



PALAU JUDICIARY

**2025**

# ANNUAL REPORT

*Meet the Justices and Judges  
of the Palau Courts*



This report was collaboratively written and prepared  
by employees of the Palau Judiciary.

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# MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE

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**OLDIAIS NGIRAIKELAU**  
Chief Justice

Each year, hundreds of people appear in court—some voluntarily, others not. Most have never met the person sitting on the high bench wearing a black robe. That person is the judge, and it may be one of us. We are entrusted with resolving disputes, upholding rights, and ensuring that justice is administered fairly, equally, and impartially for all who appear before us.

It is undeniable that our rulings affect people’s lives in significant ways. Because we understand the gravity of our decisions, we devote ourselves to interpreting the law with care, diligence, and a deep respect for the community we serve.

Yet it is natural that people may, at times, harbor small fires of doubt about the fairness of the judicial system and our rulings. They may wonder: *Why did I lose?* Did the judge truly hear and consider what I said? Did the judge seem one-sided? These questions are understandable. No system is perfect, and the person wearing the black robe is human and, as such, is bound to make mistakes.

One small way to reduce these doubts—about equal treatment and the impartiality of our rulings—is to offer the public a glimpse of who we are.

This annual report attempts to do just that. “Meet the Justices and Judges of the Palau Courts” is more than a theme; it is our commitment to transparency and our effort to share a bit about who we are as human beings. By doing so, we hope the public, and all who come before us, will gain a deeper understanding of the work we do and the people behind the bench.

Such understanding fosters openness and strengthens trust in our justice system. When the public has faith in the courts, it goes a long way toward quelling those small fires of doubt about the fairness of the system and our decisions.

# ABOUT THE JUDICIARY

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The Republic of Palau Unified Judicial System consists of the Supreme Court, the Land Court, and the Court of Common Pleas. The Supreme Court was established under the Constitution to safeguard the rule of law, protect individual rights, and ensure the fair and impartial administration of justice. The Supreme Court consists of the Trial Division and the Appellate Division. The Appellate Division is the highest judicial authority in Palau. Together with the Land Court and Court of Common Pleas, the Palau Supreme Court serves the people of Palau through the work of its justices and judges, marshals, probation and pretrial services officers, clerk of courts, and administrative staff whose professionalism ensures the effective operation of the judiciary.

## MEET THE JUSTICES

# APPELLATE DIVISION

**Oldiais Ngiraikelau is the Chief Justice of the Palau Supreme Court. In addition to being the administrative head of the unified judicial system, the Chief Justice serves as a Justice in the Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court .**

Oldiais Ngiraikelau hails from Ngchesar, Melekeok, Koror, and Airai. He graduated from Xavier High School in 1975, received his B.A. from the University of Portland in 1979, and his J.D. from the University of Hawaii Richardson School of Law in 1983. Before his appointment to the bench, Oldiais practiced law for thirty-two (32) years, focusing primarily on criminal defense. He began his criminal defense career with the State of Hawaii Public Defender's Office as a Deputy Public Defender. In 1987, he relocated to Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) where he joined the Office of Public Defender as a staff attorney and eventually became the Public Defender. He returned home in 1991 and continued his criminal defense work until his judicial appointment in 2016. On January 6, 2017, he was sworn-in as an Associate Justice and assigned as the Presiding Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Supreme Court. He served in that capacity until July 2020, when he was appointed Chief Justice of the Palau Supreme Court.

The Chief Justice and his wife of 32 years, Shunrang Dionne Oldiais, have four children and three grandchildren.



**OLDIAIS NGIRAIKELAU  
CHIEF JUSTICE**

**Fred Mitchell Isaacs is an Associate Justice in the Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court.**

Fred was born in Indianapolis, Indiana and grew up on the Purdue University campus. After serving in Army intelligence during the Vietnam War, Fred earned a BA summa cum laude in History, with minors in English Literature, French and Latin. Fred did post-graduate work in Latin before going on to law school at the University of Notre Dame, where he earned his Juris Doctor (JD). A member of numerous state and federal bars, including the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States, Fred was for 13 years a senior law clerk for four federal judges (three Senior Judges on the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and a Chief District Judge in the Seventh Circuit), a commercial litigation associate at two large law firms, the senior appellate counsel at a boutique federal appellate consulting firm, and for more than a decade owned his own federal appellate consulting practice. Prior to joining the bench, Fred served for three years (2019 - 2022) as the Dean of the School of Law at KIMEP University in Almaty, Kazakhstan and for 18 years (2000 - 2018) as a law professor in the School of Business at Marylhurst University in Oregon.

Fred and his wife, Nancy, have been married for 53 years. They have three grown children, eight grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.



**FRED MITCHELL ISAACS  
ASSOCIATE JUSTICE**

# MEET THE JUSTICES

# APPELLATE DIVISION NON-RESIDENT JUSTICES

## ASSOCIATE JUSTICE ALEXANDRO C. CASTRO

**Alexandro C. Castro serves as a part-time Associate Justice in the Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court .**

The Honorable Alexandro C. Castro joined the Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court on May 22, 2017. Then-President of Palau, Tommy E. Remengesau Jr., administered the oath of office to Justice Castro, making him the fourth non-resident justice appointed to the Court.

Justice Castro is currently the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, a position he has held since 2012. In addition to his service as Chief Justice, he has served as an Associate Justice of the CNMI Supreme Court (1998-2012); as Presiding Judge (1993-1998) of the CNMI Superior Court; and as Associate Judge of the Commonwealth Trial Court (1989-1993). He has also served as a Justice Pro Tempore of the Guam Supreme Court.

Prior to his appointment to the CNMI Judiciary, Justice Castro worked as a paralegal for the Public Defender's Office and later served as Attorney General of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, where he was the first indigenous individual to hold that office. During his tenure as Attorney General, he established the Attorney General's Cup Speech Competition, an annual Law Day event for high school students from Rota, Tinian, and Saipan.

While attending the University of Papua New Guinea's Faculty of Law, which follows a British-oriented legal curriculum, Justice Castro represented the university at the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition in the United States.

Justice Castro is admitted to practice law before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the United States Supreme Court. He is married to Carmen Moses Castro of Angaur, and they are blessed with six children.



## ASSOCIATE JUSTICE KATHERINE A. MARAMAN

**Katherine A. Maraman serves as a part-time Associate Justice in the Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court .**

Chief Justice Katherine A. Maraman joined the Supreme Court of Guam in 2008 and first served as Chief Justice from January 2017 to January 2020. She was the first female Chief Justice of Guam. Prior to her appointment to the Supreme Court, she was a Judge for the Superior Court of Guam for 14 years beginning in 1994. She has also served as Legal Advisor to the Governor of Guam from 1988 to 1994. She worked as Assistant Legislative Counsel/Minority Counsel to the Guam Legislature from 1977 to 1987 while she was in private practice from 1977 to 1988.

Chief Justice Maraman serves as a part-time Associate Justice for the Supreme Court of Palau and as Justice Pro Tempore for the Supreme Court of the CNMI. She chairs the Guam Judicial Council; Judiciary's 2024-2027 Strategic Plan Pillar of Justice 1: Improving Court Operations; and the Committee on Self-Represented Litigants. In the past, Chief Justice Maraman has served as a Member and Officer in the Guam Law Library Board of Trustees and the Public Defender Service Corp. Board of Trustees.

In 2025, Chief Justice Maraman was recognized by the Pacific Daily News and Guam Women's Chamber of Commerce as one of the top twenty-five most influential women in Guam. Chief Justice Maraman was honored for her longstanding commitment to the fair and impartial administration of justice. As stated in the recognition, Chief Justice Maraman "is more than a judge and justice—she is a voice for those who need it most, shaping a legal system that truly serves its people."

Additionally, Chief Justice Maraman is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Guam.

Education: Chief Justice Maraman received a B.A. in Economics, cum laude, from Colorado College and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of New Mexico.

Appointed by: Governor Felix P. Camacho to replace Justice Frances H. Tydingco-Gatewood as a Justice of Guam. Maraman was appointed as a Judge of the Superior Court of Guam by Governor Joseph F. Ada.



## ASSOCIATE JUSTICE DANIEL R. FOLEY

**Daniel R. Foley serves as a part-time Associate Justice in the Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court .**

Justice Foley currently serves as a nonresident Justice of the Palau Supreme Court. He served as an Associate Judge of the Hawai'i Intermediate Court of Appeals from 2000 to 2016, handling thousands of appeals from Hawai'i circuit, district and family courts, and administrative agencies. During his tenure, Justice Foley chaired the Hawai'i Access to Justice Commission and co-chaired both the Hawai'i Appellate Task Force and Committee on Equality and Access to the Courts.

Prior to his appointment to the Intermediate Court of Appeals, Justice Foley spent 16 years (1984-2000) doing trial and appellate work in state and federal courts. He was a partner in Partington and Foley for 11 years, spent two years in solo practice and worked as the legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Hawai'i for three years.

As a judge and litigator, Justice Foley has handled nearly every kind of civil and criminal case but is best known for his civil rights litigation. He drafted the rules and regulations of the Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission and taught civil rights litigation at Williamson S. Richardson School of Law. In recognition of Justice Foley's groundbreaking work in civil rights and access to justice, he has been honored by Volunteer Legal Services Hawai'i, Japanese American Citizens League Hawai'i, Hawai'i State Bar Association, Hawai'i Women Lawyers, Hawai'i Justice Foundation, American Civil Liberties Union Hawai'i, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin and Honolulu Magazine.

