



2024 COURT ANNUAL REPORT

*Paving the Path to
Tomorrow*

2024 Annual Report

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INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Palau, or Belau in Palauan, is situated westernmost in the Caroline Islands chain and is part of the larger island group of Micronesia. It is located 500 statute miles north of the equator, approximately 5,818 miles west-southwest of San Francisco, 4,449 miles west of Hawaii, 1,890 miles south of Tokyo, and 528 miles east of Manila. Palau consists of more than 340 islands and islets ranging from an acre or less in size to the 153 square mile island of Babeldaob, which represents 80% of the nation's total land area. Only 9 islands are permanently inhabited. The land area of Palau totals approximately 460 square kilometers (178 square miles), about 2.5 times the size of Washington, D.C., and consists of both volcanic and limestone formations. The islands are platform and reef, reef flats, and one classic coral atoll. The Palau archipelago extends for approximately 125 miles in the far southwestern corner of the North Pacific Ocean.

A look through early Palauan history shows that Palau may have first been settled as early as 3000 B.C. by settlers originating from Southeast Asia, although archeological remains provide firm evidence of settlements in the Palauan islands around A.D. 500. Palau made its first European contact in 1783 after the early explorers discovered the Caroline Islands. Spain controlled Palau from 1885 to 1899. Palau, together with the rest of the Caroline Islands and the Northern Marianas, was sold to Germany in 1899 following Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American War. In 1914, at the beginning of World War I, Japan moved in and forced the German administration out of the Palau Islands. After the League of Nations was formed in 1919, and Japan became a member, the League of Nations gave Japan a mandate over Micronesia and thus over Palau. Japan held Palau through the end of World War II in 1945, after which the United States took control of Palau's management. There were three phases of American administration: the United States Navy Military Government until July 1947; the civil administration of Palau as a Trust Territory under the U.S. Secretary of the Navy until July 1957; and finally, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, administered by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

In 1965, the Congress of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, also known as the Congress of Micronesia, was formed. It had legislative powers, although they were subject to the approval of the High Commissioner. The call for self-determination and independence became stronger at the end of the sixties and the Congress of Micronesia commenced discussions with the United States on the future political status of the Micronesian islands and the eventual termination of the Trusteeship.

In 1978, after more than three decades of United States administration, Palau, as part of a process toward self-government, voted against joining the Federated States of Micronesia and opted for independent status. It signed a Compact of Free Association with the United

States in 1982, and the Compact was ratified in 1993. Palau gained full sovereignty when the Compact went into effect on October 1, 1994, concluding Palau's transition from trusteeship to independence.

This 50-year agreement broadly defines the nature of the political, economic, and military relationships between Palau and the United States following the termination of the Trusteeship. The Compact provides that the Palau Government is empowered to operate under its own constitution and conduct its own domestic and foreign affairs. The U.S. Government is given full authority and responsibility for defense and security matters. The Compact also calls for substantial financial assistance from the U.S. to Palau, estimated to approach \$500 million. The electorate of Palau approved and ratified the Constitution of the Republic of Palau in 1980 and the first constitutional government for Palau became operative on January 1, 1981.

The current population of Palau is estimated to be about 17,651 according to the Ministry of Health. Approximately 65% of the total population lives in the former capital city of Koror, on Koror Island. The capital relocated in 2006 from Koror State to Melekeok State on the larger but less developed island of Babeldaob – the second largest island in Micronesia after Guam. Ngerulmud is now the National Capitol and home to the new buildings for the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of the government.

Palau is a multi-party democratic republic with directly elected executive and legislative branches. The President is both head of state and head of government. Executive power is exercised by the President while legislative power is vested in the Palau National Congress (the Olbiil Era Kelulau, or OEK). The Palau National Congress has two houses – the Senate (with 13 members elected nationwide), and the House of Delegates (made up of 16 members, one from each of Palau's 16 states). There is also a Council of Chiefs, comprising the highest traditional chiefs from each of the 16 states. The Council of Chiefs serves as an advisory board to the President on matters concerning traditional laws and customs. Article X of the Palau Constitution provides for a judiciary “independent of the legislative and executive powers.”

Palau is at the center of a geopolitical nexus. Recent reporting suggests that multiple transnational criminal networks and financial misconduct schemes are targeting Palau with high-risk and fraudulent foreign investment proposals—including cryptocurrency ventures, real estate developments, and online gambling enterprises—which threaten Palau's economic stability, national security, and diplomatic relations. These trends, if true, could have a significant impact on Palau's Judicial system.

2024 Annual Report

Historically, the Palau Judiciary has been adjudicating local crime. This new threat must be considered in the modernization and expansion of the Palau courts to accommodate this potential influx of criminal activity.

This Annual Report summarizes the Judiciary's operations and accomplishments in the 2022 calendar year, as well as its challenges going forward. The Annual Report is intended to inform the public about what the Palau Judiciary does and how it functions.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF JUSTICE

The Republic of Palau Unified Judiciary hereby releases its 2024 Court Annual Report. A successful judicial system is one that is trusted and respected by the people. In order to gain and maintain the people's trust and respect, it is crucial that the judicial system be transparent, accessible, and perceived as a fair, just, and impartial institution. The annual report provides a measure of that transparency and accessibility.

The purpose of the annual report is to give the public and all court users and visitors a clear and comprehensive view of the Judiciary's organization and operations, as well as the courts' activities, performances, achievements, and challenges. Through this annual report, the public and all court users and visitors get a glimpse of the civil servants—justices, judges, administrative personnel, and support staff—who keep the wheels of justice turning day in and day out, and the respective role each plays within the Judiciary. Additionally, the report explains the functions and jurisdictions of the various courts—Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, Trial Division of the Supreme Court, Court of Common Pleas, and Land Court—and the courts' activities, workload, and performances for the previous year.

Building on the work we did in 2023, revising our rules of civil, criminal, and appellate procedure, we created a joint bench and bar committee in 2024 to revise and update the rules and procedures governing admission to practice law in Palau. That work, along with establishing guidelines for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the courts, is continuing into 2025. Sadly, we note that a key member of our team who would have been instrumental in this work passed away in 2024. Associate Justice John K. Rechucher was a prominent senior member of the Bar with decades of service to Palau. He will be sadly missed.

The annual report is available at the Judiciary's library in Ngerulmud and the Judiciary's website (palausupremecourt.net). I wish to end this short message by thanking all those who contributed to the making of this Report. Special thanks and congratulations for a job well done go to the Annual Report Committee – Kenneth T. Uyehara, Administrative Director; Ryobch Luii, Budget Officer; Lue Dee Kotaro, Administrative Assistant/Chamber Clerk to the Chief Justice; Allison Sengebau, Clerk of Courts – Trial Division; Halora Paulus, Law Librarian; Knox O. Tkel, MIS Acting Department Head; Shaina Shiro, Human Resource Specialist; Isabella Anderson, Court Counsel; and Heidi E. Johnson, Senior Court Counsel.

