



United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

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NEWS RELEASE

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Salina M. Kanai Appointed as New Federal Public Defender for District of Hawai'i

SAN FRANCISCO — Judges of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit have appointed Salina M. Kanai, formerly Salina Kanai Althof, as the next federal public defender for the District of Hawai'i. She succeeds Peter C. Wolff, Jr., who retired last October after 24 years as Hawai'i's federal public defender, and began her four-year term on February 16, 2021, following a short stint as interim defender.

“Salina Kanai’s stellar reputation within the Hawai'i legal community and demonstrated commitment to providing strong indigent defense representation will serve her well as the new FPD,” said Circuit Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw, who chairs the Ninth Circuit’s Standing Committee on Federal Public Defenders. “With her experience, leadership skills, and ability to inspire, teach, and mentor others, she will ensure that the Hawai'i federal public defender office continues to provide the same level of outstanding service the office delivered during Peter Wolff’s long tenure.”

Kanai received her B.A. from New York University and her J.D. from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. Her 18-year legal career has been devoted to indigent criminal defense, starting as a criminal appellate attorney at the Office of the Appellate Defender in New York City. Kanai then served for five years as a deputy public defender in the State of Hawai'i's Office of the Public Defender and eight years as an assistant federal defender with the FPD Office in Hawai'i. Most recently, before rejoining the FPD Office, she was in private practice, specializing in state and federal criminal defense and serving as a part-time Family Court judge for the Hawai'i State Judiciary.

The Office of the Federal Public Defender for the District of Hawai'i, headquartered in Honolulu, has approximately 15 employees, which include attorneys, paralegals, investigators, and administrative personnel. The FPD Office for the District of Hawai'i opened 550 cases and closed 459 cases in fiscal year 2020 ending September 30.

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The Office of the Federal Public Defender was created by Congress to fulfill the constitutional requirement that financially eligible individuals charged with crimes in the federal justice system be provided with professional legal representation at no cost. By statute, judges of the courts of appeals select and appoint the federal public defender for a renewable four-year term. In the Ninth Circuit, FPD applicants are evaluated by both a local screening committee and the court's Standing Committee on Federal Public Defenders, applying Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines. Reappointment to additional terms is based upon demonstration of highly satisfactory performance as determined by a broad survey and performance evaluation.

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