Prior to his law practice in Hawai'i, Justice Foley spent eight years (1975-1983) in Micronesia as legal counsel to various government bodies, constitutional conventions and organizations. He wrote charters, constitutions and statutes, negotiated and mediated disputes, while assisting Micronesians achieve self-government and sovereignty over their lands and waters.

Justice Foley is a graduate of the University of San Francisco where he obtained his B.A. and J.D. degrees. Justice Foley has been admitted to practice before the courts of Hawai'i, California, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the US Supreme Court, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the Hawaii District Court. Justice Foley has completed mediation training at the Mediation Center of the Pacific and at Pepperdine School of Law. He is a Fellow with the American College of Civil Trial Mediators.



## ASSOCIATE JUSTICE KEVIN BENNARDO

**Justice Bennardo serves as a part-time Associate Justice in the Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court .**

Associate Justice Kevin Bennardo is a faculty member at the University of North Carolina School of Law in the United States. He first came to Palau to be a Court Counsel to the Palau Supreme Court from 2009 to 2010. He has since authored [The Rights and Liberties of the Palau Constitution](#), a treatise on Palauan Constitutional Law published in the Asian-Pacific Law and Policy Journal. He also created the Citor of the Published Judicial Decisions of Palau, a legal research tool that is freely available on the judiciary's website.

## ASSOCIATE JUSTICE DENNIS K. YAMASE

**Justice Yamase serves as a part-time Associate Justice in the Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court .**

The Honorable Dennis K. Yamase is a distinguished jurist and legal scholar with a career spanning more than four decades of public service in the Pacific region. He is a 1982 graduate of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa William S. Richardson School of Law, where he served as a member of the Law Review Editorial Board.

Justice Yamase was nominated to serve as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) on April 9, 2002, and was confirmed by the FSM Congress on June 25, 2002. In May 2015, he was nominated for the position of Chief Justice of the FSM Supreme Court and was confirmed by Congress on July 17, 2015. In 2017, he was appointed as a Part-Time Non-Resident Associate Justice of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Palau (ROP). Each of these appointments marked historic milestones, as he became the first graduate of the Richardson School of Law to serve as a Supreme Court Associate Justice and Chief Justice in any jurisdiction, as well as the first graduate to ever serve on two separate Supreme Courts simultaneously. He assumed the role of Chief Justice in October 2015 and served with distinction until his retirement in 2021.

Throughout and following his legal education, Chief Justice Yamase held numerous influential legal and policy positions across Micronesia and the Pacific. His service includes roles as legal counsel, law clerk, and attorney for the FSM Supreme Court, FSM Congress, and the ROP Supreme Court. His extensive professional experience further includes serving as Senior Senate Legislative Counsel to the Olbiil Era Kelulau (Palau National Congress), Executive Secretary of the ROP National Code Commission, Legislative Counsel and Deputy Legislative Counsel to the FSM Congress, Legal Staff for the 1990 FSM Constitutional Convention, Special Legal Counsel to the Vice President and Minister of Administration of the Republic of Palau, and Executive Director of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Law Revision Commission. He also practiced law privately in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

In addition to his judicial responsibilities, Chief Justice Yamase has made significant contributions to judicial education and legal capacity-building in the Pacific. He is a certified judicial trainer through the Pacific Judicial Development Programme (PJDP) Training of Trainers, and he served as a member of the Pacific Judicial Strengthening Initiative (PJSI) Regional Training Team.

Chief Justice Yamase is also a respected legal author and commentator. His scholarly work addresses critical topics including the domestic application of human rights in the FSM, the development of the FSM Legal Information System website, which provides long-term sustainability of online public access to FSM laws and court decisions, the institutional history of the FSM Supreme Court, and jurisdictional issues involving internal waters and submerged lands of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

Widely regarded as a founding figure in the development of modern judicial institutions, Chief Justice Yamase's career reflects a lifelong commitment to the rule of law, democratic governance, and the strengthening of legal institutions throughout Micronesia and the broader Pacific region. Beyond his distinguished public service, he is deeply respected by his peers and profoundly loved and respected by his seven children and four grandchildren, who regard him as the most remarkable and devoted father and grandfather. His legacy continues to influence judicial practice, legal scholarship, and public service across multiple island nations and generations.



# MEET THE JUSTICES

# TRIAL DIVISION

**Kathleen M. Salii is the Presiding Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Supreme Court.**

Justice Kathleen M. Salii, the longest serving Justice in the Palau Supreme Court, was appointed by Chief Justice Oldiais Ngiraikelau to serve as Presiding Justice of the Trial Division on August 19, 2020, with primary duties being to oversee case management of the trial courts in addition to carrying a full docket.

Since joining the bench and in addition to presiding over cases, Justice Salii represents the Palau Judiciary in various organizations, both locally and internationally, with the goal of ensuring continuing judicial legal education and gender equality in the courts; such organizations include the Pacific Judicial Council's Education Committee, the International Association of Women Judges, and most recently, the Pacific Islands Judicial Officers Association's Executive Council and the Pacific Association of Women Judicial Officers.

Justice Salii received her Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Denver College of Law in 1993 after obtaining her Bachelor's Degree from the University of Hawaii, Hilo. On September 1, 2000, Justice Salii was sworn in as the first woman to serve on the Palau Supreme Court following her appointment by President Kuniwo Nakamura. Prior to this, she served as an Assistant Attorney General from 1993 to 1997, an Acting Attorney General between 1997 and 1998, and then in private practice from 1998 to 2000.

Justice Salii is married and has two beautiful daughters.



**KATHLEEN M. SALII**  
**PRESIDING JUSTICE**

**Lourdes F. Materne is an Associate Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Supreme Court.**

Lourdes F. Materne has served as an Associate Justice of the Palau Supreme Court since May of 2005, bringing more than two decades of judicial and legal service to the Republic of Palau. Justice Materne was born to a Palauan mother and a Pohnpeian father, reflecting a rich cultural heritage with Micronesia.

Justice Materne earned her Juris Doctorate degree from the William S. Richardson School of Law at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 1995. She began her legal career at the Micronesian Legal Services Corporation from 1996 to 2001, serving first as a law clerk and later as a staff attorney.

From 2001 to 2002, she worked as an assistant attorney general in the Office of the Attorney General. She subsequently joined the Palau Judiciary as legal counsel for the Land Court from 2002 to 2003.

Justice Materne's judicial career continued when she was appointed Presiding Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, a role she held from April 2003 to May 2005. In May of 2005, she was appointed to the Supreme Court of Palau, where she continues over two decades of service to the Palau judiciary.



**LOURDES F. MATERNE**  
**ASSOCIATE JUSTICE**

# MEET THE JUSTICES

# TRIAL DIVISION

**Honora E. Remengesau Rudimch is an Associate Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Supreme Court.**

Justice Honora E. Remengesau Rudimch was appointed Associate Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Supreme Court in February of 2021. She took her Oath of Office on March 12, 2021. Prior to her current appointment, she was the Senior Judge of the Palau Court of Common Pleas where she held that position for a little over 15 years. Justice Rudimch represents the Palau Judiciary in the Family Protection Act (FPA) Working Group that is instrumental in the implementation of the FPA. She is a member of the Pacific Judicial Council (PJC), the Pacific Association of Women Judicial Officers (PAWJO), and the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ).

Before coming on the bench, she worked at Micronesian Legal Services - Palau Office, the Olbiilera Kelulau (Palau National Congress) Senate Legal Counsel's Office, and the Domestic Violence Clearing House in Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A. She received her Juris Doctorate Degree from William S. Richardson School of Law at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Hawaii, U.S.A. and her Bachelor's Degree from Washington State University at Pullman, Washington, U.S.A.

Justice Rudimch is married and has two children.



**HONORA E. REMENGESAU  
RUDIMCH  
ASSOCIATE JUSTICE**

**Peter D. Huffman is an Associate Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Supreme Court.**

Pete Huffman is the newest Associate Justice of the Palau Supreme Court. He took his Oath of Office in December 2024 and serves in the Trial Division.

Justice Huffman grew up in Greencastle, Indiana, in the United States. He attended the U.S. Naval Academy and went on to serve for seven years on active duty as an officer in the U.S. Navy. He then attended Yale Law School, where he received his Juris Doctorate degree.

Prior to taking the bench, Justice Huffman worked at a large law firm in New York City, clerked for Judge Henry Floyd on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, and served as Senior Court Counsel for the Judiciary of Palau. Most recently, he was a senior attorney at the environmental nonprofit Natural Resources Defense Council, where he litigated actions to enforce stronger pollution standards and to require government agencies to enforce existing environmental laws.

Justice Huffman is married and has an adventurous seven-year-old son.



**PETER D. HUFFMAN  
ASSOCIATE JUSTICE**

# MEET THE JUSTICES

# TRIAL DIVISION NON-RESIDENT JUSTICES

The off-island Justices support the work of the Supreme Court by assisting with hearings, trials, and specialized matters. Their service ensures continuity of operations and timely case resolution.

## ASSOCIATE JUSTICE RICHARD W. POLLACK

**Richard W. Pollack serves as a part-time Associate Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Supreme Court.**

Justice Pollack retired as an Associate Justice of the Hawai'i Supreme Court in 2020 after eight years of service, during which time he authored more than 150 published opinions. Prior to this appointment, he was a Circuit Court Judge in Hawai'i for twelve years, presiding over both civil and criminal proceedings.

