



UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS



2020  

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ANNUAL REPORT

# MISSION STATEMENT

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The mission of the U.S. District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands is to serve the community by ensuring equal access to justice for all by providing an impartial forum to resolve disputes in a fair, effective, and timely manner pursuant to the rule of law.

# GENERAL INFORMATION

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The District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI) was established by an act of Congress in 1977 and became operational in January 1978. It sits on the island of Saipan in the CNMI, but may also sit at other places within the Commonwealth. The District Court has the same jurisdiction to hear federal cases as other United States District Courts, including bankruptcy cases. Appeals are taken directly to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

As the smallest and youngest among the 94 district courts across the nation, the District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI) has one active district judge that employs three chambers staff and 12 clerk's office staff. The Clerk of Court also serves as the Magistrate Judge. The Office of the Pretrial and Probation Services for the District of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands has three employees stationed on Saipan. These hard-working court employees serve the community by ensuring all facets of court services run properly.

Citizens from the islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota provide an invaluable service to the Court and the community each year by serving as jurors during civil and criminal trials and grand jury proceedings.





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# FOREWORD


by Chief Judge  
Ramona V. Manglona

I am pleased to share with you the 2020 Annual Report for the U.S. District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands. 2020 was wrought with tremendous adversity in view of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Courts across the nation struggled to maintain access to the judicial system while remaining cognizant of the public health crisis. Never in my lifetime has the CNMI faced as acute a threat as COVID-19. But despite the unique challenges in the Marianas, we continued to experience noteworthy success and progress in 2020.

The Court acted swiftly in the wake of the U.S. President's national public health emergency declaration. We closed our doors, restricted entry, postponed certain proceedings, and immediately went virtual for others. The CNMI also quickly initiated various health and safety mandates including curfews, cancellation of public events, closure of public areas, strict occupancy requirements for retail establishments, mandatory quarantine, and eventually the closure of our islands' ports. The Court, and the entire world for that matter, waited in uncertainty as to what would unfold in the coming months.

Fortunately, due to the CNMI's diligent efforts in protecting the health and safety of our community, we have maintained low transmission rates of COVID-19. We were able to live with much more flexibility given the strict testing and quarantine requirements for incoming travelers and contact tracing. And as a result, the U.S. District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands opened its doors to its long-awaited new courthouse in Gualo Rai, Saipan.

On July 27, 2020, the Court held its soft opening ceremony where I highlighted the importance of housing the federal judiciary in a facility compliant with national standards set by the U.S. General Services Administration. I continued to echo my gratitude to the



various stakeholders and entities who have shaped my mission as Chief Judge to make this courthouse a reality. Today, the District Court's judicial officers and staff, along with U.S. Pretrial and Probation Office, the U.S. Marshals Service, the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Federal Protective Service is housed in a safe, secure, and beautiful courthouse facility. Particularly impressive are the oculus skylight in the third floor courtroom and areas where patrons and court employees can take in the view of the verdant mountainside to the east and the ever-present ships in the lagoon and the horizon on the west. We are nothing short of fortunate.

Our celebrations, however, have not interrupted our dedication to providing access to justice for the CNMI. We held four naturalization ceremonies in 2020. On July 28, we held such a ceremony in the newly minted third floor courtroom. 28 individuals from the Philippines, the People's Republic of China, and South Korea were naturalized. Although just the petitioners were permitted in the courthouse, we were able to live stream their ceremony. Shortly after this, the District Court held its first two jury trials. Tours were also well underway in the months following the opening of the courthouse, and on December 28, members of the CNMI Judiciary paid a visit.

Outreach continues to be an important facet of our work at the District Court. In January 2020, Designated Judge David O. Carter from the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California held hearings in the ongoing public utility case. While here, he visited a number of schools and spoke with many students. We continue to be grateful to Judge Carter for his service to our Court and dedication to the people of the CNMI.

I am proud to be part of our courthouse familia and the many individuals who have made it possible for our judicial system to thrive in the CNMI. We continue to work with the advances in technology to enable off-island attorneys, parties, and witnesses to participate in court hearings when their personal presence is cost-prohibitive.



# JUDGES & DESIGNATED JUDGES

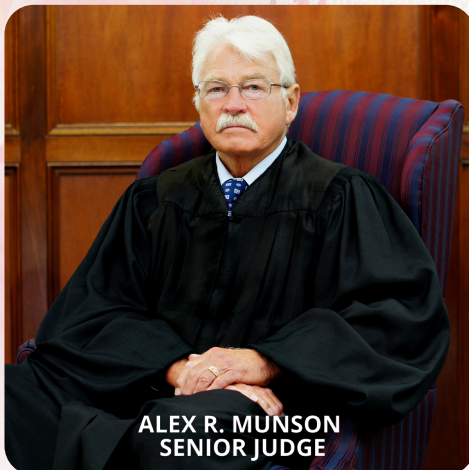




# JUDGES



On January 26, 2011, President Barack Obama nominated the Honorable Ramona V. Manglona to serve as District Court Judge for the Northern Mariana Islands. Judge Manglona's nomination was confirmed by the Senate on July 27, 2011. Two days later, President Obama signed her commission, which was the official act of appointment of Judge Manglona to the District Court. Judge Manglona assumed office as Chief Judge on July 30, 2011. Chief Judge Manglona is the first person of Northern Marianas descent to serve as a federal judge.



The Honorable Alex R. Munson served as the Chief Judge of the District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands from 1988 to 2010 when he then took senior status.

Judge Munson continues to serve the court and the community by presiding over settlement conferences and other court matters in Guam and the NMI a few times a year.



In 2013, Chief Judge Manglona appointed the Honorable Heather L. Kennedy to serve as the first Magistrate Judge for the District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands. Judge Kennedy became Clerk of Court on April 15, 2013, and assumed magistrate judge duties on June 11, 2013. On February 6, 2017, she was reappointed for a second four-year term after undergoing a review by a Merit Selection Panel and public comment period.



# DESIGNATED JUDGES



On occasion, federal judges from districts throughout the Ninth Circuit preside over certain matters in the District Court for the NMI. The District Court is grateful to Chief Judge Frances M. Tydingco-Gatewood (District of Guam), Judge David O. Carter (Central District of California), and Chief Bankruptcy Judge Robert J. Faris (District of Hawaii) for their assistance.

Pursuant to 48 U.S.C. § 1821, judges of courts of record of the Northern Mariana Islands may be assigned temporarily to serve in the District Court for the NMI. The District Court thanks Presiding Judge Roberto C. Naraja and Associate Judge Teresa Kim-Tenorio, of the Commonwealth Superior Court, who serve this Court as designated judges.



# IN MEMORIAM OF THE HON. ALFRED LAURETA



**Judge Alfred Laureta (center) at his Portrait Unveiling Ceremony at the District Court for the NMI on October 31, 2012.**

With sadness and admiration for a long and accomplished life, the District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands noted the passing of Alfred Laureta, the first District Judge of the court, who died on November 16, 2020 at the age of 96 in Kauai, Hawaii. His children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren were at his bedside. Judge Laureta was known for his deep love of his family and his unassuming, humble nature even as he blazed a trail for Filipino-Americans in the legal profession.