PALAU JUDICIARY ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

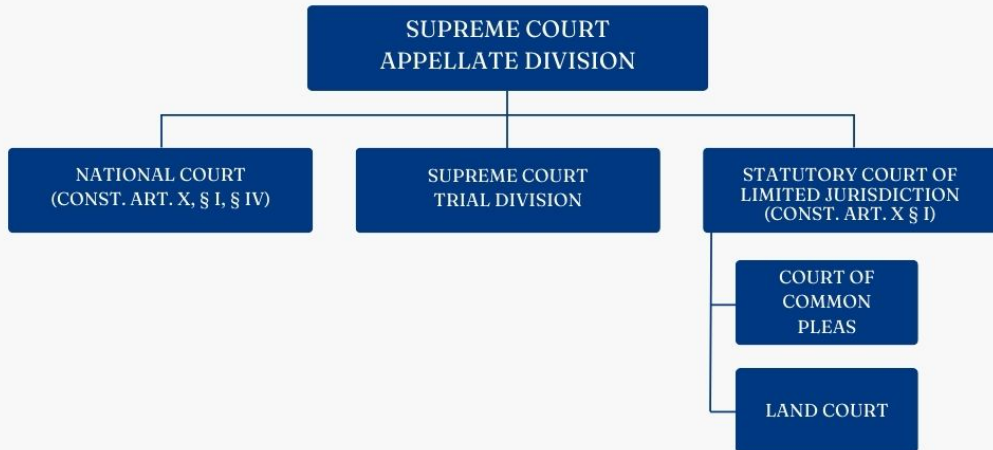
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Hanumi Kishiyasili

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02 May, 2025

COURTS



ADMINISTRATION



MISSION AND VISION

Mission

The mission of the Palau Judiciary 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 in order to protect the rights and liberties guaranteed by the laws and Constitution of the Republic of Palau.

Vision

The Courts of the Republic of Palau will provide justice for all while maintaining the highest standards of performance, professionalism, and ethics. Recognizing the inherent dignity of every person who participates in the justice system, the Judiciary will treat each participant with respect and will strive to make the process understandable, affordable, and efficient. Through the thoughtful, impartial, and well-reasoned resolution of disputes, the Judiciary enhances public trust and confidence in this independent branch of government.

THE COURTS

The Palau Unified Judiciary consists of the constitutional courts, the Supreme Court and the National Court (inactive), and the statutorily established courts, the Court of Common Pleas and the Land Court.

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court is a “Court of Record consisting of an appellate division and a trial division.” ROP Const. Art. X, § 2. The Appellate Division is a court of last resort. It has final review jurisdiction over all decisions of the Trial Division and all lower courts. ROP Const. Art. X, § 6. In other words, it hears and determines appeals from the Trial Division, the Court of Common Pleas, and the Land Court, and its rulings constitute binding legal authority not subject to review by another court.

Appellate Division

Appeals are heard by three justices. Under the initial structure of the Supreme Court, all justices served in both the Trial and Appellate Divisions. ROP Const. Art. X, § 2. On November 19, 2008, the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution was adopted, keeping intact the basic structure of the Supreme Court but removing the limit on the number of justices and calling for the separation of the appellate justices “provided the OEK appropriated funds for additional justices of that division.” Once the OEK appropriated funds in 2016, the Chief Justice promulgated formal rules for the separation of the justices on January 5, 2017. There are now three full-time justices in the Appellate Division. When one or more of the justices are conflicted in a case, replacements are assigned from a pool of non-resident, part-time associate justices. These are generally judges serving in other regional jurisdictions. Currently, there are four non-resident justices.

Trial Division

The Trial Division has original and concurrent jurisdiction with the National Court over all matters in law and equity, but exclusive jurisdiction over all matters affecting Ambassadors, other Public Ministers and Consuls, admiralty and maritime cases, and those matters in which the national government or the state government is a party. ROP Const. Art. X, § 5. There are four full-time resident justices of the Trial Division—the Honorable Kathleen M. Salii, Lourdes F. Materne, Honora E. Remengesau Rudimch, and Peter D. Huffman. Justice Salii is the Presiding Justice of the Trial Division and as such, she is responsible for assigning cases to the trial court justices, monitoring case management, and responding to public and governmental inquiries regarding the work of the Trial Division. There are four non-resident, part-time associate justices who are appointed to the Trial Division to handle cases in which all Trial Division justices have irresolvable conflicts.

Court of Common Pleas

The Court of Common Pleas was created by statute in 1981 and officially established in 1982 to handle “common” civil and criminal cases. It has jurisdiction to hear civil cases where the amount claimed or in dispute is \$10,000 or less. It does not, however, adjudicate cases involving land interests, regardless of the amount claimed or in dispute (Land cases are heard in the Land Court—see next section). Generally, the civil cases that come before the Court include name changes, family law matters, and simple estate settlement proceedings. For alimony and child support cases, there is no cap on the amount in controversy. The Court also hears small claims, where the amount claimed is \$3,000 or less, in less formal hearings. The Court of Common Pleas may also adjudicate criminal cases. Prior to July of 2017, criminal cases were assigned to the Court of Common Pleas by the Chief Justice. Since the separation of the justices from the Trial Division and the Appellate Division, the Rules of Criminal Procedures were amended to allow cases involving minor offenses defined by statute as misdemeanors, petty misdemeanors, or violations to be filed and tried in the first instance in the Court of Common Pleas. Appeals from cases adjudicated by the Court of Common Pleas are filed directly with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. The Chief Justice has also designated the Court of Common Pleas to handle civil domestic abuse cases brought under the Family Protection Act (“FPA”), which was enacted in November 2012. To meet the requirements of the FPA’s mandates, the Court has created forms and protocols to ensure that the Court is always available to assist persons seeking orders of protection, both during the Court’s normal operating hours and afterhours, if victims of abuse need immediate protection. The Court is also collaborating with other agencies, including the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health and Human Services, and the Ministry of Education to successfully implement the FPA’s mandates.

Land Court

The Land Court was established in 1996 and is vested with jurisdiction over civil cases involving the adjudication and certification of title to land. The Land Court makes determinations with respect to the ownership of all lands within the Republic, including the return of land that became public as a result of its acquisition by previous occupying powers through force, coercion, fraud, or without just compensation. Appeals from the Land Court go directly to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. The Land Court currently includes one Senior Judge. Land Court proceedings are generally conducted in Palauan, although translations are available for non-Palauan speakers.

ADMINISTRATION

Office of the Chief Justice

The Chief Justice is the Administrative Head of the Judiciary and, as such, he may assign judges from one geographical department or functional division of a court to another department or division of that court, and he may assign judges for temporary service in another court. ROP Const. Article X, § 13. The Chief Justice also appoints, with the approval of the associate justices, an administrative director to supervise the administrative operation of the Judiciary. The Office of the Chief Justice serves as the focal point of all incoming and outgoing activities of the Palau Judiciary. The Administrative Assistant to the Chief Justice and the Chamber's Administrator are responsible for updating the Chief Justice on the progress of all assigned matters. This office oversees the administrative functions of the Judiciary and coordinates with other offices.

Administrative Director

2024 was a year of continued challenges. The Judiciary budget was reduced, and extensive effort was expended to restore our budget levels. There was a mix-up in the construction grant financing of the restoration of the historical building which resulted in the Judiciary having to financially contribute to rectify the shortage.

The Judiciary faced challenges with courtroom security as there was an increase in drug cases. With the ongoing renovations of the Historic Building, everyone was pressed to work in close quarters.

The Judiciary Wellness Program aided in easing strain from working in these crowded and stressful conditions. Camaraderie has improved among the Judiciary personnel, and the overall attitude of the staff has improved.

As we move forward into 2025, we are confident that we will confront the challenges from a position of strength.