Before serving as a judge, Justice Pollack had a long career in the Office of the Public Defender in Hawai'i, as a deputy public defender in the Appellate and Trial Divisions, as a supervisor of the Office's Maui branch, and as the State Public Defender responsible for the management of 99 attorneys, investigators, and support staff for the state-wide office. During his tenure as the State Public Defender, Justice Pollack served as a member of the committee that drafted more than 400 pattern jury instructions for criminal proceedings. He also frequently taught as an Adjunct Professor/Lecturer at the William S. Richardson School of Law in Honolulu and resumed teaching at the law school following his retirement.

Justice Pollack is a graduate of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and University of California College of Law, San Francisco (formerly the UC Hastings College of Law).



## ASSOCIATE JUSTICE ANTONIO L. CORTES

**Antonio L. Cortes serves as a part-time Associate Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Supreme Court.**

Justice Cortes was born in Berkeley, California, and went on to graduate from the University of California, then Yale Law School. After practicing technology-related civil litigation in Silicon Valley, he moved to Palau in 1993 to work for Koror State Government. He was accompanied by his daughter, Sarah, who graduated from Mindszenty High School in 1996.

Justice Cortes sat for the Palau Bar in 1995 and was admitted in June that year. His work included defending the constitutionality of the Koror Constitution, defending the validity of the Palau Public Land Authority (PPLA) deeds to Koror State Public Land Authority (KSPLA), litigating a Koror-Peleliu boundary dispute, and numerous constitutionally-mandated land-return cases pending before former Land Claims Hearing Office (LCHO). He moved to Guam in 1997 and worked for the Carlsmith Ball firm for two years before opening his own practice in 1999. While in Guam he remained active in Palau, flying back to Palau as required by Palauan clients until 2004, when he returned to the San Francisco Bay Area. There he continued with civil litigation until his retirement in 2019.

After his appointment to the Palau Court in 2021, he realized that he missed practicing law, revised his retirement status to part-time, and is again active in California. He remains keenly interested in protecting the civil rights of minority citizens of the United States. Some of his fondest life recollections involve Saturday fishing trips with his former boss, neighbor, and friend, the late Governor John C. Gibbons, and the Governor's fishing partners, all of whom graciously tolerated his limited spear-fishing and beer drinking talents.



## ASSOCIATE JUSTICE R. BARRIE MICHELSEN

**R. Barrie Michelsen serves as a part-time Associate Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Supreme Court.**

Associate Justice R. Barrie Michelsen was admitted to the Palau bar by Chief Justice Nakamura in 1984. From 1984 to 1996 he maintained an inter-island law practice with clients from the Marshall Islands to Palau. In 1996 he was appointed to the Palau Supreme Court as an associate justice and served until the end of 2004.

He was in private practice in the State of Hawai'i from 2005 to 2015. He also served as an adjunct professor at the University of Hawai'i School of Law for its course on Pacific Islands jurisdictions.

In 2016 he was appointed as one of the original members of the newly constituted Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court, and served as a full time Justice until 2019. He now is a part-time Justice for the Trial Division.

Justice Michelsen is a 1976 graduate of the University of Maine School of Law. He has held positions as an assistant District Attorney in Maine, Deputy Attorney General in Guam, and Chief Litigator for the National Government of the Federated States of Micronesia.



## ASSOCIATE JUSTICE ARTHUR R. BARCINAS

**Arthur R. Barcinas serves as a part-time Associate Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Supreme Court.**

Judge Arthur R. Barcinas has served on the Superior Court of Guam since 2005, following 14 years in private practice and prior service as a Small Claims Hearings Officer, Traffic Court Judge Pro Tempore, and Administrative Hearings Officer. He has held multiple regional judicial appointments, including Part-Time Associate Justice of the Palau Supreme Court (Trial Division) and Judge Pro Tempore for both the CNMI and FSM Supreme Courts. Judge Barcinas presides over Mental Health Court and general jurisdiction matters, and co-chairs the Judiciary's Smart Supervision Project and several rule-drafting committees. He is an active member of the Pacific Judicial Council Education Committee. Judge Barcinas earned his J.D. from Gonzaga University and a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.



# MEET THE JUDGES

# COURT OF COMMON PLEAS

**G. Midth Bells serves as the Senior Judge of the Court of Common Pleas.**

G. Midth Bells was appointed Senior Judge (SJ) of the Court of Common Pleas in 2022. At the time of her appointment, she was an Assistant Special Prosecutor with the Palau Office of the Special Prosecutor. Prior to serving as Assistant Special Prosecutor, she was an Assistant Attorney General with the Palau Office of the Attorney General.

SJ Bells was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, attended Maris Stella Elementary School and graduated from Mindszenty High School, both in Koror, Palau. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology, cum laude, from Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia. After which she returned home and worked with the Palau Environmental Quality Protection Board, then as a private consultant before deciding to go to law school. SJ Bells earned her Juris Doctor (JD) from Pace University School of Law, now Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University, in Westchester County, New York.

SJ Bells is admitted to practice in New York State and took her oath in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of New York, First Judicial Department. In New York she worked for various private law firms as well as a not-for-profit organization representing clients in housing court.



**G. MIDTH BELLS  
SENIOR JUDGE**

# LAND COURT

**Rose Mary Skebong serves as the Senior Judge of the Land Court.**

Rose Mary Skebong is an alumna of Belau's own Maris Stella School and Mindszenty High School. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism at the University of Oregon School of Journalism; and her Juris Doctor's degree at Gonzaga University School of Law.

Ms. Skebong's practical experience includes working as a storekeeper/cashier at Minami Ueki Enterprises (now Island Mart) throughout her high school years; summer internships at the Palau Office of the District Attorney under Kim Batcheller and Kevin Kirk; clerkship as a second year law student at the Spokane County Public Defender's Office; staff of the Political Education Committee on the Compact of Free Association and the Political Education Committee on the Amendment of the Constitution; assistant at the Law Office of Kevin N. Kirk; and a short stint as a solo private practitioner. She has also served on various civic boards, including the National Civil Service Board, the National Development Bank of Palau and the Community Health Center.

Prior to her appointment to the bench as Associate Judge of the Land Court in May of 2003, Judge Skebong was legal counsel for the Land Court and its predecessor Land Claims Hearing Office (LCHO).

Judge Skebong was appointed Senior Judge in 2022 and is currently the only judge serving in the Land Court.

Judge Skebong is married with three children and one granddaughter.



**ROSE MARY SKEBONG  
SENIOR JUDGE**

# CASE HIGHLIGHT

## Land Court Case

Land cases in Palau frequently involve complex issues of customary ownership, family lineage, and constitutional law. The Constitution and laws of the Republic of Palau have placed on the Judiciary the task of determining ownership of all lands within the Republic as a means of returning to the original owners or their heirs any land which was acquired by previous occupying power or their nationals through force, coercion, fraud, or without just compensation or adequate consideration. These cases are approached with particular care, emphasizing fairness, respect for Palauan custom, thorough legal analysis, and transparent decision-making.

The Land Court conducted an official visit to Hatohobei State, the southernmost and least populated state of the Republic. The primary purpose of the trip was to conduct land monumentation and hold on site court hearings related to contested land matters. The team consisted of Senior Judge Rose Mary Skebong, Court Clerk Madeline Tengeluk, Senior Land Registration Officer Benjamin Emesiochel, Land Registration Officers (LROs) Leviticus Lukas Jr. and Rodney Esebei and Marshal Mally Tkel who provided security.

Due to the prohibitively high cost and infrequency of travel to Hatohobei, the Judiciary authorized surveyors from the Bureau of Lands and Surveys (BLS) and residents of Hatohobei with land claims or interests to travel on the same boat with the Land Court staff. Five surveyors with team leader Kahn Iyekar and about 20 Hatohobeians also traveled on the Ryoma, a live-aboard boat with a capacity to carry about 39 passengers.

The trip took about two (2) days, departing from Koror in the early hours of September 18, 2025, and arriving in Hatohobei harbor on September 20, 2025. It was a fortunate trip with calm seas, constant cool breeze, starry skies and the occasional tuna hit on the trolling lines trailing along the ship's wake.






During the five-day visit, LROs were able to verify the accuracy of claims and land records by interviewing claimants and knowledgeable corroborators, reviewing and matching claims to worksheet maps and collecting all relevant information basic to the claims. They also conducted field visits to disputed areas to confirm boundaries and markers and completed several monumentation of claims that have been languishing because devoid of clear identifications. The presence of surveyors ensured that all monumented claims were promptly surveyed and prepared for the mapping and adjudicatory process without much delay.

The visit served several important objectives. It allowed the LROs to gain firsthand understanding of the challenging terrain – the dense jungle and swampy marshland - that complicates and cause delays in monumentation and boundary identification. They used the experience to re-emphasize to the claimants that resolving disputes through agreements, settlements and consensus would accelerate the registration of lands in their state and the registration process as a whole. The visit also allowed the Court to address land disputes that required direct observation of the lands in question.

Conducting hearings in the state where claims are located enabled engagement with the community and allowed the community to witness the full hearing process. It also showcased and reaffirmed the Court's commitment to accomplish its statutory mandate of registering title to all lands in Palau regardless of how small or how remote they may be. Finally, the visit contributed to the building of public trust and confidence in the fairness of the judicial process and integrity of the courts; and underscored the continuing need for periodic on-location hearings.