Indeed, Judge Laureta's career was marked by many firsts. He was the first Filipino-American to be appointed in Hawaii—or any state in the nation—as a gubernatorial cabinet officer and a state court judge. In 1978, he became the first person of Filipino descent to serve as a federal judge. Judge Laureta was appointed by President Jimmy Carter and confirmed by the U.S. Senate as the first District Judge to serve in the federal court for the Northern Mariana Islands where he presided until 1988.

Judge Laureta came from humble beginnings. The Garden Islands, a Kauai newspaper, reported that Judge Laureta was born at Banana Camp in Oahu as the only son of Filipino immigrant laborers. He worked his way through college at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and eventually landed a scholarship to

Fordham University School of Law. In New York, Judge Laureta met his wife Evelyn, a nursing student, who passed away in 2012.

"I was fortunate to have met Judge Laureta in 2012, along with his children, Pamela, Michael and Gregory, when they visited Saipan for the portrait commissioning ceremony at the District Court," said Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona of the District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands. Judge Manglona honored her predecessors, Judge Laureta and Judge Alex R. Munson, by commissioning portraits of the two judges. At the age of 88, Judge Laureta took a 10-hour flight from Kauai to Saipan with his three children to attend the event. Judge Manglona remembers the octogenarian as being jovial and energetic, with abundant fond memories of his time on Saipan. "He was truly a remarkable man who developed a deep love for the Northern Marianas."

At the portrait unveiling ceremony, Judge Laureta recalled his introduction to the NMI. He said the Northern Marianas was "a new country to me." He added, "I did not know who the people were, and I didn't know what their customs were, and I really didn't know what to expect."

But it was very simple, very easy for me to make an adjustment to become acquainted with whatever existed in terms of culture, customs or whatever.” He extended his gratitude to former Governor Carlos Camacho for paving the way for his appointment, Joe Lifofoi for introduction to the Carolinian customs, and David Sablan who introduced him to the Chamorro culture.

Judge Munson, who succeeded Judge Laureta upon his retirement in 1988 and is now retired, recalls meeting Judge Laureta in September of 1982 on Saipan while working as the Chief Justice of the High Court of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The two judges worked together for many years and socialized frequently with their wives in each other's homes, at hotels and the beach. Judge Munson said, “Al was a great Judge -- he was always prepared on the facts and the law. He was well liked by the lawyers and the community because he was always fair and a gentleman to everyone.” Judge Munson fondly remembers that they fished together and travelled throughout Micronesia to hear cases of the Trust Territory High Court. He said, “Al was a great judge and an exceptionally nice guy and will be missed by all who knew him.”

While serving as the first District Judge for the District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands, which was a court of general jurisdiction at the time, Judge Laureta handled a variety of cases, including medical malpractice, wrongful death, defamation, and precedent setting cases involving government officials in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. One remarkable case involved two political enemies suing each other for defamation. In that case, Judge Laureta found both sides liable and awarded each \$1000 in general damages and \$10,000 in punitive damages. In another case, Judge Laureta presided over a class action where present and former Trust Territory (TT) employees alleged civil rights violations based on claims of one pay scale for citizens of the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and European countries

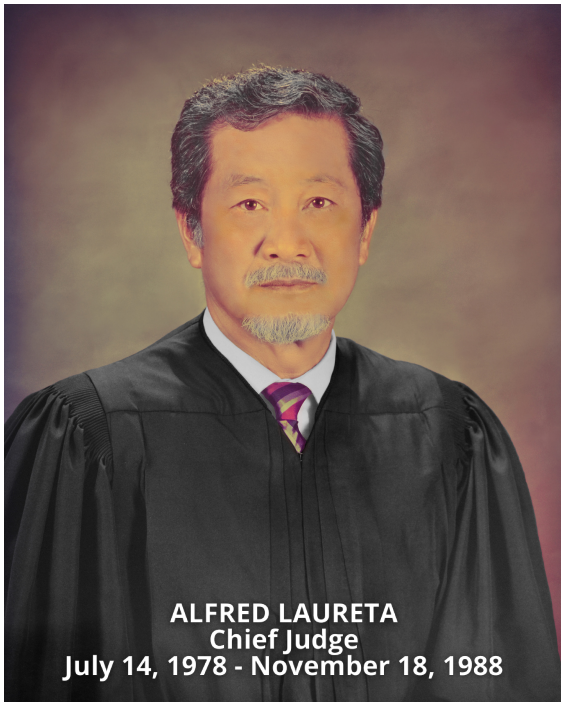
and another (lower) pay scale for the citizens of the Trust Territory, Southwest Pacific Islands, and Southeast Asian countries.

Judge Laureta demonstrated deep respect and appreciation for court support staff and his law clerks, who remember him as a man filled with humility, kindness, and optimism. Howard K.K Luke recalls first arriving on Saipan with the judge in August 1978:

*Saipan had just had the heaviest rainfall in recent recorded history. The first thing we saw upon arriving at the Saipan Intercontinental Inn was a car that was mostly underwater. The United States District Court was in a small room that had been hastily repaired, as it was heavily damaged from a fire from the kitchen area next to it not long before our arrival. We found a metal desk that served as the federal bench for the next several months. The modest house that Judge Laureta had been provided was drenched, and it took a couple of weeks of rolling up our sleeves and cleaning it before it was livable. Through it all, Judge Laureta was as happy as a clam. He was such a positive, humble, down-to-earth man, as much at home in shorts, a tee shirt, and rubber slippers as he was in black robes.*

Luke shared Judge Laureta's practice of sitting with his law clerks and listening carefully to their thoughts about the issues and cases before the court. Luke said, “He would ask us what we would do with respect to the cases before us. He took great pride in all of us, and believed we had an important role in helping him and visiting federal judges arrive at the correct decisions in all our cases. If you ask any of his former law clerks how they remember him, I have no doubt that all of us would feel deeply moved in recalling the wonderful years we were blessed with, working for this great man.” On a personal level, he recalls that Judge Laureta mentioned that while in New York, Judge Laureta and his wife Evelyn double-dated with Thurgood Marshall and another nursing student.





Mike Belles, law clerk from 1982 to 1983, said Judge Laureta remained a humble, decent, and unassuming man throughout his life. "It was a privilege to work for this kind soul who cared about the law and jurisprudence and simply doing the right thing," he said.

Former law clerk and recently retired federal magistrate judge for the Central District of California, Patrick Walsh, remembers Judge Laureta as a personable man full of kindness and humor "who tried hard to reach the right decision in all of his cases, big and small." Judge Walsh recalled Judge Laureta telling him a bit about his humble beginnings. In one story, the judge and his fellow classmates in Hawaii decided to vote on whether to wear shoes for their eighth-grade graduation ceremony. Many of the students did not wear shoes because of the expense, coupled with the warm Hawaii weather. After the vote in favor of shoes prevailed, Judge Laureta had to go out and buy a pair.

Former law clerk to Judge Laureta, David Collins, describes the judge as "a life-changing mentor and teacher who became a close friend throughout the subsequent decades. He said the judge "treated everyone inside and outside of his court equally, with respect and with dignity." In memory of the judge, Collins said: "Judge Laureta lived a full and rewarding life. Now he's on to his next adventure in another dimension presumably with his beloved late wife Evelyn again at his side. Aloha 'oe, Judge."

The District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands is proud that its founding judge had such a profound impact on those he worked with, the Filipino-American community and his adopted community of the Northern Mariana Islands. Our sincerest thank you, Olomwaay and Si Yu'us Ma'ase to Judge Laureta for serving the court and our community with compassion and distinction.





