

Davis Haas

This summer, I had the opportunity to participate in a judicial externship with the Honorable Sabrina S. McKenna, Associate Justice for the Hawai'i State Supreme Court. As the court of last resort, the five Hawai'i Supreme Court Justices decide cases that impact every state resident and, literally and figuratively, change the landscape of Hawai'i.

My tasks mostly involved analyzing legal issues being appealed and writing memos recommending either rejection or acceptance of certiorari applications. I was able to work on an agency appeal regarding Native Hawaiian water law, where I helped review appellate briefs and summarized arguments for Justice McKenna's bench brief. I also had the unique opportunity to research and write two memos on my own: criminal and civil. The criminal case was particularly exciting because my memo recommending rejection was circulated to all the justices and received unanimous agreement.

Learning how to write appellate memos was exciting as well because I had the chance to work with and learn from some of the best law clerks in the state. Having a team to go to for questions and tips made the experience collaborative and immersed me in how a professional legal environment works. During the editing process, I sent drafts to my partner law clerk, and we walked through points of improvement together. Receiving and adapting to feedback helped me grow my legal analysis skills.

Additionally, one of the many highlights of my experience was being mentored by Justice McKenna. As an experienced associate justice, Justice McKenna reviewed my memos and helped me learn how to write with more precision. When reviewing my writing, Justice McKenna noted unnecessary portions and provided some strategies to attack legal questions at their core better. Justice McKenna also encouraged me and my fellow externs to get to know the local legal community. She sent us invitations to networking events and paid for our admission to the annual Access to Justice Conference.

Moreover, by observing several oral arguments held by the supreme court, I learned more about appellate advocacy. More specifically, it was interesting to hear how the attorneys structured their time and adapted their arguments based on the justices' questions. Furthermore, at a Q&A hosted by the justices for law students interning for the summer, I discovered that most of them do not try to place attorneys in the "hot seat" during oral arguments but prefer to ask questions based on the flow of the conversation. Attending oral arguments and learning about the justices' motivations when asking questions encouraged me to consider further exploring litigation experiences.

Overall, serving as an extern at the Hawai'i State Supreme Court was one of the greatest honors of my life. I feel my work profoundly impacted the people of Hawai'i, and I am looking forward

to potentially returning as a law clerk for Justice McKenna. Making meaningful connections with law clerks, justices, and attorneys taught me more about who I want to be as a legal professional. I am thankful to everyone at the Hawai'i State Supreme Court for making my time memorable. The lessons I learned will stay with me for the rest of my life.