# CREATION OF THE PALAU BAR ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE (PBAC)



On May 26, 2025, the Palau Supreme Court established the Palau Bar Admissions Committee (PBAC” or “Committee”) in accordance with Article X, Section 14 of the Palau Constitution. This Committee aims to advance the legal profession, uphold justice, and promote civic development. The Committee reviews applications for admission to the Palau Bar, administers the bar exam, including any requests for rescoring, conducts the character and fitness determination process, and reviews and recommends qualified applicants to the Chief Justice for admission to the Palau Bar. Additionally, the Committee reviews and recommends to the Chief Justice whether to grant or deny any request for waiver of the Rules of Admission. The PBAC is also charged with enforcing the continuing legal education (CLE) requirements of the Supreme Court of Palau as set forth in the CLE Rules. Finally, the Committee will regularly review its policies and procedures for improvement.

One of the PBAC’s accomplishments has been the adoption of the NextGen UBE for the Palauan bar examination. Palau is among the first countries to adopt the NextGen UBE which is being administered for the first time in July of 2026. The NextGen UBE will be given in only a portion of states in the United States in the year 2026. Starting in July 2026, the Palauan bar examination will consist of the NextGen UBE and the Palauan-based essay examination.

# MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH GUAM

The Supreme Court entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Judiciary of Guam to administer the NextGen UBE in Guam twice a year—beginning in July of 2026 and then in February and July of each of the following years. The Palauan Essay Examination (PEE) will be administered in Guam on the second afternoon following the NextGen UBE. The PEE may also be administered on an alternative date in Palau.



# STRATEGIC GOALS

Each year, the Judiciary works diligently to advance the six strategic goals established in January 2024.

#1: To preserve and promote the rule of law and judicial independence in the Republic of Palau.

#2: To administer and deliver the highest quality of justice and service in a timely and efficient manner that treats all participants fairly, consistently, and is accessible to all.

#3: To have a skilled and satisfied workforce.

#4: To adjudicate in a timely fashion title to all lands in the Republic of Palau.

#5: To improve technology and information systems.

#6: To create and maintain a repository of all policies and rules.

The following highlights reflect activities carried out in 2025 that support and align with these goals

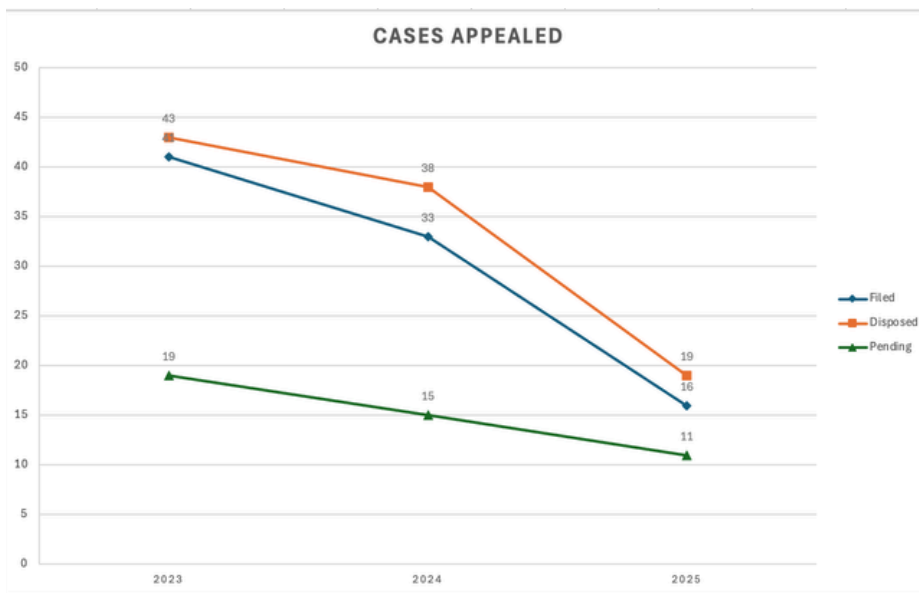
## TO PRESERVE AND PROMOTE THE RULE OF LAW AND JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF PALAU

It is the role of the Judiciary to ensure the fair adjudication of disputes by an impartial and knowledgeable judge who decides cases based on the law and the facts presented by the parties. Fulfillment of this role requires an independent Judiciary. Judges must be free to exercise discretion in all aspects of judicial decision-making without bowing to political or public pressure or fearing the potential impact that a decision may have on their professional lives or on the Judiciary's funding. Judicial independence can exist only when the public and the other branches of government have confidence in and respect for the judicial system.



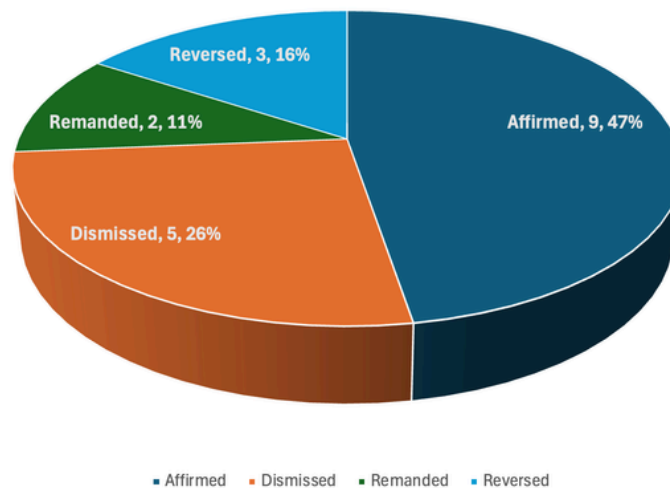
# TO ADMINISTER AND DELIVER THE HIGHEST QUALITY OF JUSTICE AND SERVICE IN A TIMELY AND EFFICIENT MANNER THAT TREATS ALL PARTICIPANTS FAIRLY, CONSISTENTLY, AND IS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

Confidence in the judicial system stems from an individual's belief that he or she is being treated fairly and with respect. That confidence can be undermined when there are barriers to meaningful participation in court processes. The people of Palau must have the tools needed to petition for redress of their injuries. To this end, the Judiciary website contains the rules of procedure, forms, and policies. It also contains some explanatory materials designed to assist unrepresented parties as they navigate the court system. The Judiciary continues to provide court services in both Ngerulmud and Koror.



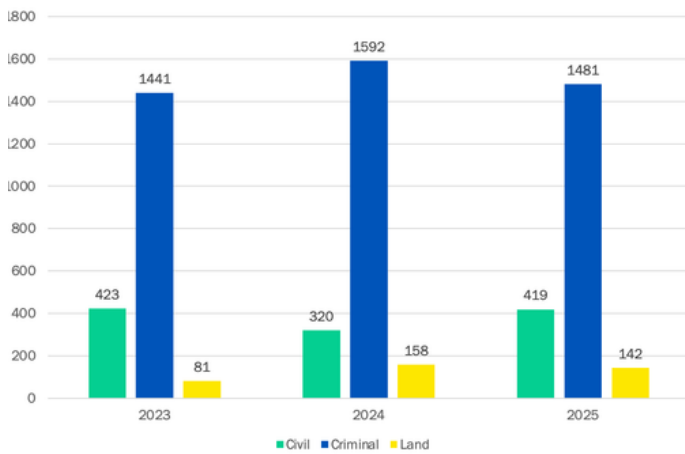
Appellate division, serving as the highest court, has heard and made decisions on 19 cases in 2025. These charts show the number of cases filed for appeal over the course of three years and the decision outcome for the disposed cases in 2025.

**APPEAL OUTCOME**



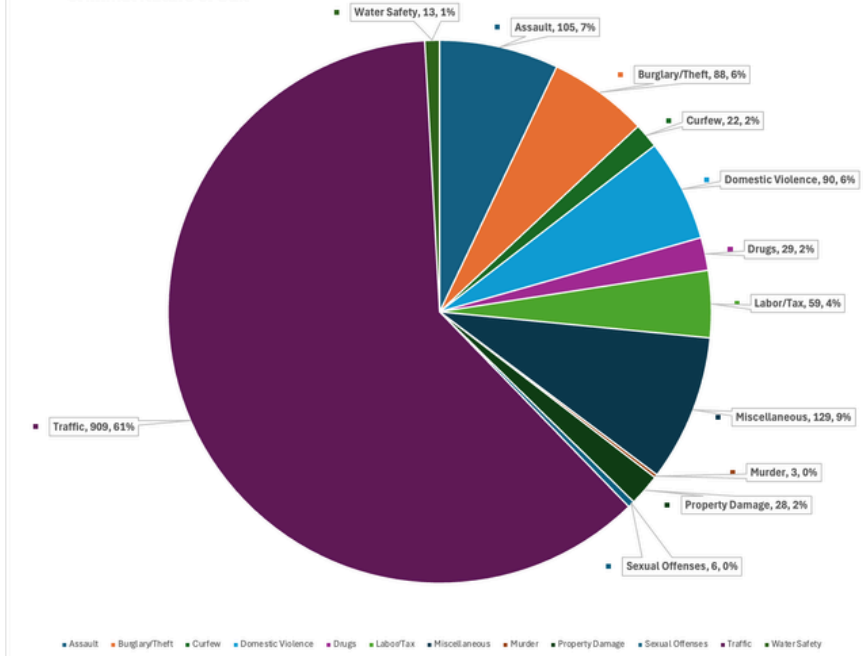
# TO ADMINISTER AND DELIVER THE HIGHEST QUALITY OF JUSTICE AND SERVICE IN A TIMELY AND EFFICIENT MANNER THAT TREATS ALL PARTICIPANTS FAIRLY, CONSISTENTLY, AND IS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL (CONT.)