# **ATTORNEY REPRESENTATIVES**



## NINTH CIRCUIT LAWYER REPRESENTATIVE

The District's Ninth Circuit Lawyer Representatives are Vincent J. Seman and Bruce L. Berline. The Lawyer Representative plays an important role in the administration of justice in the Circuits 15 districts, including the planning and execution of the annual Circuit Conference.

Vincent J. Seman opened his law practice, Seman Law Office, LLC, in November 2019. Before starting his own firm, he served as a general counsel for Century Insurance. Prior to joining Century Insurance, he was an attorney with Carlsmith Ball, LLP.

He is licensed to practice law in the CNMI, Guam, and Hawaii.

From 2011-2020, Mr. Seman has served in numerous governmental, professional, and civic organizations, including the Northern Marianas College Board of Regents, the Saipan Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, and the CNMI Bar Association Board of Directors. He is also a Pacific Century Fellow. Mr. Seman received his Juris Doctorate degree from Whittier Law School and his B.S. degree in management from Bentley College.



## CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT RESOURCE COUNSEL AND LAWYER REPRESENTATIVE



Bruce L. Berline is the District Court's Criminal Justice Act (CJA) Representative and Resource Counsel and alternate Lawyer Representative. In districts such as the Northern Mariana Islands, that do not have a federal public defender, the District Court appoints a Resource Counsel to provide support and guidance to the CJA panel members and to liaise with the Defender Services Office in Washington D.C. and other CJA panel representatives throughout the nation.

Mr. Berline is also the chairperson of the CJA Standing Committee. He, along with Robert T. Torres and David Banes, assist the District Court in ensuring the CJA panel consists of knowledgeable and well-trained attorneys capable of upholding the guarantee of the Sixth Amendment of providing competent counsel to individuals charged with crimes.

Mr. Berline has served the court as CJA Representative and Resource Counsel since 2015. He has been a member of the CJA panel since 1999 and has been in practice in the CNMI for over 25 years, with a focus on criminal defense, admiralty, and personal injury litigation.



# ATTORNEY ADMISSIONS





# ATTORNEY ADMISSIONS

In 2020, thirteen attorneys were admitted to practice in the District Court. Temporary Admissions: Jonathan "Robby" Glass, Jr., John Philips Lowrey, Rebecca G. Ross, Abbi Novotny, Precious Boone, Alison Michelle Nelson, and Dustin D. Rollins. Permanent Admissions: Joe McDoulett, Andrew B. Ojeda, Ashley Kost, Carl A. Flores Dela Cruz, Tiandouwa Tuan, and Jordan Sundall.



Chief Judge Manglona swears in Precious Boone



Magistrate Judge Kennedy and Robby Glass with his wife Mary.



Chief Judge Manglona swears in Joe McDoulett



Chief Judge Manglona and Ashley Kost

Chief Judge Manglona swears in Alison M. Nelson and Carl F. Dela Cruz



Chief Judge Manglona and Tiandouwa Yuan

# ATTORNEY ADMISSIONS FUND

The Attorney Admission Fund for this District Court is primarily used to support educational programs and events for members of the District Court Bar, including the annual district conference and other continuing legal education programs throughout the year. Other expenditures include support for civics programs for students, the Drug Offender Re-Entry (D.O.R.E.) Program, the reimbursement of attorney costs associated with attorney disciplinary matters, and the Pacific Judicial Council.

In 2018, the District Court first implemented Local Rule 83.5, which established the Attorney Admission Biennial Renewal fee of \$30.00 as a requirement for all attorneys admitted to the District Court. The renewal fee ensures that the District Court has an accurate listing of its current bar members and that all contact information is up to date. It also assist in funding educational programs.



# 2020 HIGHLIGHTS



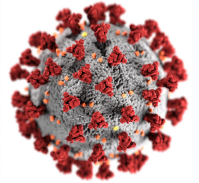


# DISTRICT COURT IS NOW ON FACEBOOK

In January, the District Court for the NMI officially joined the social media age and created a Facebook page. The Court's Facebook page is a helpful platform for the public to view court scheduling information, naturalization ceremonies, outreach programs, and other information. Particularly since COVID-19 hit in March, the page is often visited by members of the public to get the most current information about the District Court and Clerk's Office hours of operation and applicable restrictions for entering the federal courthouse. Visit the District Court's Facebook page at DistrictCourtNMI.

<https://www.facebook.com/DistrictCourtNMI/>

## DISTRICT COURT IMPLEMENTS PROCEDURES DUE TO COVID-19



On March 16, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the District Court for the NMI implemented new entry protocols for the courthouse, discontinued all in-person proceedings, including trials and grand jury sessions, and started to hold remote court proceedings. A week later, the courthouse closed in response to a community outbreak of COVID-19 on the nearby island of Guam, but the Court and the Clerk's Office continued to conduct business remotely by phone, email, and video conferencing.

The Clerk's Office, particularly the IT Department and courtroom staff, quickly rose to this new challenge by developing a remote courtroom, including establishing reliable video connections, providing public access by phone and creating the court record via phone and/or video. Teleworking Clerk's Office staff responded to intake counter requests by email and phone. Internal meetings to brainstorm about these new procedures and all remote court proceedings were accomplished primarily via the Microsoft Teams and Zoom platforms.

On May 18, 2020, the Court resumed limited operations in the Horiguchi Courthouse with a skeleton crew on staggered schedules from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Entry protocols remained in place. Court proceedings were held remotely or in-person as determined by the presiding judge in the matter, on a case-by-case basis. All naturalization ceremonies, attorney admissions, and other non-case-related proceedings remained postponed. During this time of limited operations, court employees worked from three different locations: their homes, the Horiguchi Courthouse, and the Gualo Rai Courthouse. The courthouse moved locations in the middle of a pandemic! See the following section for even more information about the move.

As strict testing and quarantine procedures for travelers to the CNMI proved successful at limiting the spread of COVID-19, the Court resumed regular business hours on July 27, 2020, in the new Gualo Rai courthouse. With COVID-19 safety measures in place, such as entry questionnaires, hand sanitizing, mask requirements and social distancing in place, the new courthouse was initially opened only to court employees, tenants of the building, and individuals with business with the Clerk's Office or appearing for scheduled in-person court proceedings or confirmed appointments with judges, the Office of Pretrial and Probation, or other tenants of the building.



The first post-pandemic jury trial was held in early August. To minimize risk, the Court required the use of personal protective equipment and enhanced cleaning protocols throughout the trial and beyond. Jurors traveling by plane were mailed N95 masks with their summons. Upon arrival at the courthouse, jurors were provided with individual bags containing a cloth mask, hand sanitizer, a notepad, and a pen. The judge, courtroom personnel, jurors, witnesses, and attorneys wore masks and were socially distanced in the spacious new Gualo Rai courtroom. Each microphone was covered with disposable plastic covers, which were changed after each speaker. Enhanced cleaning protocols were completed at intervals during the day to minimize the risk. Fortunately, no COVID-19 case has been linked to any court proceeding or court operation in the NMI.



PlexiGuard glasses were installed in the 3rd Floor Courtroom due to COVID-19, to protect jurors when in a trial proceeding.



Chairs were placed six feet apart and decal stickers were placed for jurors when signing in for jury service.



