation. Her background reveals a clear dedication to public service and to ensuring our community has access to justice. Additionally, Ms. Durante has deep roots in her community and has extensive volunteer experience.

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.
- Ms. Durante 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. Durante in all categories of the

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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. Durante on March 24, 2026, to discuss the subcommittee's findings.
- On March 25, 2026, the HSBA Board of Directors interviewed Ms. Durante in executive session.
- The HSBA Board deliberated and voted that Ms. Durante was qualified.

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