Cases Filed Trial Courts

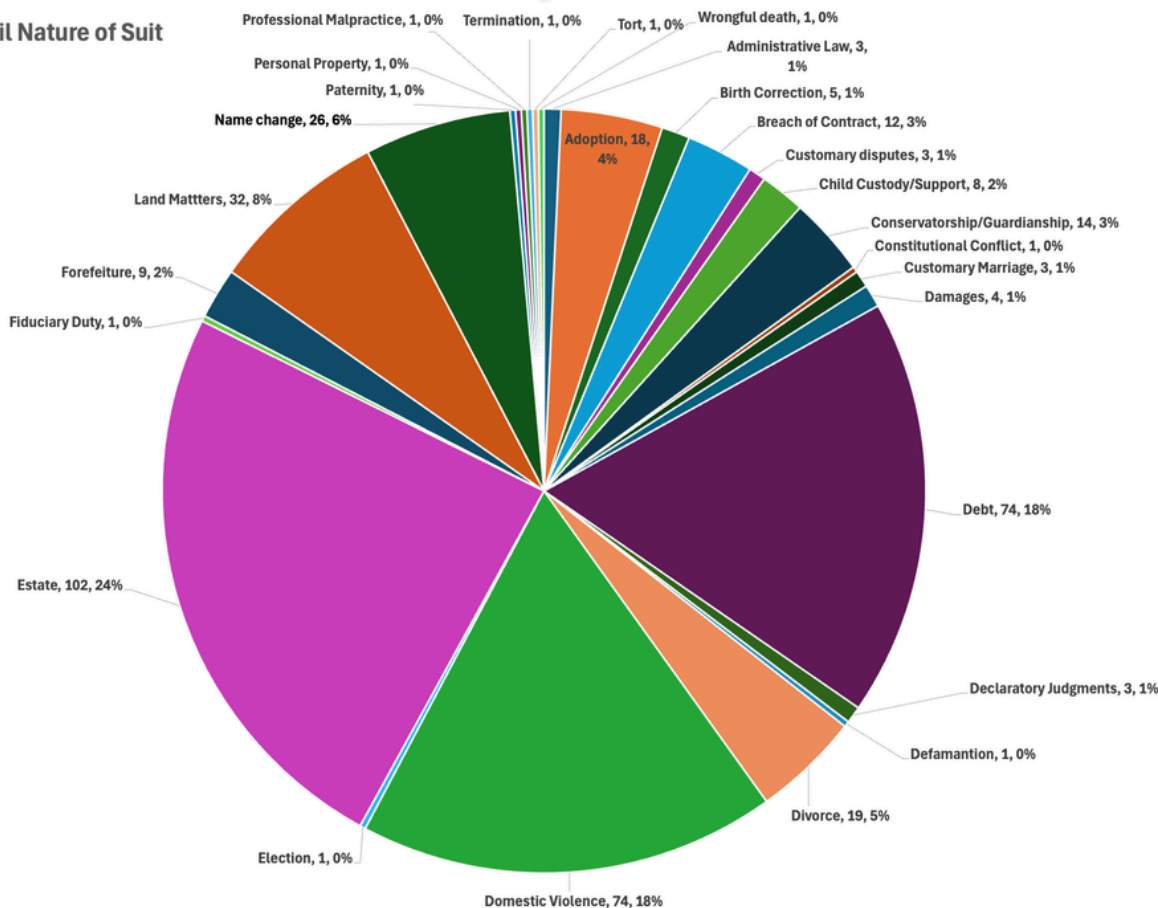


The trial courts hear most of the cases filed in the Judiciary. These charts shows the the different types of cases filed, having criminal cases with the most filed.

Criminal Nature of Suit



Civil Nature of Suit



# G3 TO HAVE A SKILLED AND SATISFIED WORKFORCE

The effective administration of justice requires a highly skilled and satisfied workforce. Deliberate attention to recruiting, developing, and retaining high quality staff at all levels is critical. Because lack of expertise and poor morale would have a negative impact on the services provided by, and the public's perception of, the Judiciary, steps are taken to foster employees' professional and personal development. Continued improvements are needed to ensure regular and open communication among the court units in Koror and Ngerulmud and to provide staffing mechanisms that meet the needs of all courts and the two courthouses. The Judiciary offers its Justices, Judges, and court employees opportunities for continual development and training both on-island and off-island. Through the continual training, the Judiciary stays up-to-date on the increasing complexity of law and court procedures, emerging legal and ethical issues, new technologies, procedural fairness in all court operations and interactions with the public, and new management and service techniques.

## JUDICIARY WELLNESS PROGRAM

The Judiciary remains committed to sustaining the Wellness Program as an integral part of employee well-being.

The Court promoted employee wellness through support initiatives focused on work-life balance, stress management, and professional well-being. During FY 2025, the Judiciary continued its efforts to keep the Wellness Program active and effective. With support from Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Funding, the Judiciary enhanced the physical fitness and overall wellness of its personnel through structured health and wellness activities aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles and reducing non-communicable disease risk factors. Key initiatives included the annual Biggest Loser Challenge, the Walk-a-Thin event, and participation in inter-agency volleyball tournaments. These activities not only supported physical health but also fostered teamwork, camaraderie, and positive morale among staff. Encouraged by consistent positive feedback, the Judiciary remains committed to sustaining the Wellness Program as an integral part of employee well-being.



## TRAININGS AND CONFERENCES

Judges and staff participated in annual judiciary trainings covering judicial ethics, legal updates, case management, and professional development to ensure high standards of service.



### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FEBRUARY 18, 2025

On Tuesday, February 18, 2025, over 25 personnel from the Palau Judiciary attended a half-day seminar on the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) basics, covering both traditional and generative AI and its potential impact on the Judiciary's work. The seminar was designed to inform judicial decision-making by explaining current use of this innovative technology as the Judiciary looks to adopting its policies on AI-use in its work, recognizing that AI can provide greater efficiencies in preparing legal documents and can improve access to justice. The seminar was presented by Ms. Joleen Ngoriakl, Owner and Principal Consultant at North Pacifican Co. and Founder of Digital Citizenship Institute (seated third from the right), together with Professor Lyria Bennet Moses, Head of the University of New South Wales, Sydney School of Law, Society, and Criminology via a pre-recorded lecture. The seminar also presented case studies on AI in the courtrooms today and implementation of AI in practice, as well as a demonstration of the potential pitfalls of using AI. The seminar concluded with a question and answer session, allowing attendees to gain a meaningful understanding of the benefits and risks of AI-use in the justice system. The Palau Judiciary is committed to adopting a policy integrating the use of AI in its work, acknowledging the concerns about authenticity and accuracy and the integrity of court proceedings and decisions while maintaining the integrity of the process and ethical standards.





**GENERAL JUDICIAL TRAINING**

**RENO, NEVADA | MARCH 28 - APRIL 14, 2025**

In 2025, Justice Huffman attended the two-week General Jurisdiction course at the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada. General Jurisdiction is the College's flagship course, covering a broad range of judicial topics from procedure and evidence to courtroom security and civility. The course is taught by current and former judges as well as experienced attorneys and legal experts. In addition to the substantive material, the course provided an opportunity to meet and learn from the other judges attending the course, including colleagues from Guam, FSM, and Hawai'i.

**2025 9TH CIRCUIT JUDICIAL CONFERENCE**

**MONTEREY/CARMEL, CALIFORNIA | JULY 20 - 25, 2025**

In 2025, Justice Huffman also participated in the Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference in Monterey, California. The annual conference brings together trial and appellate judges from the United States Ninth Circuit for presentations and discussions on substantive developments in the law and legal profession. The 2025 conference included sessions on the law of natural disasters, developments in the use of artificial intelligence in court, and the impacts of incarceration on physical and mental health. Speakers included Justice Elena Kagan of the U.S. Supreme Court and Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative. As part of the conference, Justice Huffman also attended the meeting of the Pacific Islands Committee, which brings together judges from across regional jurisdictions.

**MEDIATION TRAINING****APRIL 2025**

*Sharing Our Knowledge . . . In Paradise by Jill L. Burkhardt, United States Magistrate Judge, Southern District of California*

In April, Magistrate Judges Heather Kennedy (District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands), Stacie Beckerman (District of Oregon), and Jill Burkhardt (Southern District of California) traveled to the Republic of Palau to conduct mediation training for attorneys and lay mediators in that Pacific island nation.

Comprised of 340 islands and with a population of about 15,000 people, the Republic of Palau is located east of the Philippines and southwest of Guam. Palau is a Freely Associated State and, as such, has a special relationship with the United States through the Compacts of Free Association. These agreements allow nations to maintain their sovereignty and independence while receiving U.S. financial and defense support.

Many of the litigated disputes in Palau involve the use and ownership of land. In Palau, land was traditionally held (rather than “owned”) for the benefit of the community, and traditional land ownership was largely communal, based on clan and lineage systems. Decision-making power has typically rested with chiefs and other influential clan members. Decisions about the control of lands were made at clan meetings and were recorded primarily through oral history rather than a written registry. These traditions were impacted by the colonization of the islands by Spain (1885-1898), Germany (1889-1914), and Japan (1918-1945). Most impactful were the Japanese, who undertook to create a land registry called the tochi daicho. Unfortunately, the registry did not always accurately reflect the true status of the land.