## CHIEF JUDGE MANGLONA ON USA TODAY'S LIST OF WOMEN OF THE CENTURY IN THE U.S. TERRITORIES

On August 14, 2020, Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona was featured on USA Today's list of Women of the Century in the U.S. Territories with several other inspiring women including Beatric Flores Emsley (Guam), Tulsi Gabbard (American Samoa), and Barbara Christian (U.S. Virgin Islands). The article recognized accomplished women who stayed in their home territories working to better the lives of generations to come.

To read the full article, please visit: [www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com).



# DISTRICT COURT MOVES TO NEW COURTHOUSE

While the District Court was a satisfied tenant of the Horiguchi Building for more than 30 years (1989-2020), the site location and physical structure did not meet modern judicial building requirements. Consequently, the District Court embarked on a journey for over a decade to fund and find an appropriate location and building proposal, under the leadership of both former Chief Judge Munson and current Chief Judge Manglona.

Finally, on December 07, 2017, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) and the U.S. District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands joined the Marianas Management Corporation to mark the start of construction for a new U.S. Courthouse in Saipan. Marianas Management Corporation entered into a 20-year lease arrangement with the federal government to build and maintain the Gualo Rai courthouse.

On June 11, 2020, the space was accepted and the District Court began its move to the new courthouse in Gualo Rai. Chief Judge Manglona held the first management meeting in her empty chambers on June 11, 2020. With limited manpower and the precautions needed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the move took a bit more than a month. The last court proceeding in the Horiguchi Building was held on July 9, 2020, and the first proceeding in the new courthouse took place on July 14, 2020.



Far Left: Law Clerk Matthew Uhalde, Courtroom Deputy Francine Atalig, Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona, Court Reporter Heidi Doogan, Attorney Bruce Berline, and Attorney David Banes pose for a group photo after the last proceeding.



On July 24, 2020, the District Court employees and U.S. Probation Officers bid a final farewell from the roof top of the Horiguchi building. (In the background is the new courthouse.)



# NEW COURTHOUSE SOFT OPENING

Although the District Court had originally planned a large celebration to commemorate this momentous milestone with dignitaries from across the nation, including prominent members of the Federal Judiciary, the General Services Administration, and our community, the COVID-19 pandemic made traveling and large gatherings an unrealistic endeavor for the summer of 2020.

Hence, the District Court held a soft opening ceremony on July 27, 2020 with a few board members of the Marianas Management Corporation and other tenants of the building, comprising of the United States Marshal Service, the United States Attorney's Office, and the Office of Pretrial and Probation.

The simple outdoor ceremony began with Chief Judge's opening remarks commenting on the history of the building selection process and thanking the agencies and individuals who were instrumental to the building's completion. The Saipan Southern High School Manta Ray Battalion Color Guard conducted the Presenting of Colors, and the Federal and Commonwealth flags were hoisted to adorn the southeast side of the courthouse entrance. Aiko Erungel, Court Operations Clerk for the Clerk's Office, beautifully sang the U.S. National and CNMI Anthems. While it was not the commemoration originally designed, the small ceremony suitably recognized and honored the court's transition to its new home.



Representatives from Marianas Management Corporation, U.S. Marshals, Magistrate Judge Kennedy, Justice Manglona (CNMI Supreme Court), Chief Judge Manglona, Manta Ray JROTC Color Guard pose for a group photo.



U.S. Attorney's Office staff pose for a group photo.



U.S. District Court for the NMI staff pose for a group photo.



Saipan Southern High School JROTC Manta Ray Battalion Color Guard



Flower arrangements from Senior Judge Alex R. Munson



# FINAL TOUCHES ON THE COURTROOM PROJECT



Installation



L-R: Chief Deputy William "Bill" Bezzant, Quantum Installers Adrian Lambrecht, Daniel Bullard, and IT Manager Glenn Mendoza.



3rd Floor Main Courtroom during the Quantum contractors and the Court's IT staff installation of audio visual (AV) equipment.



Main Courtroom after installation: fully equipped as shown in the picture, monitors are placed in the gallery, speakers and cameras are installed.



# NATURALIZATION CEREMONIES





# NATURALIZATION CEREMONIES

In 2020, the District Court held only four naturalization ceremonies. It was the fewest number of ceremonies ever conducted in one year. The last two ceremonies held at the old courthouse were done pre-pandemic and before the CNMI government's COVID-19 restrictions were imposed. The keynote speakers in the old courthouse are Former CNMI House Representative Cinta Kaipat, Esq., and Frankie Eliptico, Interim President of Northern Marianas College.

As conditions in the NMI during the summer indicated that there would be minimal risk, the District Court coordinated with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to conduct two naturalization ceremonies on July 28, 2020, in the spacious new courtroom in Gualo Rai. Candidates who had been waiting for many months finally became U.S. citizens after taking their oaths during the two back-to-back ceremonies.

Due to COVID-19 social distancing requirements, only petitioners were allowed to enter the courtroom. A total of 88 individuals from the Philippines, the People's Republic of China, Russia and South Korea personally took their oaths of citizenship to become naturalized. With no Immigration Services Officer residing on Saipan, USCIS participated in the ceremonies remotely from Guam. Petitioners' families and friends could view the ceremonies via a live feed on the District Court's Facebook page.

Naturalization Ceremony  
Guest Speaker: Cinta Kaipat with Chief Judge Manglona, Immigration Services Officer Aaron Johnson, and the new citizens.



President's Day Naturalization Ceremony  
Guest Speaker: Frankie Eliptico with Chief Judge Manglona, Immigration Services Officer Aaron Johnson, and the new citizens.



July Morning Session Naturalization Ceremony  
Chief Judge Manglona (middle) pose for a group photo with the newly sworn citizens.



July Afternoon Session Naturalization Ceremony  
Chief Judge Manglona (middle) pose for a group photo with the newly sworn citizens.





# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

# JUDGE CARTER VISITS CNMI SCHOOLS

On January 30, 2020, Designated Judge David O. Carter visited several schools including Oleai Elementary School, Hopwood Middle School, and William S. Reyes Elementary School. Judge Carter is presiding over the ongoing Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act case brought by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).



Judge Carter with Oleai Elementary School students.



Judge Carter visiting Hopwood Middle School at the recovery tents in Koblerville due to Super Typhoon Yutu destroying their school campus in Chalan Piao.

# SAIPAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL (SIS) VISITS THE DISTRICT COURT

On February 20, 2020, students of Mr. Derek Culp's class visited the District Court. The students were able to attend a naturalization ceremony that was scheduled that day and got a brief tour with Chief Judge Manglona.



Chief Judge Manglona with Saipan International School students and the keynote speaker Frankie Eliptico.



# CNMI JUDICIARY'S TOUR OF THE NEW COURTHOUSE



CNMI Judiciary Staff, District Court Staff, and Marianas High School Glee Club who performed for the occasion, pose for a group photo.

Justices and Judges from the CNMI Judiciary received a tour of the newly built federal courthouse in Gualo Rai, Saipan on December 28, 2020. The tour included visits to the U.S. Probation Office, Law Library, Second Floor Courtroom, Clerk's Office, Magistrate Judge/Visiting Judge's Chambers, and the District Judge's Third Floor Courtroom and Chambers, among other courthouse spaces. The CNMI bench also met with Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona and Magistrate Judge Heather L. Kennedy in a roundtable discussion on topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic such as remote proceedings, vaccinations for court staff, jury trial procedures, and other judicial practices. The CNMI Justices and Judges are the first to receive an official tour of the completed building.