DEPARTMENTS

Appellate Clerk of Courts

The Office of the Appellate Clerk of Court provides administrative support to judicial officers and service to the public. The office is responsible for managing appellate cases. The Appellate Court is a “court of last resort,” a superior court of record having appellate jurisdiction with final authority to adjudicate all cases and controversies properly brought before it. Criminal appeals include cases from both the Trial Division and the Court of Common Pleas. Civil appeals include cases from the Trial Division, Court of Common Pleas, and Land Court. Appeals are heard by panels of three justices in the Appellate Division. There are five non-resident associate justices of the Appellate Division who are appointed to serve in case of conflicts of interest of resident justices.

Trial Clerk of Courts

The Office of the Clerk of Courts is the largest department within the Judiciary and is the primary point of contact for people interacting with the courts. The main purpose of the office is to provide administrative support to judicial officers and service to the public. It is responsible for the overall management of cases within the judiciary from initial filing to final disposition. The Clerk of Courts oversees a number of sections with important functions vital to its operations: Vital Statistics, Land Records, Land Registry, and Mediation. It also receives and disburses court-related funds, such as fines and restitution. The Office of the Clerk of Courts also handles a variety of miscellaneous services such as certification and notarization of documents.

Office of the Court Counsel

The Office of the Court Counsel is primarily responsible for assisting the justices and judges with legal research related to the cases that come before them. In addition, court counsels assist in preparing court publications and provide advice on the legality of administrative operations. The office consists of two to three attorneys per cohort, operating under one-year contracts, who are predominantly recruited from federal and state courts and law schools in the United States.

Marshals Division

The Marshals Division was created in 1998 through legislation codified in 4 PNC § 502. Marshals are responsible for serving court papers, including jury summons, executing bench warrants, acting as bailiffs, and providing security for the courts. Marshals are also authorized to make court-ordered arrests.

Probation Office

The Probation Office is comprised of five (5) employees consisting of one (1) Chief Probation Officer, three (3) Probation Officers, and one (1) Probation Clerk. Together they are responsible for ensuring sentencing orders are followed and completed on time and making sure the terms and conditions of probation are met. In doing so, they coordinate educational opportunities, job placement assistance, as well as counseling for adult defendants and juveniles. The Probation Office also prepares and submits pre-sentence investigation reports to the judges to assist them in determining the appropriate sentence for adult defendants and juvenile delinquents.

Law Library

The Law Libraries, Ikesakes Law Library in Koror and Mokoll Memorial Law Library in Ngerulmud, are open to attorneys, judges, and the general public. These libraries provide essential legal research resources to meet the increasing demands of the Palau judicial system, the practicing bar, and the wider community. The law library is committed to providing access to comprehensive and up-to-date legal materials and resources in an efficient manner. Patrons can utilize Westlaw Online Research, conduct Land Court Title Searches, and access recordings of court proceedings. Photocopying services are available at a rate of \$0.50 per page. Please note that Ikesakes Law Library is currently closed due to renovations and restoration of the historical building in Koror, while Mokoll Memorial Law Library in Ngerulmud operates from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Archive Department

The Archive Office was established in March 2019. The mission and vision of the Archive Office is to provide a systematic and strategic approach to creating and controlling a records management system for preservation and organization of court closed case files (disposed) and to provide access to the records electronically for public research. The goal is to ensure that court cases from the Appellate Division, Trial Division, Court of Common Pleas, and Land Court that are designated as “Disposed” are collected, maintained, and available for research.

Land Registration Office

The Land Registration Office (LRO) assists the Land Court to accomplish its statutory mandate of determining ownership of all lands in the Republic of Palau. To this end, the LRO is primarily responsible for the processing of land claims by assisting claimants with their claims, conducting monumentations and surveys, and assisting in mediations and hearings. The Land Registration Office is open from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm for anyone who has a land claim or a land inquiry that they need assistance with.

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Land Record Office

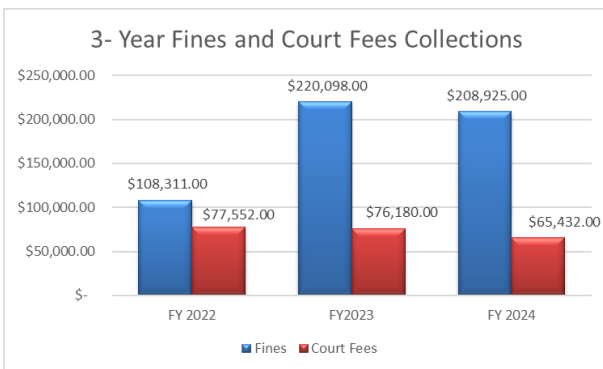
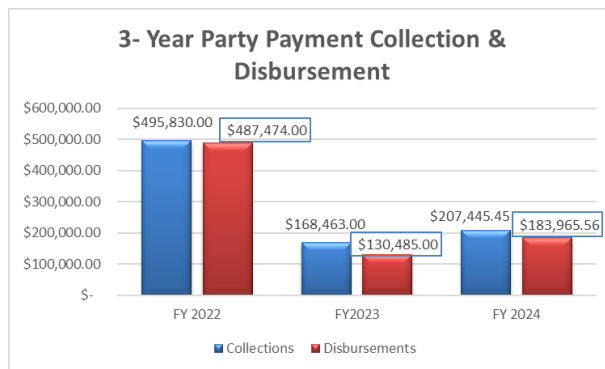
The Registrar's Office serves to record all documents that transfer title to land and supervises the operations of the Central Land Registry Section. The Central Land Registry Section is the depository for all property plots and final cadastral maps, certificates of title, determinations of ownership, and other land-related documents.

Property Management Office

The Property Management Office is an administrative support section that procures supplies, materials, equipment, and furniture for the Judiciary. Its overall goal is to improve maintenance and management practices of the Judiciary's capitalized and non-capitalized assets through cost savings, improved accessibility, and increased efficiency of utilization.

Budget Office

The Budget Office is responsible for managing the financial resources of the Judiciary in accordance with the laws, regulations, and policies of the Republic of Palau. With personnel of three staff and one currently vacant position, the office oversees the following: (1) financial statements and reporting; (2) cash receipts; (3) accounts receivable; (4) cash disbursements; (5) accounts payable; (6) appropriations; (7) audit; (8) revenue forecasts; (9) grants; (10) budget; and (11) employee timesheets for payroll processing. Finally, the Office is currently working with the Ministry of Finance to transition to a more modern and effective financial management system to further improve workflow and efficiency.



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Management Information Systems

The MIS Division provides the Judiciary with computer resources to serve the public more accurately and efficiently. The MIS Division maintains several networked databases that provide ready access to records and cases for all members of the court staff. Members of the public are welcome to access court records electronically at the Office of the Clerk of Courts, located in the Judge Pablo Ringang Building in the Court Complex in Koror.

Human Resources

The Human Resources (HR) Office, led by the Human Resources Specialist, is dedicated to effectively managing the Judiciary's workforce. The office oversees all aspects of personnel management, including recruitment, hiring, benefits administration, employee evaluations, pay adjustments, and staff training and development. It ensures that employees are treated equitably, compensated fairly, and supported in alignment with the Judiciary's mission, vision, and values.

The HR Office is committed to fostering a positive organizational culture through the implementation of effective policies and procedures. As an active member of the Belau Educators and Employers Alliance (BEEA), the office supports the career pathways curriculum for high school students by hosting interested students during the school year upon request. It also participates in the Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP), provides college internship opportunities, and offers career guidance to students aspiring to join the Palau Judiciary.

Additionally, the HR Office collaborates with the Palau National Scholarship Board to identify and recruit prospective graduates each semester, ensuring the development of a workforce grounded in strong educational foundations. Through these initiatives, the HR Office plays a pivotal role in building a capable and dynamic Judiciary team.