In addition to privately owned lands (owned by individuals or clans), some land is publicly held by the State Public Land Authority. Non-Palauans cannot own land, but land can be leased to foreign entities for up to 99 years.

Today, several factors contribute to the complicated nature of land disputes including unrecorded, oral clan decisions affecting the control of lands, changing cultural expectations regarding individual vs. communal control and ownership, significant portions of land that have never been recorded in the land registry, errors in the land registry, and differing expectations of the State’s responsibility with respect to public lands. Land disputes in litigation are handled by a dedicated Land Court. Unfortunately, the disputes are complicated and there are a number of vacancies on the bench, so there is a substantial and growing backlog of Land Court cases.

Through the Ninth Circuit Pacific Island Committee, and on behalf of the Palau Judiciary, Chief Justice Oldiais Ngiraikelau invited Magistrate Judges Kennedy, Beckerman and Burkhardt to Palau to conduct mediation training. At this 2-1/2 day training, the magistrate judges worked with a group of enthusiastic attendees interested in developing their mediation skills. Some were lawyers and others were not; some had prior mediation training and experience, and others did not. All were tremendously committed and engaged. The training consisted of a balance between interactive presentations, demonstrations by the trainers, and role playing by the attendees with on-the-spot feedback by the trainers. The hypotheticals featured a personal injury dispute, a product liability claim, a small claims matter between two neighbors, and a land dispute. The training was structured around different mediation skills and how they are integrated into the different stages of a mediation. In small groups, each mediator-in-training was able to practice each component of mediation and also conduct two full mock mediations. Each participant jumped into the training, and particularly the role playing, wholeheartedly. To a person, they demonstrated the temperament and skills critical to successful dispute resolution.

Skilled local mediators are uniquely suited to help Palauans resolve their land disputes more quickly and potentially with better outcomes than could be achieved through protracted litigation. This is in part because these disputes often have more at issue than can be addressed through the dispassionate application of legal principles. At stake are not only people's longstanding ties to their homelands, but their ties to each other. Maintaining or restoring relationships within and between clans, and within and between family members, is as important as any other outcome of the litigation. Mediators who are part of the community and culture and who have training in alternative dispute resolution have the ability to make a huge positive impact. To have been given the opportunity to advance those ends was a great honor and privilege.



**NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF BAR EXAMINERS (NCBE) CONFERENCE  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON | MAY 1 - 4, 2025**

In the first week of May 2025, Justice Isaacs traveled to Seattle, Washington to attend the annual meeting of the National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE). The NCBE, which is charged with overseeing the creation and administration of standardized bar examinations, consists of 56 member jurisdictions: all 50 of the United States, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the Republic of Palau. Accompanying Justice Isaacs on this trip were Justice Honora Rudimch and Chief Appellate Clerk Vernice Rechebei. They attended the NCBE conference as members of the newly formed Palau Bar Admissions Committee (PBAC) and Palau's official representatives to the NCBE.

The principal reason for their attendance at this conference was to learn about the NextGen Uniform Bar Examination (UBE), a three-part standardized test for bar admissions that will eventually replace the current UBE, a collection of four different tests currently used by most of the NCBE's 56 member jurisdictions. (The existing UBE is scheduled to be phased out by 2028.) Although each of them had attended various online (Zoom) training sessions during the preceding year, they needed to learn more about the specifics – the “nuts-and-bolts” – of administering the NextGen exam. The importance of this training lay in the fact that Palau will join Guam in administering the NextGen UBE in July of 2026, so every opportunity to learn about the new test – its components, its administration, and its grading/scoring – was taken.

Over the course of the three and one-half days of training, there were several sessions each day: roundtable discussions (justices only), breakout meetings covering various topics for administrators and graders, and even during meals speakers presented information about the NextGen test and explained the complicated metrics behind the design and “beta” testing of NextGen. As informative as this conference was to those whose jurisdictions were considering adopting the NextGen exam, the 2026 conference (scheduled to be held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) is likely to be even more “nuts-and-bolts” oriented, as all of the beta testing will have been completed and jurisdictions like Palau will be gearing up for the first-ever administration of the new test in July.



### **JUDICIARY WIDE TRAINING NGERULMUD, PALAU | JUNE 16-18, 2025**

Over the course of three days from June 16-18, 2025, all Judiciary personnel, from justices and judges to staff from all departments, attended its first ever, in-country training, during which time all court operations ceased except for emergency matters. This reflects the commitment to having a skilled and knowledgeable workforce in its effort to ensure efficiency in the work of the courts. The training included off-island educators and was made possible through the Judiciary's compact funds allocated to judicial training.

The training consisted of joint sessions for both justices/judges and staff, with sessions including procedural justice: learning the core principles of procedural justice and emphasizing the importance of fairness and impartiality; case flow management and accountability and court performance; social media and ethics: how to navigate the ethical complexities of social media usage both professionally and personally; managing workplace stress; and court security. In separate sessions, justices and judges focused on judicial ethics for judges and families, judicial disqualification, and the use of artificial intelligence. Personnel focused on leadership roles and responsibilities, customer service skills, legal advice vs. legal information, meaningful courtroom interpretation, and ethics for court staff.

The training was also designed to encourage open and meaningful interaction among personnel. The Palau Judiciary is grateful for the invaluable assistance from Russ Mathieson, Education Specialist for the Pacific Islands Judicial Programs of the Ninth Circuit to coordinate the training, and to the presenters who spoke over the three days, who were: Justice Daniel Carothers of the North Dakota Supreme Court, and from the Guam Judiciary: Chief Justice Robert Torres of the Guam Supreme Court, Administrator Danielle Rosette, Language Access Manager David Welle, Chief Marshal Leo S. Diaz, and Deputy Marshals Cameron Mantanona and Greg Cruz. The seminar concluded with a question-and-answer session, allowing attendees to refresh their skills in their day-to-day work in the justice system. The Palau Judiciary is committed to maintaining a skilled and trained workforce to assist the public, and this training is but one way to ensure consistency in services and to continue to maintain the integrity of court proceedings and the high ethical standards of the Judiciary.

## COURT TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE 2025 KANSAS CITY, USA | SEPTEMBER 16 - 18, 2025

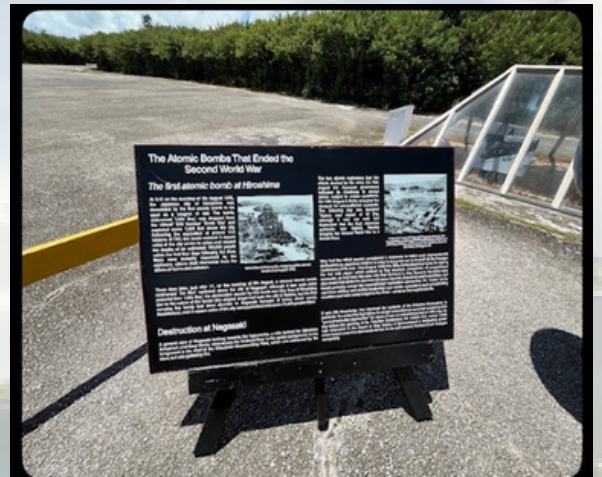
The Court Technology Conference 2025 (CTC 2025), hosted by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), was held on September 16–18, 2025, in Kansas City, Missouri. As the world’s largest gathering dedicated to court technology, the conference brought together judges, court administrators, IT leaders, and justice-sector professionals to explore how technology is reshaping court operations and public service. Through more than 60 educational sessions, hands-on workshops, keynote addresses, and a large technology marketplace, CTC 2025 focused on practical, court-ready solutions, covering topics such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, data management, digital access to courts, and business process transformation.

The key point of CTC 2025 was the responsible and practical integration of technology, especially artificial intelligence, into court systems to improve efficiency, security, and access to justice while preserving trust, fairness, and human judgment. Discussions repeatedly emphasized that technology should augment, not replace, judicial decision-making. AI was highlighted as the most prominent theme, with a strong focus on governance, transparency, bias mitigation, and real-world use cases such as document review, scheduling, and data analysis, alongside equally critical priorities like cybersecurity resilience and equitable digital access for the public.



**PACIFIC JUDICIAL COUNCIL (PJC) MID-YEAR CONFERENCE  
SAIPAN, CNMI | SEPTEMBER 23 - 26, 2025**

During the last week of September 2025, several members of the Palau judiciary, including Chief Justice Ngiraikelau, Presiding Justice Salii, Associate Justices Rudimch and Isaacs, among others, travelled to Saipan to attend a joint event, viz., a mid-year Pacific Judicial Council (PJC) Conference and the annual Northern Mariana Islands Bar Association conference. In addition to the obvious advantage of being able to spend three days in face-to-face meetings with colleagues from throughout the Pacific, folks they otherwise rarely get to “see” except virtually, they spent part of their first day visiting Tinian to see, among other things, the airfields and bunkers where two atomic bombs were secured in the final days of World War II.



The attendees were able to observe oral arguments before the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, which sat in special session, followed over the next two days by various presentations and sessions covering a wide array of topics, including training in Artificial Intelligence (AI), statutory and constitutional interpretation, pretrial detention best practices, and even presentations by representatives.

**ATTENDING INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP FOR ICAO TRIP STRATEGY (IOM)  
KOROR, PALAU | NOVEMBER 24, 2025**

On November 24th, our court staff attended the 'ICAO TRIP (Traveller Identification Programme) Strategy Workshop' held by International Organization for Migration (IOM).