In June 2020, the U.S. District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands officially occupied the new courthouse in Gualo Rai. Prior to this, the District Court was housed in the Horiguchi Building in Garapan, Saipan for over two decades. Spearheaded by Chief Judge Manglona, the engineering and architectural feat was planned and constructed over a three-and-a-half-year period. "The project would not have been possible but for the many individuals who helped make it a success," said Chief Judge Manglona.

The federal court anticipates hosting more tours in the future. For more information, visit the District Court's website at [www.nmid.uscourts.gov](http://www.nmid.uscourts.gov).



From L-R: Chief Deputy Clerk Bill Bezzant, Superior Court Clerk Patrick Diaz, Court Administrator Sonia Camacho, Supreme Court Clerk Judy T. Aldan, Superior Court Judge Teresa Kim-Tenorio, Chief Justice Alexandro C. Castro, Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona, Presiding Judge Roberto C. Naraja, and Superior Court Judge Wes Bogdan. Not shown in the photo are Associate Justices Perry B. Inos and John A. Manglona, Judges Joseph J.N. Camacho and Kenneth L. Govendo, and Magistrate Judge Heather L. Kennedy.

# 2020 NINTH CIRCUIT CIVICS CONTEST WINNER FOR NMI

Each year, the Judicial Council for the Ninth Circuit creates an essay topic and encourages regional civics contests in the district courts of seven western states, Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands. The winner from each of the fifteen district competitions advances to the Circuit competition. The finalists in the Circuit are recognized each year at the Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference.

Although the 2020 Circuit Conference was canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Civics Contest was not. Nearly 1000 students from across the Circuit submitted essay or video entries responding to the following prompt:

In the wake of the 15th and 19th Amendments, barriers remained to prevent United States citizens from voting. Do formal or informal barriers remain today? What additional changes would you make, if any, to Americans' voting rights?

Richard Baleares, a graduating senior at Saipan Southern High School, submitted the winning video entry to earn \$100 in the NMI's regional competition. He secured the opportunity to compete against 26 other finalists for the first place Circuit prize of \$2,000 cash.



Richard is joined by his parents, Chief Judge Manglona, Clerk of Court/Magistrate Judge Kennedy.



# BUILD A BANKRUPTCY PRACTICE SEMINARS

The District Court and other bankruptcy courts in the nation, anticipate a rise in both business and personal bankruptcy filings as a result of pandemic-related financial and economic stressors that our country is unfortunately experiencing. In response, the District Courts of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam, in partnership with the CNMI and Guam Bar Associations, hosted a virtual and in person Bankruptcy Seminar Series. Judge Daniel P. Collins, Bankruptcy Judge for the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Arizona, who facilitated the virtual sessions, was instrumental to the development and delivery of this Bankruptcy Seminar Series. The three-part series offered our federal and local bar members, debtors, creditors, banking institutions, lenders, real estate agents, brokerage firms and other interested businesses the latest information on bankruptcy issues.

The first virtual seminar, entitled “**Building a Bankruptcy Practice,**” launched on September 24, 2020 with distinguished panelists including Judge Collins, Professor Anthony J. Casey, Deputy Dean, Professor of Law, and Faculty Director at the Center on Law and Finance, University of Chicago, and Attorney Anupama Yerramalli, counsel with Latham & Watkins LLP of New York. Attendees received an overview of current bankruptcy issues and updated case law to assist them in deciding whether a bankruptcy case should be filed.

The second virtual seminar, entitled “**Economic Impacts of COVID-19**” was held on October 30, 2020. It focused on cutting edge bankruptcy issues and was designed to provide insight into ways for businesses to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. The illustrious panelists included Judge Collins, Siska S. Hutapea, MAI, SRA, AI-GRS, R/W-AC, MRICS, MRE, the President and

Chief Appraiser of Cornerstone Valuation Guam, Inc., Clarke Schaumann, CEO and member of the Board of Directors for ANZ Guam, Inc., and Andrew Helman, Esq. partner and co-chair of the Bankruptcy Practice of Murray Plumb and Murray law firm in Portland, Maine. This seminar covered key topics including valuation of assets, moratoriums on loans and mortgages, forgiveness of PPP loans, and more to provide business the opportunity to evaluate the pros and cons of bankruptcy and other options during these difficult economic times. While many businesses are struggling to survive and bankruptcy may be the right solution for some, it is not the only option for a struggling business.

The third and final seminar, held on November 19, 2020, continued to focus on “**Business Bankruptcy Issues During the Pandemic.**” Again, Judge Collins put together an experienced and knowledgeable panel, including Misty Perry Isaacson, Esq., of Pagter and Perry Isaacson, APLC, in Santa Ana, California, and Alika L. Piper, Esq., of Klevansky Piper, LLP, in Honolulu, Hawaii and Tiffany Payne Geyer, Esq., Partner of Baker Hostetler in Orlando, Florida. The broad range of topics included PPP legislative and forgiveness issues, Chapters 7, 11 and 13 bankruptcies, employee issues of wages, benefits and retirement accounts, liability of debtors in possession under the WARN Act, unexpired lease and executory contract issues in COVID Times, preference issues, and opportunities in bankruptcy including automatic stays, commercial landlords acquiring their tenants, executive bonuses and restructuring under secured obligations in bankruptcy.

# JUSTICE AND THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19

**A POWER Act Virtual Seminar  
Held September 23, 2020 | 10AM-12PM**

Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona at the District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands hosted the second annual POWER Act event on September 23, 2020. Due to COVID-19 health and safety concerns, the event was conducted as a free live webinar presentation with 42 attorneys in attendance, including 17 from the Republic of Palau.

The event provided two hours of continuing legal education (CLE) credit to participants. While last year's inaugural event focused on the nuts and bolts of the CNMI's violence prevention laws and the local professional services available, the 2020 event focused on the pandemic's effect on victims of family violence and the agencies striving to provide services to them during this unique and challenging time.

The Pro Bono Work to Empower and Represent Act ("POWER Act") was signed into law on September 4, 2018. Congress enacted the POWER Act after it found that there existed extremely high rates of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking at the local, state, tribal and national levels. The law requires that federal courts lead a public event "in partnership with a State, local, tribal, or territorial domestic violence service provider or coalition and a State or local volunteer lawyer project, promoting pro bono legal services as a critical way in which to empower survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, and engage citizens in assisting those survivors." Congress determined that pro bono assistance can help fill the need for legal representation for those in need of assistance, not just by providing legal representation, but also access to emergency shelter, transportation, and childcare. The public event must be held annually until 2023.



LR: John Bradley, Criminal Chief, CNMI Office of the Attorney General; Matthew Uhalde, Law Clerk; Jenny Chhea, Law Clerk; Associate Judge Teresa K. Kim-Tenorio, CNMI Superior Court; Clerk/Magistrate Judge Heather L. Kennedy, District Court for the NMI; Maisie B. Tenorio, Executive Director, Northern Marianas Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence; Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona, District Court for the NMI; Joseph Kevin Villagomez, Former Family Court Manager, CNMI Superior Court; and Julian Camacho, CNMI Division of Youth Services.