New Hires in 2024

In 2024, the Palau Judiciary welcomed Anika Maan and Isabella Anderson as the 2024-2025 Court Counsels. Seven other positions were also filled in 2024:

Mr. Richard Ngiratrang as Chief Probation Officer, Mr. Bailey Eberdong as Probation Officer, Mr. Byron Napoleon as Deputy Marshal, Mr. Kiffer Kasiano as

Marshal I, Ms. Mally Tkel as Marshal I, Ms. Delia Rae Joseph as Account Specialist, and Mr. Eli Rechucher as Deputy Administrative Assistant to the Office of the Chief Justice.



JUDICIARY HIGHLIGHTS

On January 12, 2024, the Judiciary conducted its first annual Strategic Planning meeting. The meeting concluded with the validation of the mission and vision statements and an agreement on the following six goals for the Palau Judiciary:

#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.

Goals #5 and #6 were added as new goals to the 2009 Strategic Plan.

The 2024 court highlights are events or actions that have been taken throughout the year that align with these six strategic goals.

I. To Preserve and Promote the Rule of Law and Judicial Independence in The Republic of Palau.

The court plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting the rule of law and judicial independence, ensuring that justice is administered impartially, efficiently, and fairly. By embracing methods like remote court proceedings (RCP), providing free legal aid, and ensuring the consistency of appellate rulings, the court strengthens its ability to uphold the integrity of the judicial system.

Remote Court Proceedings (RCP)

In today's fast-paced and unpredictable world, access to the courts (justice) is essential for maintaining the rule of law. Remote proceedings, enabled by technology, are a vital tool in ensuring that the judicial process is not hindered by physical barriers. Whether due to geographic distance, health concerns, or other logistical issues, remote hearings make it possible for individuals to participate in legal proceedings from the comfort of their homes or offices. This inclusive approach ensures that justice is not delayed or denied for those who cannot afford to travel and are otherwise unable to attend in person. Importantly, remote proceedings maintain the efficiency of the judicial system, enabling the courts to operate continuously and without interruption, further promoting the rule of law by ensuring timely and transparent justice.

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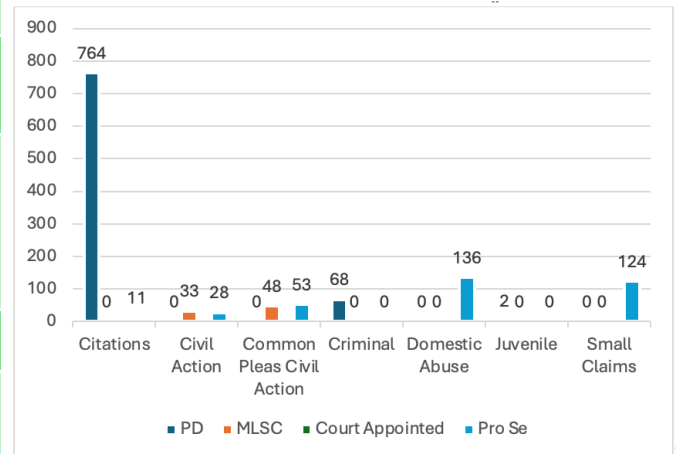
In 2024 alone, a total of forty-eight (48) remote court proceedings were conducted. Most of these remote hearings were requested by parties who were outside the country due to issues preventing them from traveling. This highlights how remote access to justice ensures that courts can still deliver justice and minimize delays.

Free Legal Aid

Legal aid is available for parties who cannot afford an attorney. The Office of the Public Defender (“PD”) and Micronesian Legal Service Corporation (“MLSC”) provide such services. In some cases, the court may appoint an attorney (when a party is facing criminal penalty) while some parties opt to be self-represented (“pro se”). Guidance for pro se parties is available at the Clerk of Courts Office.

In 2024, a total of one thousand two hundred seventy-six (1276) litigants received legal aid.

Case Type	PD	MLSC	Court Appointed	Pro Se
Citations	764	0	2	11
Civil Action	0	33	0	28
Common Pleas Civil Action	0	48	0	53
Criminal	68	0	7	0
Domestic Abuse	0	0	0	136
Juvenile	2	0	0	0
Small Claims	0	0	0	124



Case Opinion Publications - Appellate

Appellate court decisions preserve the rule of law by ensuring consistent, fair, and predictable application of legal principles. In 2024, a total of thirty-four appellate opinions were published.

II. To Have a Skilled and Satisfied Workforce.

CONFERENCES



Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Stakeholders' Meeting | Koror, Palau | March 5-7, 2024

Clerk of Court Allison I. Sengebau, as the Civil Registrar of Palau, attended this meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to strengthen capacity and develop a national

CRVS improvement plan. The meeting was sponsored by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Island Health Officers Association (PIHOA), Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Brisbane Accord Group (BAG) and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO). One of the outcomes of the network and collaboration is improved death certificate issuance and progress on the creation of a National CRVS committee.

Pacific Judicial Council 2024 Environmental Law & Science Conference



The Pacific Judicial Council successfully hosted the 2024 Environmental Law & Science Conference from October 28 to October 31, 2024, at the Ngarachamayong Cultural Center in Koror, Palau. This prestigious event brought together judges, legal experts, scientists, and policymakers from across the Pacific region to address critical

environmental challenges and legal developments. With a total of 16 insightful sessions, the conference covered key topics such as "Persuasion and Decision-making in Complex Cases," "Marine Pollution, Laws and Conventions," "Ocean Governance: Protecting the Pacific Ocean," and "Implications of Recent U.S. Supreme Court Environmental Decisions Affecting Pacific Islands." The event served as a vital platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration to enhance environmental law and governance in the Pacific.

2024 PIALA Conference in Hagåtña, Guam

The Pacific Islands Association of Libraries, Archives, and Museums held their 33rd annual conference from December 2 to 7, 2024, at the Guam Museum in Hagåtña, Guam.



TRAININGS

MUNIS Overview Training | Guma' Hustisia Iimwal Aweewe, Saipan | May 3-10, 2024

Throughout the year, the Palau Judiciary has sent court staff members to Saipan for shadow training with their respective counterparts at the NMI Judiciary. This initiative aims to expand skill sets and introduce new procedures that can benefit the Palau Judiciary.

One such training was on MUNIS, an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software that helps streamline and integrate various administrative functions, such as: Financial Management (general ledger, budgeting, accounting), Human Resources & Payroll, Procurement & Purchasing, Accounts Payable/Receivable, Utility Billing, Asset and Inventory Management, Project and Grant Accounting. Representatives from the Palau Judiciary's Budget Office, MIS, and Administration had the opportunity to visit the NMI Judiciary for an overview of how MUNIS is set up and applied in a court setting. We sincerely thank the Saipan Judiciary for their continued support in helping us explore new technologies and ideas relevant to court operations.

Amplifying Women’s Voices Training | Palasia Hotel, Koror | July 23, 2024

On July 23, 2024, UNDP in collaboration with MLSC initiated a training on “Amplifying Women’s Voices” which focused on implementation of the Family Protection Act process in other FSM islands. Ms. Makka Oimei attended that training to reiterate the process for obtaining a restraining order through the courts. This training was held at Ming’s Hall in the Palasia Hotel.