During the workshop, the TRIP Strategy's five pillars and related systems were introduced by Ms. Laura Scorreti, Senior regional Immigration and Border Governance Specialist from IOM Regional Office for Asia & the Pacific. This workshop was held to ensure that e-MRP passports scheduled to be introduced under the "Enhancing Border Management Capacity Through the Introduction of an E-Passport for the Republic of Palau" are issued and managed based on ICAO identity verification standards.

Participants shared insights and discussed challenges and compatibility with current passport management system with the TRIP Strategy.



### WESTLAW WORKSHOP

KOROR, PALAU | DECEMBER 3, 2025

On December 3, 2025, the Judiciary reviewed its contract for legal research with Westlaw representative Joe Amos. During the combined review and training process, court staff were shown new updates to the Westlaw search tools and the various different types of contracts available to the Palau Judiciary. The court also discussed the possibility of its database of case law becoming available in the Westlaw database to assist the court, bar members, the public, and educational institutions in advancing knowledge in general and legal research in particular.



### THANKSGIVING

In 2025, the Court held its first Thanksgiving luncheon, bringing together all Judiciary personnel to celebrate the season of gratitude through potluck dishes, games, prizes, and shared laughter.



### APPRECIATION PARTY

In December 2025, we ended the year with an appreciation party, a wonderful way to close yet another productive year and to show our gratitude for each of our staff whose hard work ensures the successful operation of the Judiciary. With good food, good company, and raffle prizes, we concluded the year with a spirit of appreciation and the hope of achieving even more in the coming year. We thank all Judiciary staff for their continued dedication and determination to advance our mission of providing access to justice for the Republic.



### 2025 NEW HIRES

In 2025, we welcomed 10 new court employees: Deputy Assistant to the Administrative Assistant/Chamber Clerk of the Office of the Chief Justice Jeanne M. Kilcullen, Court Counsel Megan Kwek, Court Counsel Matthew Nelson, Senior Court Counsel Esther Gabriel, General Counsel Sherry Gilberston, Computer Technician Norma Norman, Chief Marshal Ismael Aguon, Deputy Marshal Besul Aitaro, Deputy Marshal Cahlviz Ngiralbong, and Deputy Marshal Zaddy Rechelluul.



A couple of more conferences and trainings were participated in throughout the year. This table shows all the trainings and conferences attended through out the whole year.

## 2025 TRAVEL REPORT

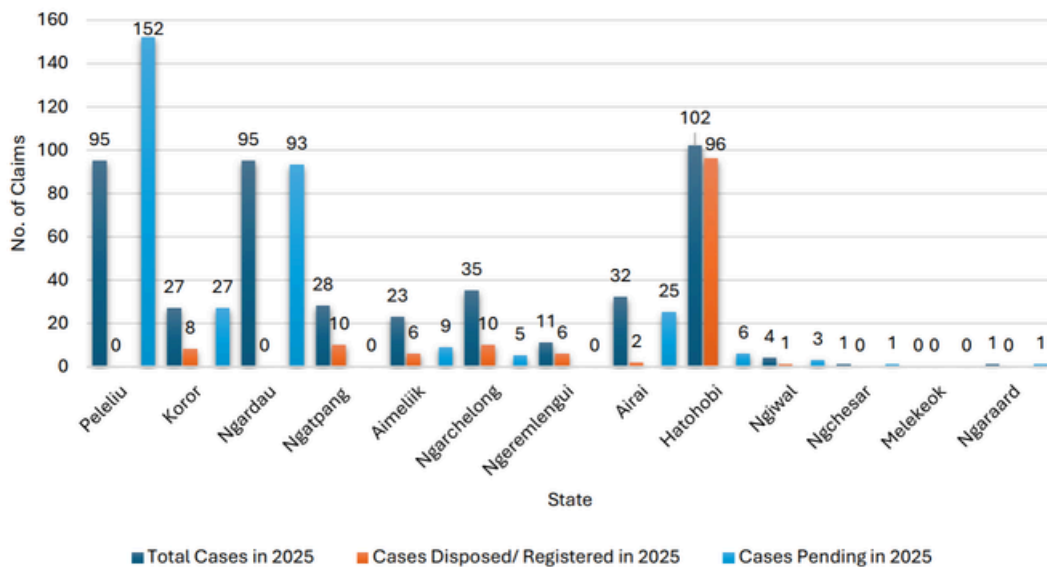
NAME	TRAVEL PERIOD (FROM)	TRAVEL PERIOD (TO)	DESTINATION	PURPOSE OF TRAVEL
Oldiais Ngiraikelau	01/22/25	02/03/25	San Diego, California	FJC Mid-Winter Workshop and the Pacific Island Committee Meeting
Kathleen M. Salii	02/08/25	02/15/25	Auckland, New Zealand	2025 Pacific Judicial Conference and Chief Justices leadership forum
Honora E. R. Rudimch	03/18/25	03/24/25	YAP, FSM	Training on Enhancing Judicial Performnce through stress management and focused decision making
Rose Mary Skebong	03/18/25	03/24/25	YAP, FSM	Training on Enhancing Judicial Performnce through stress management and focused decision making
G. Midth Bells	03/18/25	03/24/25	YAP, FSM	Training on Enhancing Judicial Performnce through stress management and focused decision making
Efrecia R. Kazuma	03/23/25	03/29/25	Nadi, Fiji	Pacific Civil Registrars Gathering
Allison Sengebau	03/23/25	03/29/25	Nadi, Fiji	Pacific Civil Registrars Gathering
Peter D. Huffman	03/28/25	04/14/25	Reno, Nevada	General Judicial Training
Bailey J. Eberdong	04/26/25	05/05/25	GUAM	Probation Training by PJC
Ryobch W. Luii	04/26/25	05/05/25	Columbus, Ohio	GFOA Budget Academy
Se-Belau Kual	04/26/25	05/05/25	Guam	Probation Training by PJC
Jr Young Sikyang	04/26/25	05/05/25	GUAM	Probation Training by PJC
Alvera Azuma	04/26/25	05/05/25	Guam	Probation Training by PJC
Honora E. R. Rudimch	04/29/25	05/06/25	Seattle, Washington	2025 NCBE ABAC Conference
Vernice Rechebei	04/29/25	05/06/25	Seattle, Washington	2025 NCBE ABAC Conference
Fred M. Isaacs	04/29/25	05/15/25	Seattle, Washington	2025 NCBE ABAC Conference
Biusech F. Tabelual	05/12/25	05/19/25	Papua New Guinea	PCJE Managing and Reporting on Fraud and Corruption Workshop
Dudley D. Skilang	05/12/25	05/19/25	Papua New Guinea	PCJE Managing and Reporting on Fraud and Corruption Workshop
Kathleen M. Salii	06/16/25	06/23/25	San Juan, Puerto Rico	NJC Court Administration Academy
Trevor K. Villanueva	06/28/25	07/04/25	SAIPAN	To meet with Saipan Court Team to evaluate E-Court and it's capabilities to assist us in our negotiations and awarding bid.
Georgine M. Bells	06/28/25	07/04/25	SAIPAN	To meet with Saipan Court Team to evaluate E-Court and it's capabilities to assist us in our negotiations and awarding bid.
Allison Sengebau	06/28/25	07/04/25	SAIPAN	To meet with Saipan Court Team to evaluate E-Court and it's capabilities to assist us in our negotiations and awarding bid.
Oldiais Ngiraikelau	07/18/25	07/25/25	Monterey/Carmel, CA	2025 9th Circuit Judicial Conference
Peter D. Huffman	07/20/25	07/25/25	Monterey/Carmel, CA	2025 9th Circuit Judicial Conference
Connie Joy Saburo	08/04/25	08/07/25	Kosrae, FSM	Case Management for Judges and Chief Clerks Conference

NAME	TRAVEL PERIOD (FROM)	TRAVEL PERIOD (TO)	DESTINATION	PURPOSE OF TRAVEL
Madeline Tengeluk	08/04/25	08/07/25	Kosrae, FSM	Case Management for Judges and Chief Clerks Conference
Alaveanda Alfonso	08/04/25	08/07/25	Kosrae, FSM	Case Management for Judges and Chief Clerks Conference
Esichang Leia Taro	08/04/25	08/07/25	Kosrae, FSM	Case Management for Judges and Chief Clerks Conference
Lue Dee Kotaro	08/08/25	08/13/25	Los Angeles, California	To conduct Appellate Vacancy interviews
Ernestine Rengiil	08/08/25	08/13/25	Los Angeles, California	To conduct Appellate Vacancy interviews
Oldiais Ngiraikelau	08/08/25	08/13/25	Los Angeles, California	To conduct Appellate Vacancy interviews
Ebil Y. Matsutaro	08/08/25	08/13/25	Los Angeles, California	To conduct Appellate Vacancy Interview
Yukiwo P. Dengokl	08/08/25	08/13/25	Los Angeles, California	To conduct Appellate Vacancy Interview
Kathleen M. Salii	08/18/25	08/25/25	Papua New Guinea	International Judicial Conference
Eden Benhart	09/06/25	09/15/25	SAIPAN	APIPA Conference
Syringa Gulibert	09/06/25	09/15/25	SAIPAN	APIPA Conference
Delia Rae Joseph	09/06/25	09/15/25	SAIPAN	APIPA Conference
Shaina N. Shiro	09/06/25	09/15/25	SAIPAN	APIPA Conference
G. Midth Bells	09/05/25	09/22/25	KANSAS CITY	2025 COURT TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE
Trevor K. Villanueva	09/12/25	09/22/25	KANSAS CITY	2025 COURT TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE
Knox O. Tkel	09/12/25	09/22/25	KANSAS CITY	2025 COURT TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE
Ryobch W. Luii	09/12/25	09/22/25	KANSAS CITY	2025 COURT TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE
Lue Dee Kotaro	09/12/25	09/22/25	KANSAS CITY	2025 COURT TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE
Honora E. R. Rudimch	09/23/25	09/29/25	SAIPAN	Joint Annual District Court/PJC Mid year Conference
Fred M. Isaacs	09/23/25	09/29/25	SAIPAN	Joint Annual District Court/PJC Mid year Conference
Rose Mary Skebong	11/03/25	11/10/25	Phonpei, FSM	PJC American College of Trial Lawyers Trial Practice Training Conference
Raldston Ngirengkoi	11/15/25	11/21/25	GUAM	Marshal Training with U.S. District Court
Besul Aitaro	11/15/25	11/21/25	GUAM	Marshal Training with U.S. District Court
Keith Ngirchomlei	11/15/25	11/21/25	GUAM	Marshal Training with U.S. District Court
Leah Takeo	11/22/25	11/28/25	Majuro, Marshall Island	PIALA Conference
La-Yeav O. Ngemaes	11/22/25	11/28/25	Majuro, Marshall Island	PIALA Conference