Providing their information and insights while broadcasting via Cisco WebEx from the second-floor courtroom of the United States District Courthouse for the District of the Northern Mariana Islands, the presenters wore face masks, other than when speaking to the audience, and observed social distancing standards. Maisie B. Tenorio, the Executive Director for the Northern Marianas Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, spoke about the challenges that victims are facing and their access to resources during the pandemic. She highlighted the additional isolation and vulnerability of family violence victims during shutdowns and quarantine measures. Joe Kevin Villagomez—the former Family Court Manager at the CNMI Superior Court, who is about to resume working for the Community Guidance Center as a counselor—provided statistical information about family court cases. Notably, divorce rates and paternity case rates were up in 2020 when compared with 2019. Mr. John Bradley, the Chief of the Criminal Division of the CNMI Office of Attorney General, shared information about his office's role in the process and the pandemic's challenges in the prosecution of cases. Julian Camacho from the CNMI Division of Youth Services shared data that the number of reported cases has decreased during the pandemic due to the closure of schools.

This Power Act seminar was particularly timely this year. With the annual awareness campaigns for “Domestic Violence Awareness Month” and “Celebrate Pro Bono Week” taking place in October, the Power Act Seminar combined the important messages of both awareness campaigns just a week before they begin.

In her remarks during the event, Chief Judge Manglona told the lawyers in attendance: “It is our hope that you will be reminded of the serious need for pro bono legal assistance, and that you will be inspired to accept at least one case in the coming year.”

Chief Judge Manglona thanks all the presenters for their time, Associate Judge Teresa Kim-Tenorio from the CNMI Superior Court, Executive Director Maisie B. Tenorio from the Northern Marianas Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Clerk/Magistrate Judge Heather L. Kennedy, and Chambers Administrator Amanda Hayes from the District Court for planning the event this year.





# STAFFING





# EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT!



**Heidi W. Doogan**, Official Court Reporter, started working with the District Court in January 2020.

**Jonathan Liwag**, I.T. Security Officer, started working with the District Court in May 2020.



**Jenny Chhea**, Law Clerk, started working with the District Court in August 2020.

**Christine Kim**, Intern, started working with the District Court in August 2020.





# EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION LUNCHEON

On June 23, 2020, the District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands held its Employee Recognition Luncheon. Chief Judge Manglona and Magistrate Judge Kennedy recognized the employees that received the Special Achievement and Service Pin Awards.

## CONGRATULATIONS

Heidi's dedication and attention to detail shined during our COVID-19 operations. Shortly after surviving some relocation challenges while moving her household to Saipan, Heidi quickly adapted to the remote proceedings required by COVID-19 restrictions. Creating an accurate verbatim record when connections can be spotty, delayed and garbled requires incredible focus and patience.



As project manager/architect, Walter excelled at developing aesthetically pleasing and practical design solutions as he oversaw the construction of the new Gualo Rai courthouse. Although the original term of his position was expected to last only two years, he cheerfully persevered over five years as we encountered project misstarts and two natural disasters of catastrophic proportions. Although he returned to the mainland, we won't forget him as we will be surrounded by the evidence of his problem-solving abilities and his creativity in the new courthouse for years to come.



Although her job title is Chambers Administrator, Amanda routinely takes on projects and assignments beyond her responsibilities to ensure that both chambers and the clerk's office operate efficiently. Amanda has a positive and productive approach to her work and a sense of humor that she readily shares with her coworkers to brighten their spirits. Not only does Amanda offer support to her colleagues for professional issues, but she is a source of support when they face personal challenges. She embodies the terms "industrious" and "teamwork."







See You  
Soon

# EMPLOYEE FAREWELLS

**Walter Popen**, Architect/Project Manager, joined the District Court in March 2015 and ended his term in June 2020 after the completion of the new courthouse.



**Daria Campion**, Law Clerk, ended her term with the District Court in August 2020.

**Matt Uhalde**, Law Clerk, ended his term with the District Court in November 2020.



**Christine Kim**, Intern, ended her internship with the District Court in October 2020.

# **U.S. PROBATION & PRE-TRIAL SERVICES OFFICE**





# STAFFING

After 20 years of service Probation Clerk Specialist Teresita Joseph ("Teri") retired from the Guam office. In February 2020, Teri left the island to visit her daughter and grandchildren in New Jersey. As luck would have it, she became stranded because of COVID-19 and was unable to return to the office, even for a proper send-off into retirement. Just one more example of the new "normal." Teri was amazing at what she did and was a dedicated public servant. Once she began her day behind the computer she seemingly never got up for breaks or even to eat. Although Teri's absence is felt, we understand that she is enjoying being a full-time grandmother and spending more time with loved ones.

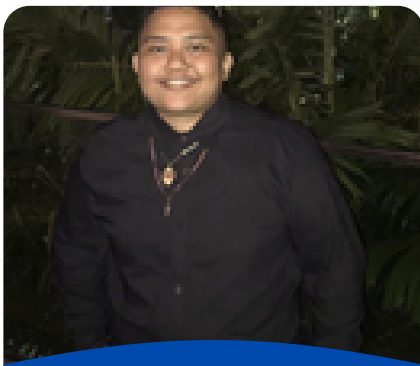


Teresita "Teri" Joseph getting sworn in by Chief U.S. Probation Officer F. Michael Cruz.



Tyanna Sablan  
Student, Northern Marianas College

In the spring of 2020, the unit hired its first student interns for Pretrial Services, Tyanna Sablan and Roquel Cendana. Before Tyanna was hired she had been volunteering as an intern in the NMI office. She received her Associates degree in Criminal Justice and is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in business management at the Northern Marianas College. After she graduates in December 2021, she hopes to join the U.S. Airforce and later, possibly rejoin Probation as a presentence writer.



Roquel Cendana  
Student, University of Guam

Roquel first began as an unpaid intern volunteer in the Guam office in 2019. She was earning her Associates of Science degree in Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement Administration at the Guam Community College. She is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and Public Administration at the University of Guam. Her goal after graduating in Spring of 2022 is to remain working in Federal Law Enforcement.

# TRAINING

As always, annual training is so important for the district and the evolution of work performed. Although there may have been no actual in-person trainings this year, there have been all sorts of early and very early morning virtual trainings, such as: Supervision in a COVID-19 Environment, Criminal Thinking Styles, Treatment Services Training, Beyond Trauma, Guam Virtual Conference on Substance Use Disorder, NAPSA Pretrial Conference, Use of Force, Leading During a Pandemic, Virtual Sex Offender Specific Discussion Training, Neurobiology of Trauma, Fear and Racism, Linux Forensics, 9th Circuit Virtual IT Conference, Body Language, Impaired Driving and Cannabis, Security Awareness Training, Cyberstalking, Virtual 9th Circuit CDAM conference, Use of Force, and Case Planning. The District has teamed up with the District of Alaska for ongoing virtual training.

## ADAPTED PRACTICES

There have undoubtedly been some real challenges with the COVID-19, but as it turns out, they have led to unexpected new levels of productivity and increased supervision of the persons served. After all, problems are only problems if perceived.

