



TESTIMONY
Senate Committee on Judiciary
Hearing: Thursday, June 16, 2022, 10:30 a.m.

To: Sen. Karl Rhoads, Chair
Sen. Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice Chair

From: Donna V. Payesko, Esq. 

Re: Confirmation of attorney Joanna E. Sokolow as judge in the District Family Court of the Third Circuit

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole and Senate Members, as a local Kona attorney in private practice, thank you for the opportunity to offer comments in **STRONG SUPPORT** of the conformation of Joanna E. Sokolow as judge for the District Family Court of the Third Circuit.

I have known attorney Sokolow, both personally and professionally, since I began practicing law in Hawaii circa 2008. Ms. Sokolow is one of the finest attorneys I have ever encountered. She is impressively educated, highly intelligent, compassionate, consistently even-tempered, respectful of others, fair, balanced and hard-working. Ms. Sokolow's breadth of work experience perfectly mirrors the jurisdiction of the Family Court as she has spent her career focused on the types of cases that fill the Family Court docket, and, in addition, has experience per diem judging which will minimize any administrative learning curve.

Family Court is probably the most community centered court that exists, one that touches the lives of so many citizens in ways that affect litigants dealing with very personal and life-changing issues of divorce, custody and domestic violence, to name a few. Joanna is well-respected in the local community, is wholly committed to access to justice for all, and I am confident that she will ensure the rights of all are respected.

Chief Justice Recktenwald could not have made a better choice for this position, and I hope she will be confirmed.

Thank you. 



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The Honorable Karl Rhoads, Chair
The Honorable Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice-Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary
Hawai'i State Senate, Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Re: Consideration and Confirmation of Joanna E. Sokolow to the District Family Court of the Third Circuit

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

It was with *very strong support* that we write to you regarding the confirmation of Third Circuit District-Family Court nominee, Joanna Sokolow. We have both known Ms. Sokolow in the legal community for years. Ms. Laird followed in her footsteps as Managing Attorney for the Kona office of the Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i. Ms. Fujioka-Lilley litigated against her when she was a deputy prosecuting attorney and Ms. Sokolow worked as a Deputy Public Defender. Ms. Laird and Ms. Sokolow both served on the Initiatives Committee of the Hawai'i Access to Justice Commission. Ms. Fujioka-Lilley now serves with her on the board of directors for Family Support Services West Hawai'i. Since going into private practice, we've both worked with Ms. Sokolow as co-counsel and aligned counsel on civil cases.

Ms. Sokolow always presents her position as a zealous advocate and comes prepared on both the facts and the law of her cases. She is a smart lawyer, a conscientious fiduciary, and a delightful colleague. She is caring and decisive and, if confirmed, our community will be well served by Judge Sokolow. She has years of professional experience in family law and criminal law matters, litigating in all state courts, including the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Ms. Sokolow is a rock in the West Hawai'i bar, a team player who puts the community first and believes in equal justice for all.

We have no doubt that Ms. Sokolow will ably fulfill all the responsibilities and duties of her position and be a great credit to our Judiciary and community.

Sincerely,

Dawn Henry Laird, Esq.

Terri Lea Fujioka-Lilley, Esq.

JC-2

Submitted on: 6/14/2022 11:59:15 AM

Testimony for JDC on 6/16/2022 10:30:00 AM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Nalani Fujimori Kaina | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments: I write in strong support of the judicial appointment of Joanna Sokolow to the bench in Kona. I am writing this testimony in my individual capacity. I have known Joanna since she first started as an AmeriCorps Attorney in Legal Aid's Kona Office. In moving to Kona from Washington, DC, she dove right in the practice of law, actively representing clients and stepping into the role as a guardian ad litem. Soon I approached her during one of the Legal Aid Hawaii Island meetings about taking on the role as Managing Attorney for Kona. While reluctant at first, she quickly took to the role and found a way to balance overseeing the office and regularly closing the highest number of cases by any attorney across the entire program. She also worked closely with Judge Ibarra to get the Self Help Desk at the Kona library open. Her interest though in litigation and growing those skills led her to the public defenders' office and while she left Legal Aid, she never left her commitment and dedication to access to justice issues. She continued to serve on the HSBA's Delivery of Legal Services Committee and was eventually appointed to the Access to Justice Commission. She also continued to be volunteer with the Kona Self Help Center. I am in strong support of Joanna's appointment to the bench. In her you will find a highly capable, compassionate and dedicate judge who will work fiercely to ensure that both sides are heard and that the most vulnerable are able to actively participate in the judicial system. She will ensure that processes are fair and that her judicial decisions will be well reasoned. Mahalo for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of Joanna Sokolow's judicial appointment.