The Land Court began the year 2025 with 296 pending cases carried over from the previous year. Throughout the year, 153 new cases were added for a total of 449 cases. The court heard, determined and otherwise disposed of 143 cases and referred three (3) cases to Trial Division of the Supreme Court. The figures below show the Land Court’s progress in 2025.

*Status of Cases by State*

State	No. of Cases	Cases Disposed/ Lots Registered	No. of Cases Pending
Aimeliik	23	6/9	17
Airai	32	2	30
Hatohobi	102	96	6
Koror	27	8/10	19
Melekeok	0	0	0
Ngaraard	1	0	1
Ngarchelong	30	10	20
Ngardmau	95	2 (Referred to Trial Division)	93
Ngatpang	28	10	18
Ngchesar	1	0	1
Ngeremlengui	11	11/14	0
Ngjwal	4	1 (Referred to Trial Division)	3
Peleliu	95	0	95
Totals	449	146 / 33	303



The Judiciary remains committed to modernizing its technology and information systems to ensure efficient court operations, secure digital infrastructure, and improved public access to justice. Advancements in electronic systems, hardware, and digital services are essential to providing reliable tools for court users and staff, reducing barriers to participation, and strengthening overall judicial performance.

### **Addressing Technological Challenges**

In 2025, the Judiciary confronted significant technological challenges when it was determined that the existing website and electronic-filing system lacked necessary security protections, leaving them vulnerable to potential attacks. As a precaution, both systems were taken offline while comprehensive upgrades to hardware and software were initiated. The Judiciary's website was restored in early 2026 with enhanced security features, and a contract has since been executed to procure a new electronic filing and case management system that will ensure long-term stability, accessibility, and data protection.

### **System Upgrades and Modernization**

To support a uniform and modern working environment, the Judiciary successfully completed the final phase of its computer upgrade project, replacing 28 outdated workstations with new computers running Windows 11 Pro. This upgrade ensures that all staff members are equipped with reliable and efficient technology that improves productivity and supports the Judiciary's mission.

In November 2025, the Judiciary further advanced its modernization efforts by contracting for a new Case Management System capable of digital filing. This expanded functionality will enhance accessibility for court users, particularly those in remote areas and self-represented litigants who may face challenges filing documents in person. The new system is designed to provide easier access, faster processing, and greater transparency for all court users.

### **Enhancing Access and Promoting Equity**

As the Judiciary continues to build and improve its technology infrastructure, equal access to justice remains a central priority. Reliable digital tools, secure online services, and modern case management systems are critical to ensuring that every individual in Palau, regardless of location, can meaningfully access the courts. These improvements help mitigate disparities in access, reduce delays, and reinforce fairness and integrity throughout the judicial process.

The Palau Judiciary continues to maintain a repository of all court policies and rules, made available physically in the Palau Judiciary Law Library or digitally on the Palau Judiciary Website. One of the court's goals is to have all the laws of the Republic accessible to the public through the Palau Judiciary website.

Republic of Palau - Judiciary Branch

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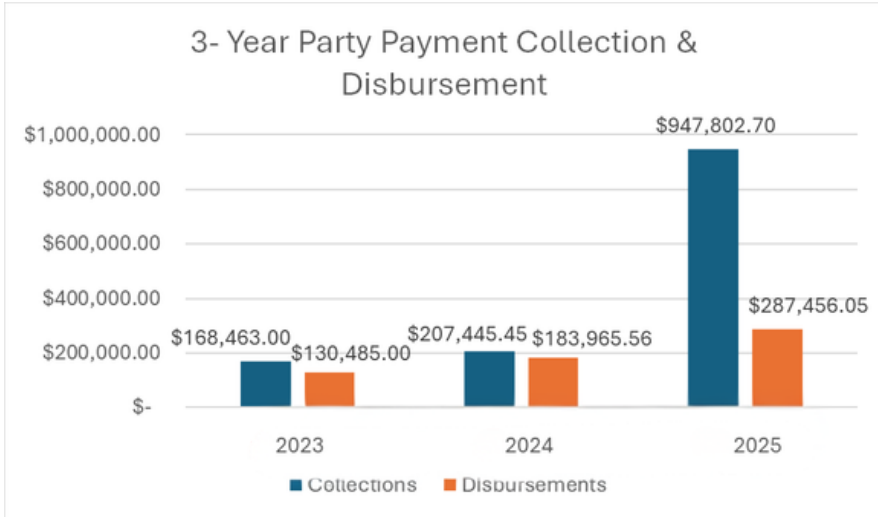
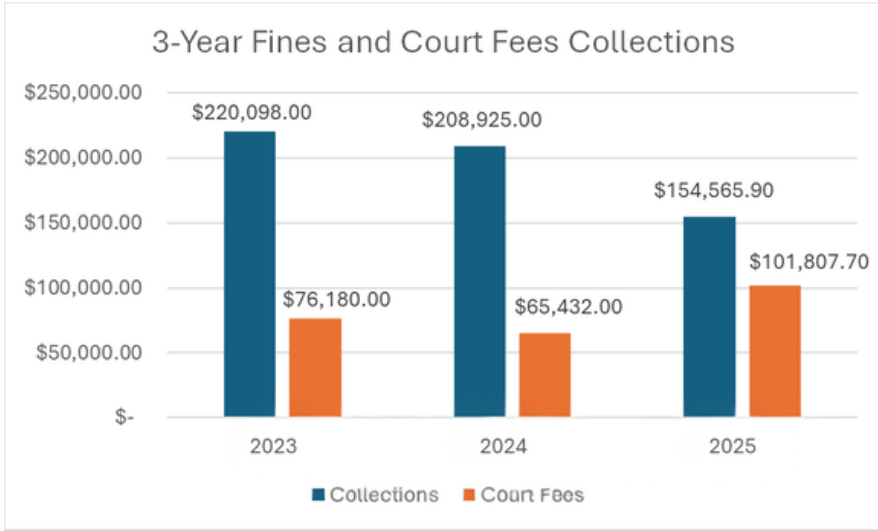
**Judiciary Branch**

The Judiciary's purpose is to preserve and enhance the rule of law by providing a just, efficient, and accessible mechanism for resolving disputes. The Judiciary will interpret and apply the law, as modified by custom and tradition, consistently, impartially, and independently to protect the rights and liberties guaranteed by the laws and Constitution of the Republic of Palau.

About the Artwork  
Contact us: (680) 488-4979  
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# 2025 FINANCIAL REPORT



Every year, the Palau Judiciary receives appropriations from the national government to ensure services to the public remains uninterrupted. The chart above shows the total amount received for calendar year 2025. Calendar year 2025 data above covers nine months of Fiscal Year 2025 and three months of Fiscal Year 2026. In other words, we can conclude that accomplishments highlighted in this report in terms of dollar value would be \$4,017,444.20.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Chief Justice takes this opportunity to acknowledge the work performed by the Annual Report Committee consisting of Administrative Director Kenneth T. Uyehara, Clerk of Courts Allison Sengebau, Human Resources Specialist Shania N. Shiro, Law Librarian Halora Paulus, Acting Director of Management Information Systems Knox O. Tkel, Budget Officer Ryobch Luii, Administrative Assistant to the Chief Justice Lue Dee Dechol Kotaro, and General Counsel Sherry M. Gilbertson. Halora Paulus is recognized for her unending patience in making sure the pictures and biographical information of each of the justices and judges met with their approval. Knox O. Tkel is acknowledged for her skill in designing one of the best annual reports the Palau Judiciary has published. It would be remiss not to recognize the contributions of the Palau Judiciary’s staff members and the justices and judges who provided the content of the report.

Further, the Chief Justice thanks all the justices and judges for providing their biographical information and pictures to make the 2025 Annual Report, “Meet the Justices and Judges of the Palau Judiciary,” possible. Special thanks go to United States Magistrate Judge Jill L. Burkhardt, for allowing the court to publish her article, *Sharing Our Knowledge . . . In Paradise*, in this annual report.

Chief Justice Oldiais Ngiraikelau





Palau Judiciary  
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