

Hawai'i Access to Justice Conference
“Continuing to Meet Challenges to Access to Justice”
Friday, June 17, 2022

Workshop Summary

“Social Justice Lawyering for Public Health”
Friday, June 17, 2022, 2:15 - 3:30 p.m.

Agenda Blurp: The panel will introduce the concept of “social determinants of health” and share specific examples of how lawyers can better incorporate public health in various settings including poverty law, environmental justice, and Native Hawaiian health.

DESCRIPTION

Deja Ostrowski (Medical-Legal Partnership for Children in Hawai'i) moderated a panel on “Social Justice Lawyering in Public Health” with panelists Fernando Cosio (Medical-Legal Partnership for Children in Hawai'i), Sharde Freitas (Center for Indigenous Innovation and Health Equity), and Wayne Tanaka (Sierra Club). The panelists emphasized the importance of social justice lawyering work that centers community stories, cultural and indigenous practices, and building power with traditionally excluded people. With the backdrop of lessons learned and underscored as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, panelists provided specific examples of their work especially in light of the historical inequities exposed by the pandemic. Fernando Cosio provided an overview of the Medical-Legal Partnership model of integrating legal services into a community health setting. He shared why it's needed, why it works, and an overview of the social determinants of health (SDH). Sharde Freitas opened with an oli (“E Iho Ana”) and built on the SDH framework to introduce Maui Ola, a more encompassing Native Hawaiian framework for wellness. Wayne Tanaka provided a rethinking of the ways in which colonialism has impacted our islands and communities, and the roles that lawyers can play in using Hawai'i's laws to seek justice, and heal the ongoing harms of past injustices

Panelists also identified how themes from Dean Nelson's keynote speech on inclusive justice are implemented in their own law and policy initiatives, including being responsive to “societal upheaval,” challenging the status quo to benefit all, and engaging in “trans-disciplinary teams” and engaging “where justice lives.” The panelists concluded with practical tips and takeaway lessons about their foundational tenants of social justice lawyering: collaborating across disciplines and roles; building trust by listening, showing empathy, and meeting people where they're at; and “not sleeping through the revolution” by remembering Hawai'i's colonial past and working to upend the status quo. The panelists' collective work illustrates how social justice lawyering doesn't just benefit one client or one community—social justice lawyering often results in benefits for all. Examples range from successful landlord-tenant mediations that resulted in better outcomes for all parties to 'āina work engaging a Maui Ola approach that uplifts all people in the community.