JC-2

Submitted on: 6/14/2022 9:33:07 PM

Testimony for JDC on 6/16/2022 10:30:00 AM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Catherine E. Gibson | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments: I wholeheartedly support the nomination of the Honorable Joanna E. Sokolow to the District Family Court of Third Circuit. I have worked with Joanna in different capacities over the years and have seen that she always makes decisions carefully and ethically. She treats people with dignity and respect, regardless of their social or economic standing. She does this as a lawyer, a parent, a community member, and she will do this on the bench. Joanna is a dedicated public servant. Her record includes many years as an attorney at Legal Aid, the Office of the Public Defender, the Children’s Law Project of Hawaii, in private practice representing indigent defendants, and as a per diem judge—all the while volunteering hundreds of hours per year at the Kona Self Help Desk. Joanna is diligent, knowledgeable, and always working to hone her skills and increase her knowledge. Despite her many attributes, Joanna is perpetually humble. She never appears to consider herself better than others, which makes her trusted by her clients and highly respected among her colleagues. She is an asset to our community, and we would be fortunate to have her on the bench in District Family Court.

JC-2

Submitted on: 6/15/2022 9:22:59 AM

Testimony for JDC on 6/16/2022 10:30:00 AM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Noah Gibson | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments: Aloha Chair & Committee members, I write today in strong support of Judicial Nominee, JOANNA E. SOKOLOW in her consideration and confirmation to the District Family Court of the Third Circuit, for a term to expire in 6 years. As a former Kona Public Defender I had the opportunity to work with Ms. JOANNA E. SOKOLOW inside and outside the courtroom, and she has the experience, integrity, demeanor, and abilities to be an outstanding Family Court Judge, and the people of Hawaii Island would be very lucky to have her in their courtrooms. Most recently I had the opportunity to have Ms. JOANNA E. SOKOLOW preside over a Family Court trial in Waimea as a per diem Judge, and she did a fantastic job, in an area of law which is not easy for judges who have to make hard impactful decisions for our Hawaii Island families. I would highly encourage the committee to confirm her nomination. With Respect and Aloha, Noah Gibson

June 15, 2022

LATE

Senator Karl Rhoads, Chair
Senator Jarret Keohokalole, Vice Chair
Senate Committee On Judiciary

Re: *JC2 – Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the District Family Court of the Third Circuit, Judicial Nominee, JOANNA E. SOKOLOW, for a term to expire in 6 years.*

Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Keohokalole, and Members of the Senate:

I am writing in strong support of Joanna E. Sokolow's nomination to serve as Judge of the District Family Court of the Third Circuit.

Ms. Sokolow and I were colleagues at the Office of the Public Defender for several years until she moved on to private practice. I am also currently serving with her on the Access to Justice – Committee on Initiatives to Enhance Civil Justice where she is the current chair. Over the years, Ms. Sokolow and I have become close friends and I have nothing but the utmost respect for her, personally and professionally.

Ms. Sokolow is a person who is not only committed to ensuring justice, but is also honest, patient, and compassionate when dealing with others. In her legal practice and work as the chair for the Committee on Initiatives to Enhance Civil Justice, Ms. Sokolow has repeatedly demonstrated her keen understanding of the law and how it affects people in their everyday life. These are qualities that makes her an excellent choice for a judge in the District Family Court.

I urge you to confirm Ms. Sokolow's nomination to serve as Judge of the District Family Court of the Third Circuit.

Sincerely,


E. Edward Aquino

LATE

JC-2

Submitted on: 6/15/2022 10:07:06 PM

Testimony for JDC on 6/16/2022 10:30:00 AM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Joseph E. Cardoza | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments: Chair: Hon. Karl Rhoads, Chair Vice Chair: Hon. Jarrett Keohokalole, Vice Chair Committee: Senate Committee on Judiciary Testimony of: Joseph E. Cardoza Organization: None (Testifying as an individual citizen) Hearing Date: Thursday, June 16, 2022 Hearing Time: 10:30 a.m. Place: Conference Room 016 and Via Videoconference Hawai`i State Capitol 415 South Beretania Street Honolulu, Hawai`i Jud. Comm: Judiciary Comm. No. 2 Position: Support of Judicial Nominee JOANNA E. SOKOLOW Dear Chair Rhoads and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary: I am writing in my individual capacity in support of Judicial Nominee Joanna E. Sokolow who has been appointed by Chief Justice Mark E. Recktenwald to serve as a District Family Court Judge of the Third Circuit for a term of six years. I have known Joanna Sokolow through her dedicated service as a Commissioner on the Hawai`i Access to Justice Commission. She currently serves as Chair of the Hawai`i Access to Justice Commission's Committee on Initiatives to Enhance Civil Justice and Right to Counsel in Certain Civil Proceedings. She has worked to create initiatives to address the challenges faced by those appearing before our courts, including those who are of low- and moderate-income and thus, must represent themselves. Given Joanna Sokolow's legal experience and commitment to access to justice, I consider her an excellent candidate for the judicial office of District Family Court Judge of the Third Circuit. Thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony. I do not plan to testify during the hearing on Judiciary Comm. No. 2.