Addressing Sexual/Domestic Violence Across the Lifespan from Intervention to Prevention Workshop | Hagåtña, Guam | September 24-26, 2024

From September 24 to 26, 2024, the Ministry of Health & Human Services staff, along with Ms. Makka Oimei, attended a workshop in Hagåtña, Guam, sponsored by the Guam Police Department, on “Addressing Sexual/Domestic Violence Across the Lifespan from Intervention to Prevention”



Mediation Training | October 16-17, 2024

There was Mediation Training in Palau from October 16 to 17, 2024. This training was provided through the Pacific Justice Sector Programme (PJSP) by trainers Ms. Delwyn TeMoni and Judge John Adams. In attendance were Lu Dee Dechol Kotaro, Bris Ulechong, Hasinta Tabelual, Vameline Singeo, Ebil Matsutaro, and Ken Uyehara. The training included topics on mediation structure, the role of a mediator, requisite skills, and opening statements, as well as demonstrations and role plays.



Evidence Training | Chuuk, FSM

Court Counsels Heidi Johnson and Dylan Houle attended a workshop in Chuuk focused on evidentiary basics. The training was led by U.S. District Judges Cynthia A. Bashant and Jamal N. Whitehead, and covered topics such as competence, documentary evidence, character evidence, impeachment, expert testimony, hearsay, child witnesses, and sidebar discussions.



Tri-Angle Combative (TRICOM) Fundamentals Operator Course

The Marshals Department recently completed the Tri-Angle Combative (TRICOM) Fundamentals Operator Course, a specialized training program designed to enhance tactical and defensive skills. This intensive five-day training was conducted from November 15 to November 19, 2024, spanning a total of 20 instructional hours. The training provided the Marshals with vital combative skills to enhance their operational efficiency and personal safety. By completing this course, the Marshals demonstrated their commitment to professional development and maintaining a high standard of readiness in carrying out their duties.



Combat Pistol Pre-Qualification Training

Small Arms training conducted on September 4, 2024, under the supervision and instruction of the United States Marines, Tiger Unit, consisted of handling firearms and target accuracy training. During the two-day training, each Marshal participated in at least two iterations of target shooting and expended approximately 180 rounds for the qualification range. In the first iteration (familiarization round), each Marshal expended approximately 85 rounds while shooting at targets from 5 different distances (5, 10, 15, 25 and 30 feet). In the second iteration (qualification round), each Marshal fired rounds from 5 different distances (5, 10, 15, 25 and 30 feet) to qualify. This training was conducted in accordance with Palau Judiciary Standards.



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2024 Travel Report		
Name	Dates	Training Purpose
Bailey Eberdong	April 29 - May 3	2024 PJC Probation Officers Training, Agana, Guam
Young Sikyang Jr.	April 30 - May 3	2024 PJC Probation Officers Training, Agana, Guam
Fred M. Isaacs	April 30 - May 7	NCBE Bar Exam Conference in Chicago, Illinois
Viola Stephanus	August 10 - August 16	CNMI/Palau Judicial Shadowing Training Program
Juanita Udui	August 10 - August 16	CNMI/Palau Judicial Shadowing Training Program
Kathleen M. Salii	August 24 - August 28	Joint Annual District Court of Guam Conference & Biennial PJC Conference
Oldiais Ngiraikelau	August 24 - August 28	Joint Annual District Court of Guam Conference & Biennial PJC Conference
Honora E. R. Rudimch	August 24 - August 28	Joint Annual District Court of Guam Conference & Biennial PJC Conference
Rose Mary Skebong	August 24 - August 28	Joint Annual District Court of Guam Conference & Biennial PJC Conference
Fred M. Isaacs	July 19 - August 11	9th Circuit Conference in Sacramento, California
Oldiais Ngiraikelau	July 3 - July 8	50th Anniversary of Judiciary of Guam
Keith Ngirchomlei	July 3 - July 8	50th Anniversary of Judiciary of Guam
Lue Dee Kotaro	June 6 - June 14	118th GFOA Annual Conference
Ryobch W. Luii	June 6 - June 14	118th GFOA Annual Conference
Kathleen M. Salii	March 9 - March 17	Pacific Judicial Integrity Program Conference in Port Vila, Vanuatu
Ryobch W. Luii	May 3 - May 10	MUNIS Training with CNMI Judiciary
Knox O. Tkel	May 3 - May 10	MUNIS Training with CNMI Judiciary
Lue Dee Kotaro	May 3 - May 10	MUNIS Training with CNMI Judiciary
Richard Ngiratrang	May 3 - May 10	CNMI/Palau Judicial Shadowing Training Program
Kathleen M. Salii	November 2 - November 8	Judicial training on Cyber Crime and Electronic Evidence in Nadi, Fiji
Mardrine Sato-Udui	November 30 - December 9	2024 PIALA Conference in Hagåtña, Guam
La-Yeav O. Ngemaes	November 30 - December 9	2024 PIALA Conference in Hagåtña, Guam
Kathleen M. Salii	September 19 - September 27	PJSP Women in Justice Workshop in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea
Honora E. R. Rudimch	September 19 - September 27	PJSP Women in Justice Workshop in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea
Myla M. Oimei	September 23 - September 27	Sexual & Domestic Violence Workshop in Guam

Judiciary Wellness Program

Biggest Loser Challenge

In 2024, the Judiciary reaffirmed its dedication to promoting staff well-being through the Judiciary Wellness Program. This initiative encouraged participation in various activities aimed at fostering a healthier lifestyle.

A key highlight was the Judiciary's partnership with Belau Wellness, a local NGO committed to healthy living, to host the *Biggest Loser Challenge*. This six-month program motivated participants to adopt healthier habits through exercise and balanced eating. To complement the challenge, the Judiciary organized interdepartmental volleyball tournaments twice a week and monthly *Walk-a-Thon* events where staff gathered an hour before the end of the workday to walk a mile or more together. Raffle giveaways, including fuel vouchers, added an element of excitement to these activities.

At the conclusion of the *Biggest Loser Challenge*, five participants with the highest weight loss percentages were rewarded with monetary prizes. The program's success underscores the Judiciary's commitment to staff wellness, and we look forward to continuing and expanding these efforts in the coming year.



III. To Improve Technology and Information Systems.

Our fifth objective is to continuously enhance technology and information systems by leveraging emerging technologies. This initiative focuses on improving collaboration, efficiency, and security—critical factors in evaluating existing systems and adopting new solutions.

Case Management System (CMS)

In 2024, the court made significant progress toward achieving this goal by advancing efforts to implement a CMS. A key component of this work involves organizing data within the current database to facilitate a seamless transition to a new CMS once it is deployed. This complex and time-intensive project requires reviewing and restructuring over 20 years of data. We extend our gratitude to the dedicated team members whose expertise and perseverance have been instrumental in driving this initiative forward.

MUNIS

As part of our ongoing efforts to streamline day-to-day operations, the Budget Office has identified MUNIS as a potential tool for personnel management and administrative functions. MUNIS offers a comprehensive suite of features, including financial management, payroll and human resources, procurement, and project management.

To gain a deeper understanding of this promising system, representatives from the court visited the Saipan Judiciary, a neighboring jurisdiction that has successfully implemented MUNIS. During this visit, the court observed its functionality, implementation process, and practical applications in a real-world setting.

This exploration highlighted MUNIS’s potential to facilitate interagency collaboration by providing a unified system while preserving the operational independence of individual agencies. Its capabilities could significantly enhance efficiency and communication across departments, making it an asset for future administrative improvements.