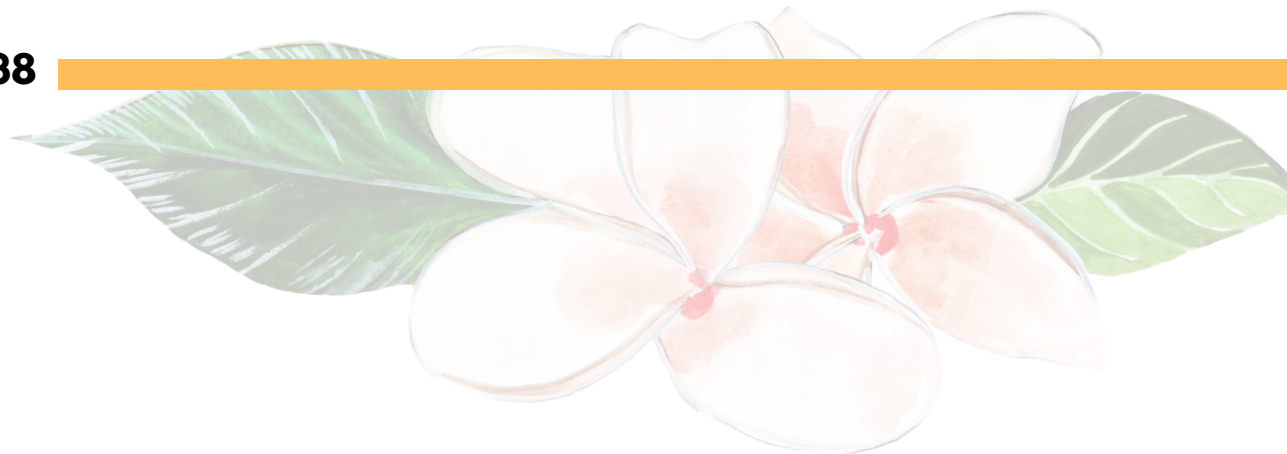
For many years, the National Pretrial and Probation system has been moving towards a more mobile means of work. The Probation Automated Case Tracking System (PACTS) is virtual, making it possible to log on anywhere for access to case files. Offices nationwide have been going paperless, uploading and downloading necessary documents to PACTS. The Guam and NMI offices, have embraced these ideas and have been slowly moving towards paperless systems for the last several years. The COVID-19 quarantine happened at an opportune moment in our timeline. Officers were already equipped with Surface Pros and were able to log on to PACTS remotely.

In March 2020, as the offices shut down, the IT administrator, Barbara Hattori provided all staff with additional computer monitors, keyboards, and scanners to take home to set up virtual offices at home. Suddenly, the time constraints of an 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule no longer applied. Officers logged on at all times of the day and night, between online classes, cooking meals, and dealing with family quarantine, in order to meet deadlines for

case plans and submit reports. Officers began using virtual contacts (Facetime, WhatsApp video) to have virtual face to face contact with clients and conduct home, employment, and collateral visits. After an adjustment period, there have been real benefits. Clients no longer had to leave work to report to the office to meet with their officers. They no longer had to find babysitters in order to make an appointment. Officers were able to see and talk to clients in their environment with minimal disruption to their schedules.

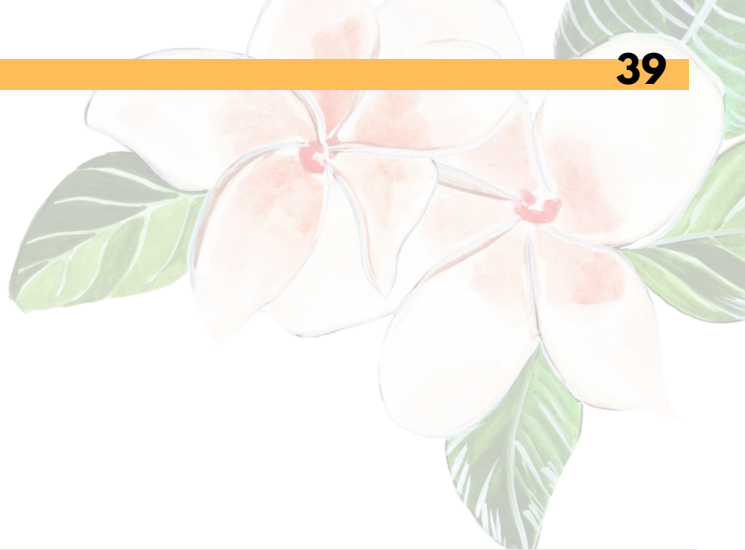
COVID-19 started a new way of thinking about how an office has to be run. Technology is now being used in ways that improve our functions. Officers “Zoom” into court hearings, staffings with treatment providers, and meetings with our clients at the residential facilities on Guam. Microsoft Teams is being used to stay in touch with each other, staff cases, have meetings, and trainings. Cellphones are being used to text and video chat with clients and their family members. The Electronic Reporting System for monthly reports, so commonly unused for years, has become relevant and widely used. Changing how the work is performed, combined with the importance of still using traditional office hours and field work has led to a more well-rounded and robust approach, which is a win-win for all, clients, community and staff.