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

Joanna E. Sokolow
District Family Court Judge of the Third Circuit (JC2)

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

FROM: Shannon S. Sheldon
President, Hawaii State Bar Association

Hearing: Thursday, June 16, 2022 at 10:30 a.m.
Conference Room 016 & Videoconference
State Capitol

The Board of Directors of the Hawaii State Bar Association (HSBA) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on the nomination of Joanna E. Sokolow for the position of District Family Court Judge of the Third Circuit.

The HSBA Board of Directors followed its multi-step process to inform the confirming authority of its findings on this appointment.

- Notification to the nominee of the HSBA appointment review process, which includes a questionnaire requesting educational credentials, legal and other professional work experiences, personal references; a resume; a copy of the JSC application; and an interview with the HSBA Board of Directors.
- Notification via electronic transmission to the HSBA membership of the appointment and a request for comments on the nominee.
- Appointment of a three-person review subcommittee of HSBA Board members by the President which serves as a neutral fact-finding body to: review documentation submitted by the nominee, contact references submitted by the nominee, review comments received from the HSBA membership, and conduct follow-up member contact for clarification, if necessary, for presentation to the HSBA Board.

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- Submittal of a report by the three-person review subcommittee to the President, and subsequently to the entire Board.
- Meeting of the President, the Executive Director, and the Nominee prior to the scheduled interview of the nominee by the Board.
- Interview of the nominee by the HSBA Board.
- Deliberation of the HSBA Board to determine if the nominees is qualified or unqualified.
- Submittal of the HSBA Board's recommendation to the confirming authority.

The HSBA President and the Executive Director met with Ms. Joanna Sokolow on June 13, 2022 to discuss the subcommittee's findings. On June 14th, Ms. Sokolow was interviewed by the HSBA Board of Directors in executive session.

Documentation submitted by Ms. Sokolow 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. Sokolow in all categories of the HSBA criteria which include:

- Integrity
- Diligence
- Legal knowledge and ability
- Professional experience
- Temperament
- Financial responsibility
- Public service
- Ability to fulfill the responsibilities and duties of the position

The task of the HSBA was to determine the qualifications and suitability of the Nominee utilizing in large part, the judicial appointments criteria of the American Bar Association. The criteria are not ranked in terms of importance as it is used universally to review the qualifications of appointees for trial and appellate positions. The determination of qualified or unqualified is based on a totality of the documentation received, member and reference comments, and the interview of the individual appointed.

Nominee Joanna Sokolow has a legal background which has consistently provided the indigent and underrepresented individuals with legal services in private practice, government practice, and nonprofit community services. Ms. Sokolow is currently a partner of Sokolow & Gibson LLP in Kailua Kona and a Per Diem Judge for the Third Circuit. Prior Kailua Kona legal employers include: the Children's Law Project of Hawaii, the Office of the Public Defender, and the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii (LASH).

Ms. Sokolow began working at LASH after graduating from law school. She was an AmeriCorps attorney for a year, and then became a staff attorney. Thereafter she was a managing attorney of the Kona office until she left to serve as Deputy Public Defender. The Nominee continued to provide legal services to the indigent accused of felonies and covered the Veterans Treatment Court, the Juvenile Drug Court, and the Juvenile Delinquency Court.

The Nominee has experience in family and criminal law and has litigated extensively in state Courts including the Intermediate Court of Appeals. Her civil experience includes landlord tenant, consumer, wills, and public benefits cases.

The Nominee is a member of the Access to Justice Commission and serves as the Chair of the Committee on Initiatives. She volunteers at the Kona Self Help Desk, the Kids First Program designed to help children of divorcing parents, and the We the People Program which introduces students to government and community service.

After a review of all documentation submitted and the interview of the Nominee, which included dialogue and questioning relating to her background, experiences, and reasons for pursuing the position of District Family Court Judge of the Third Circuit, the Board of the Hawaii State Bar Association found Ms. Joanna Sokolow to be **QUALIFIED** for the position of District Family Court Judge of the Third Circuit.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments for consideration during the deliberations and decision making of your Committee.