Computer Upgrades

As part of our succession planning objectives, we successfully retired approximately seven computers in 2024 and replaced them with new ones. Our strategy includes phasing out PCs that have reached the five-year mark, in alignment with industry recommendations to upgrade computers after five years of daily use. This approach ensures optimal performance, as processors naturally degrade over time, leading to reduced efficiency. Additionally, upgrading our equipment helps maintain up-to-date hardware and ensures compatibility with the latest software updates, enhancing overall productivity and system reliability.

IV. To Create and Maintain a Repository of All Policies and Rules.

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.

V. 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.

The Palau Judiciary recognizes its obligation to dispose of cases before it in a reasonable time. Accordingly, the courts seek to finalize cases in a timely manner. The “clearance rate” reflects cases “cleared” or finalized as a percentage of (in relation to) the total number of cases filed. The average duration is the average number of days from filing to final disposition.

Appellate Division

In 2024, a total of thirty-three (33) cases were filed, thirty-eight (38) were disposed, with fifteen (15) pending resulting in 115.15% clearance rate.

1. Criminal & Civil Appeals:

Clearance Rate:

Year	Cases Filed	Cases Disposed	Cases Pending	Clearance Rate %
2020	34	35	6	102.94 %
2021	38	33	24	87 %
2022	31	33	18	106.45 %
2023	41	43	19	104.88 %
2024	33	38	15	115.15%

Type and Outcome of cases appealed:

Case Type	Number	
Civil	31	
Criminal	3	
Land	4	
Case Outcome	Number	Percentage
Affirmed	18	47%
Dismissed	12	32%
Remanded	6	16%
Reversed	2	5%

2. Average Duration:

The average number of days for an Appeal case from filing to disposal in 2024 is two hundred twenty-one (221) days.

Average Duration:

Year	Average Duration of a Case in Days
2020	215
2021	246
2022	239
2023	235
2024	221

Average Number of Cases per Judicial Officer & Court Staff:

Year	Judicial Officer	Court Staff
2022	10	8
2023	14	10
2024	11	8

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Trial Division

In 2024, a total of two thousand eighty (2080) cases were filed in the Trial Division, Court of Common Pleas, and Land Court combined. The average number of cases per judicial officer is three hundred forty-seven (347) and the average case per clerk is one hundred sixty (160).

The chart below gives an overview of the number of cases filed, disposed of, and pending, as well as the clearance rate and average duration by category or case type.

2024 CASE STATS					
CATEGORY	FILED	Disposed	Pending	Clearance Rate	Average Duration
CIVIL	98	114	146	116.33%	480 days
CRIMINAL	80	70	17	87.50%	60 days
JUVENILE	2	1	0	50.00%	519 days
SMALL CLAIMS	62	65	6	104.84%	55 days
CP/CA	92	78	32	84.78%	59 days
CA/DA	68	66	0	97.06%	10 days
SP	8	8	0	100.00%	5 days
LAND	158	122	355	77.22%	411 days
Citations	1512	1490	156	98.54%	22 days

In 2024, a total of 199 cases were filed in the Trial Division, including 98 civil cases, 58 criminal cases, 2 juvenile cases, 6 CADA cases, and 8 SP cases.

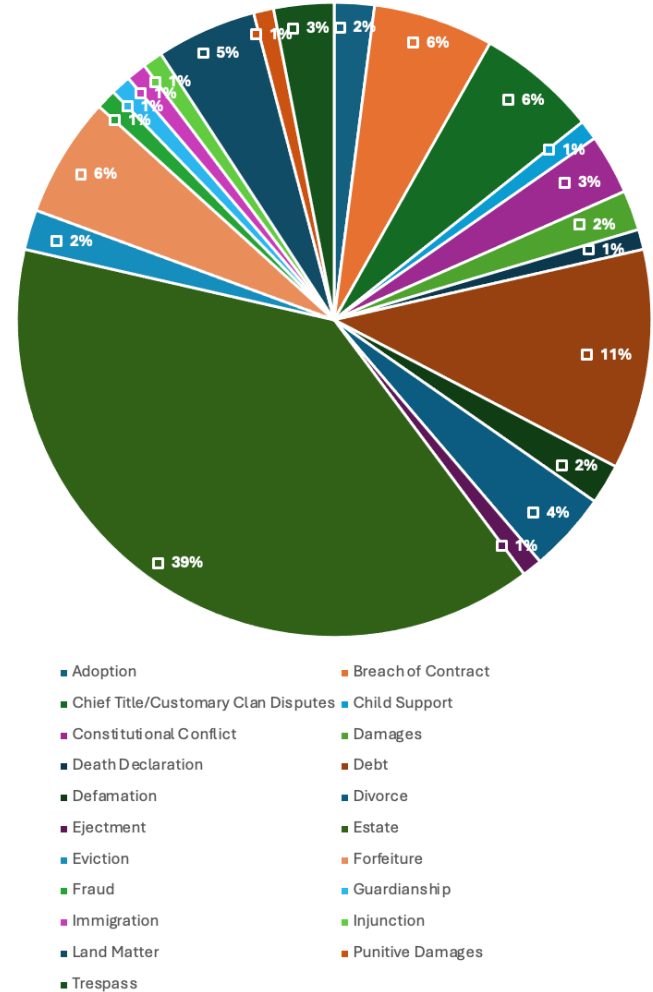
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Civil Cases

The Trial Division hears all civil cases, which involve issues such as breach of contract, property disputes, family law, and more. The table below breaks down the types of civil cases filed in 2024 by category.

Civil Case Break-Down

Civil Case Categories	No.
Adoption	2
Breach of Contract	6
Chief Title/Customary Clan Disputes	6
Child Support	1
Constitutional Conflict	3
Damages	2
Death Declaration	1
Debt	11
Defamation	2
Divorce	4
Ejectment	1
Estate	38
Eviction	2
Forfeiture	6
Fraud	1
Guardianship	1
Immigration	1
Injunction	1
Land Matter	5
Punitive Damages	1
Trespass	3
Total Cases	98

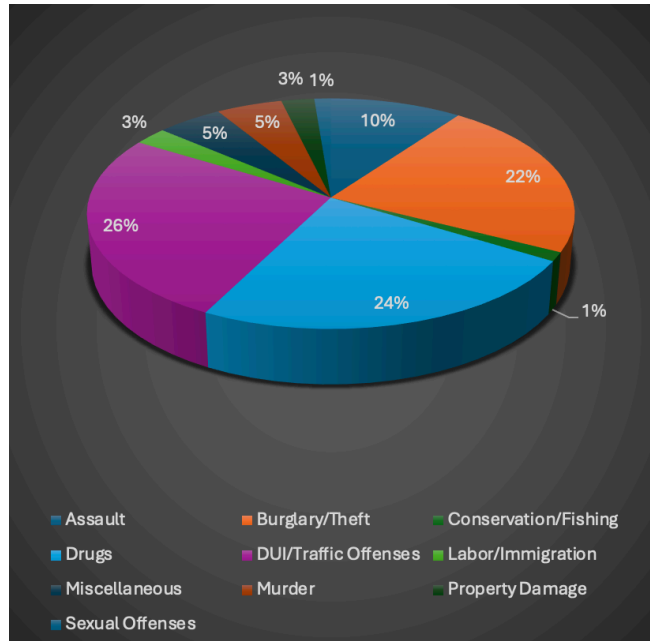


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Criminal Cases

A total of eighty (80) criminal cases were filed in 2024. Fifty-eight (58) out of the eighty (80) cases filed were filed in the Trial Division and the remaining twenty-two (22) cases were filed in the Court of Common Pleas. The table shown below shows the breakdown of the criminal charges filed by categories.