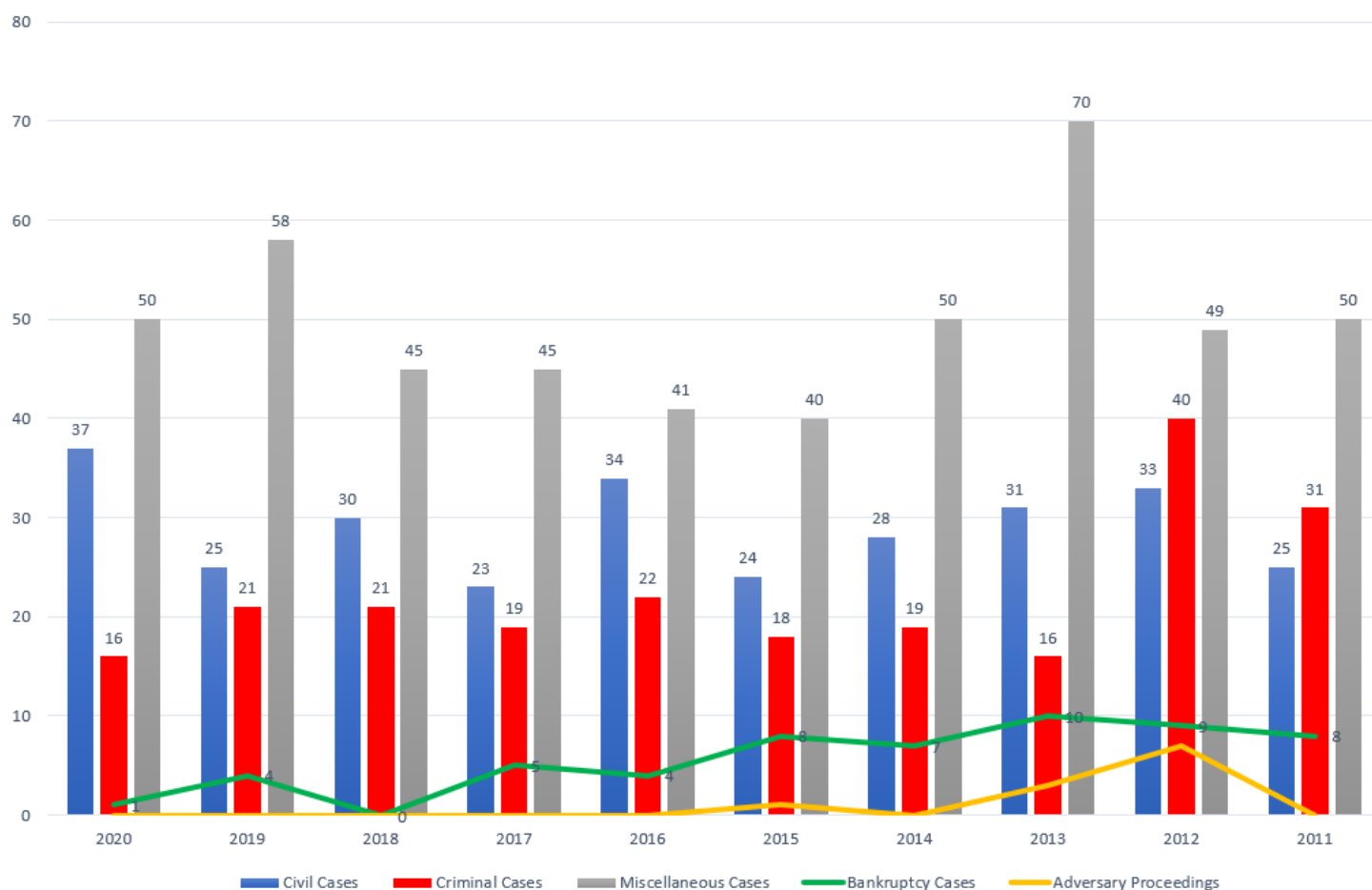


# STATISTICS



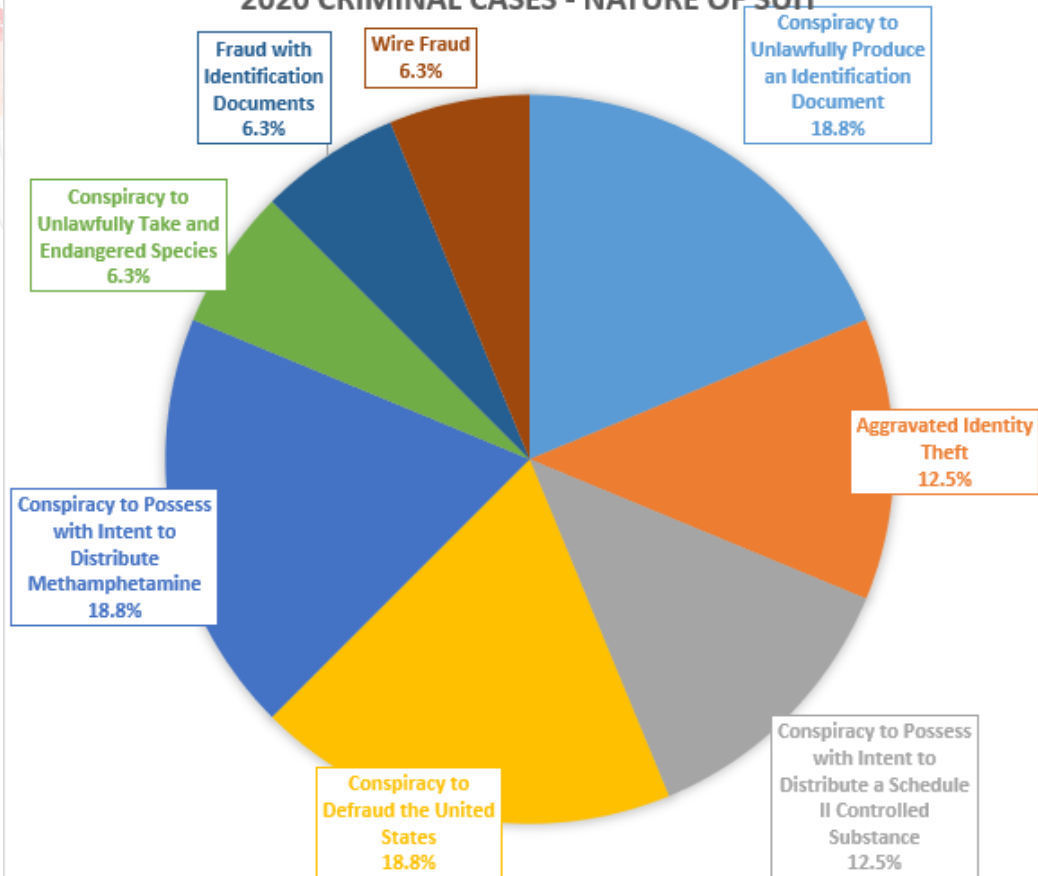


## CASES FILED

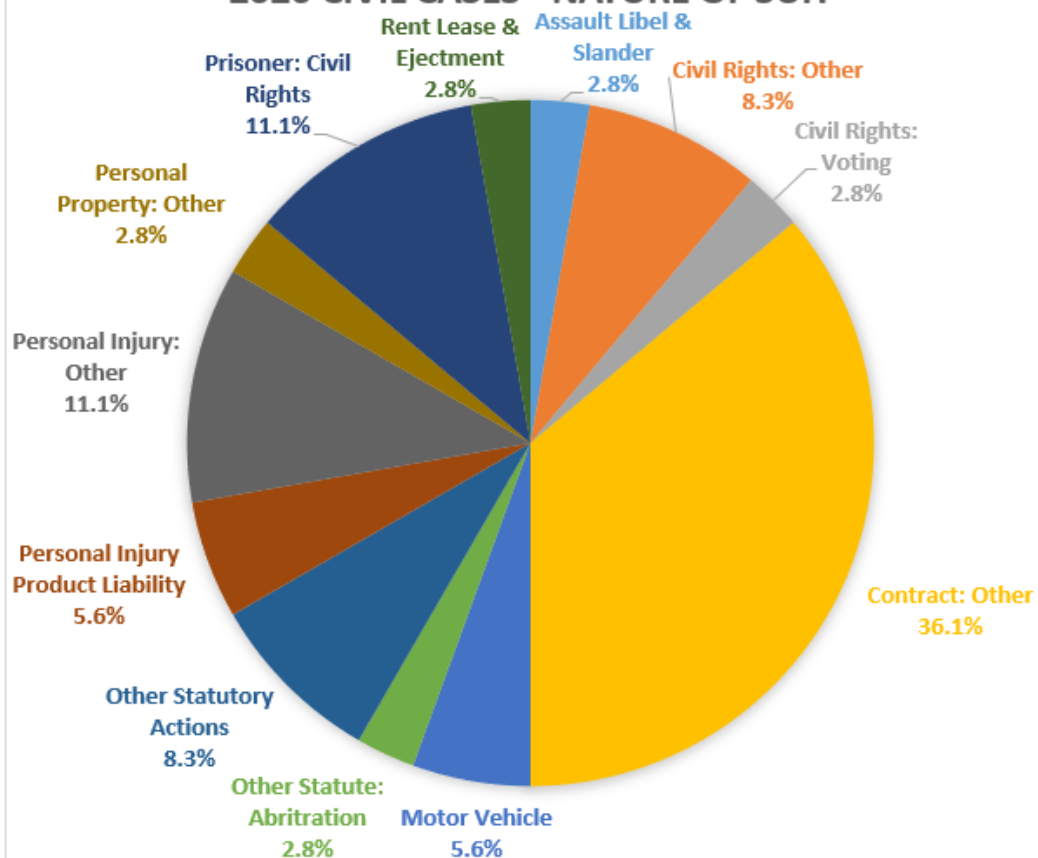




### 2020 CRIMINAL CASES - NATURE OF SUIT



### 2020 CIVIL CASES - NATURE OF SUIT



# SCAN ME



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