Case Categories	No.
Assault	8
Burglary/Theft	18
Conservation/Fishing	1
Drugs	19
DUI/Traffic Offenses	21
Labor/Immigration	2
Miscellaneous	4
Murder	4
Property Damage	2
Sexual Offenses	1
	80



Criminal Charges Filed Under the Family Protection Act

Criminal charges filed pursuant to the Family Protection Act (FPA) are filed in both the Trial Division and the Court of Common Pleas, depending on whether they are felony or misdemeanor charges. Felony charges are filed via an information as a criminal case. Misdemeanors are generally filed via citations.

In 2024, there were fifty-three (53) FPA misdemeanor citations filed, and three (3) FPA felony cases filed, totaling fifty-six criminal actions filed.

Juvenile

Juvenile Citations filed by alleged Perpetrator

Male	62	90%
Female	7	10%
	69	

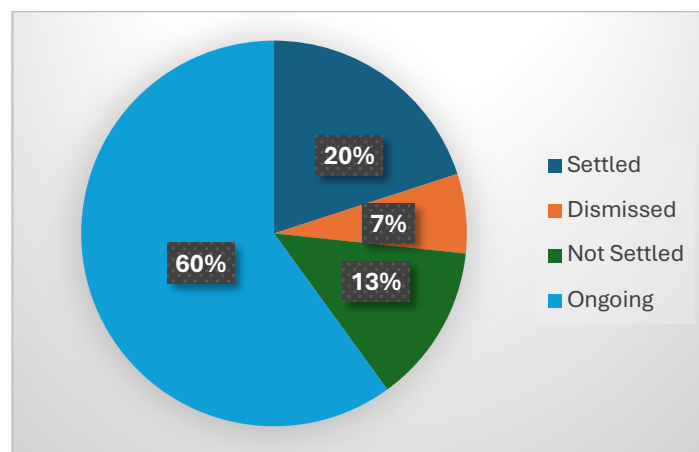
With a total of sixty-nine juvenile citations, sixty-two (62) or 90% of the cases and citations were filed against boys; seven (7) or 10% were filed against girls.

Outcomes of juvenile cases and citations		
Deferred Adjudication/Prosecution (Diversionary Process)	3	4%
Adjudicated (No Diversionary Process) and penalty includes incarceration	2	3%
Adjudicated (No Diversionary Process) and penalty does not include incarceration	37	54%
Dismissed, Warrant outstanding, Pending	27	39%
	69	

The outcome for the sixty-nine (69) juvenile cases and citations disposed are as follows: three (3) received a deferred adjudication/prosecution (diversionary process); two (2) were adjudicated (no diversionary process) and penalty included confinement; thirty-seven (37) were adjudicated (no diversionary process) and penalty did not include confinement; twenty-five were dismissed and two (2) are still pending.

Mediation

In 2024, fifteen (15) cases were assigned to mediation. Three cases were settled, one was dismissed, two were unable to settle, and nine cases are still ongoing.



Jury

In 2024, twenty (20) of the new criminal cases filed qualified for jury trial. Of the twelve (12) jury cases disposed in 2024, nine (9) plead out and did not go to trial, two (2) were dismissed and one (1) waived the right to a jury trial and plead out. One (1) of the cases filed in 2024 had four defendants, which all plead out after jurors were impaneled but before trial began. Only one (1) of the twenty (20) criminal cases filed in 2024 went to trial.

The Jury section printed three thousand two hundred forty-three (3243) jury summons. One thousand seven hundred-fifteen (1715) were executed. The judiciary continues to strive to improve its jury trial process and thanks everyone summoned for fulfilling their civic duty.

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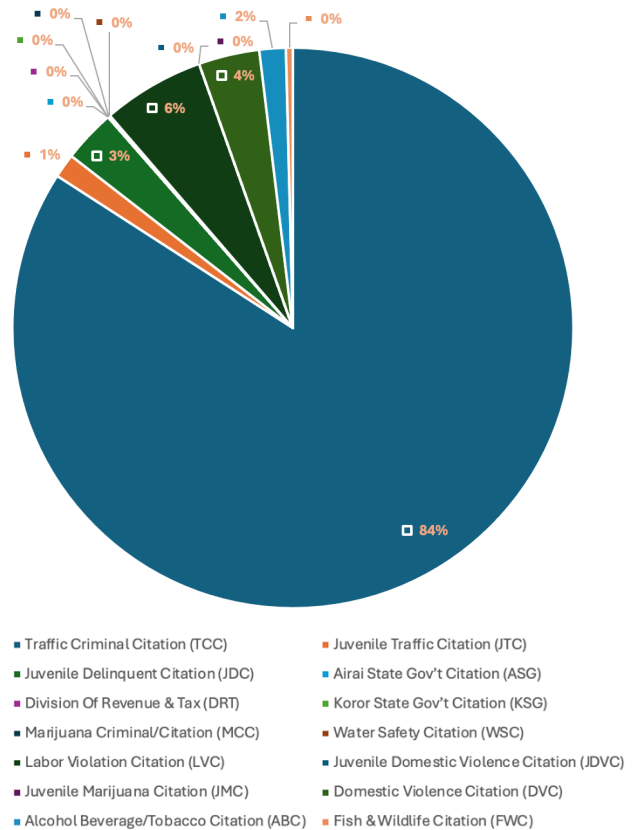
Court of Common Pleas

Citations

There were 1512 citations filed in 2024. The citations are filed in the first instance in the Court of Common Pleas. If the Judge of the Court of Common Pleas has a conflict, a Justice from the Trial Division is designated to preside over the citation. Citations comprise the majority of the court's caseload and are heard weekly. A citation, depending on the charge, may be paid at the Office of the Clerk of Courts if an offender does not contest the charge(s).

The table below is a citation break-down by category.

Citation Categories	No.
Traffic Criminal Citation (TCC)	1272
Juvenile Traffic Citation (JTC)	21
Juvenile Delinquent Citation (JDC)	46
Airai State Gov't Citation (ASG)	0
Division Of Revenue & Tax (DRT)	0
Koror State Gov't Citation (KSG)	0
Marijuana Criminal/Citation (MCC)	1
Water Safety Citation (WSC)	1
Labor Violation Citation (LVC)	89
Juvenile Domestic Violence Citation (JDVC)	0
Juvenile Marijuana Citation (JMC)	0
Domestic Violence Citation (DVC)	53
Alcohol Beverage/Tobacco Citation (ABC)	23
Fish & Wildlife Citation (FWC)	6
Total Citations	1512



The table below shows the number of paid citations. Certain types of offenses cannot be paid directly, and the offender must appear before the court. Out of the 1512 citations filed, 712 were paid while the remaining 778 citations proceeded to court.

PAID CITATIONS	712	48%
Citations w/hearings	778	52%
Total Citations	1490	

Small Claims

Small Claims cases are monetary claims of up to \$3,000 and are filed in the Court of Common Pleas. In 2024, there were sixty-two (62) small claim cases filed, sixty-five (65) disposed, and six (6) pending with a 104.84% clearance rate and an average duration of fifty-five (55) days.

Land Court

In 2024, a total of 158 cases were filed in the Land Court. Throughout the year, one hundred twenty-two (122) cases were disposed of, leaving three hundred fifty-five remaining at the end of 2024. This comes to a 77.22% clearance rate with an average duration of four hundred eleven (411) days.

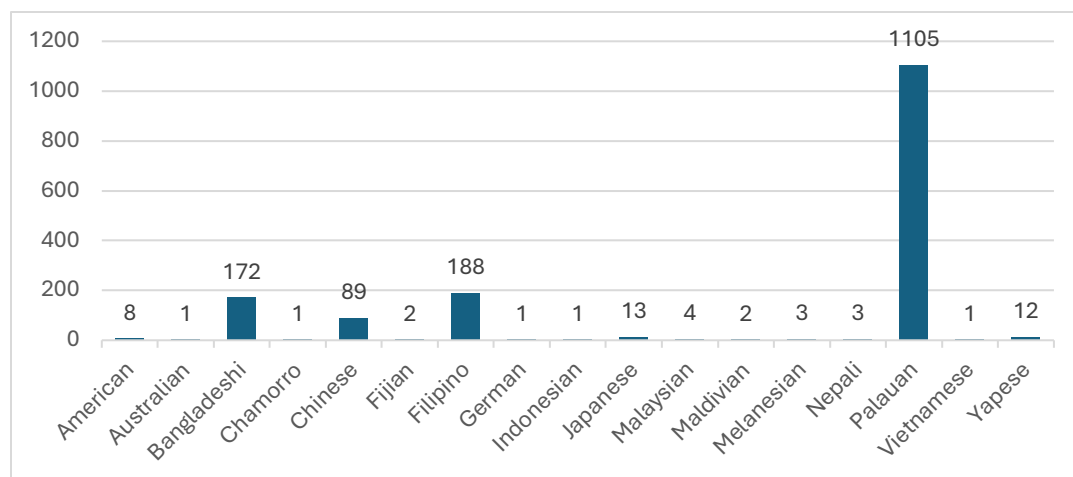
Code of Conduct Complaints

The Judiciary's Code of Judicial Conduct was promulgated on March 1, 2011, by the Palau Supreme Court and amended on March 9, 2011. A copy of the Judicial Code of Conduct can be retrieved from the Rules & Other Publications tab of the Palau Judiciary website: www.palausupremecourt.net.

In 2024, there were zero (0) complaints filed against a judicial officer or staff.

Defendants by Nationality

For an overview of defendants by nationality in 2024, see the chart below. Palauans make up the majority with 1,105 individuals (68%), followed by Filipinos with 188 (11%), Bangladeshis with 172 (10%), and Chinese with 89 (5%). Other nationalities each number fewer than 15, collectively accounting for less than 0.9%.



VI. To Adjudicate in a Timely Fashion Title to All Lands in the Republic of Palau.

On September 22, 2022, the President of the Republic of Palau signed into law RPPL No. 11-25. This law amended certain sections of Title 35 relating to the Land Court. Most notably, this law moved the Land Registration Officers (LRO) and employees from the Bureau of Lands and Surveys (BLS) and placed them back under the jurisdiction of the Land Court as they once were. On February 13, 2023, three LROs officially and physically relocated to the Land Court at the court complex in Ngerulmud, Melekeok.

From February 13, 2023, to the date of this report, which is slightly over a year, the 4,721 pending claims brought by the LROs have been reduced to **4,000** as reflected in column 3 of Table I. In other words, as reflected in column 4 of Table 1, **721** claims have been disposed.^[1]

i. LRO Statistics

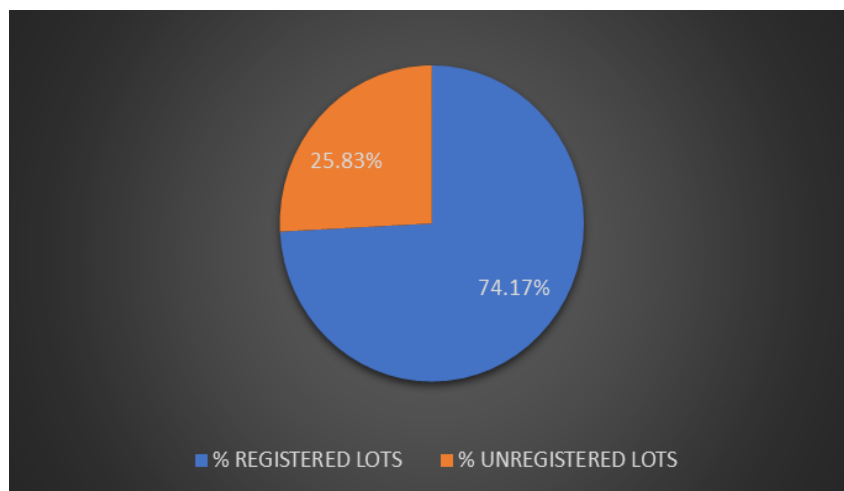
TABLE I CLAIMS BROUGHT BY LROs				
COLUMN 1 STATE	COLUMN 2 No. of Claims as of Feb. 2023	COLUMN 3 No. of Claims as Feb 2024	COLUMN 4 No. of DISPOSED CLAIMS	COMMENTS
AIMELIK	511	511	0	YET TO BE VERIFIED AND SORTED, FOR POSSIBLE DISPOSED CASES INCLUDED
AIRAI	400	400	0	CLAIMS TO BE SORTED OUT, CONSOLIDATED/VERIFY STATUS
ANGAUR	11	0	11	COMPLETED
HATOHOBEL	853	799	54	CLAIMS YET TO BE SORTED
KAYANGEL	0	0	0	COMPLETED
KOROR	474	247	227	YET TO BE VERIFIED AND SORTED, FOR POSSIBLE DISPOSED CASES INCLUDED
MELEKEOK	0	0	0	COMPLETED
NGARAARD	32	21	11	CLAIMS YET TO BE SORTED OUT, VERIFY STATUS FOR UPDATE
NGARDMAU	56	0	56	COMPLETED
NGAREMLENGUI	158	121	37	1 CLAIM DISPOSED BY LAND COURT ON MAY 2023
NGATPANG	61	66	-5	CLAIMS TO BE SORTED OUT
NGCHESAR	17	10	7	MOSTLY COMPLETED
NGERCHELONG	294	253	41	CLAIMS TO BE SORTED OUT, VERIFY STATUS FOR UPDATE
NGIWAL	339	191	148	CLAIMS TO BE SORTED OUT, SOME TO BE VERIFIED IF DISPOSED FOR UPDATE
PELELIU	974	860	114	CLAIMS TO BE SORTED OUT, CONSOLIDATED/VERIFY STATUS
SONSOROL	541	521	20	CLAIMS YET TO BE SORTED
TOTAL	4721	4000	721	

In the beginning of 2024, the Judiciary was presented with 4,720 pending land claim files. The amount of work that began by confirming, consolidating, and disposing of redundant files is important. Records obtained from BLS as reflected in the last two columns of Table III below show that **74.17% of the total land mass in Palau has been registered. The remaining 25.83% have not been registered.** In other words, ownership determination for this remaining land area remains to be made.

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TOTAL REGISTERED AND UNREGISTERED LAND

NO.	STATE	TOTAL LAND AREA		TOTAL AREA CERTIFIED CADASTRAL PLATS		TOTAL AREA UNREGISTERED LOTS		PERCENTAGE	
		SQUARE METERS	SQUARE MILES	SQUARE METERS	SQUARE MILES	SQUARE METERS	SQUARE MILES	REGISTERED LOTS	UNREGISTERED LOTS
1	MELEKEOK	24,694,925	9.535	21,582,054	8.333	3,112,871	1.202	87.39%	12.61%
2	TOBI (HATOHOBEL)	753,332	0.291	261,004	0.101	492,328	0.190	34.65%	65.35%
3	NGARCHELONG	8,465,560	3.269	7,270,945	2.807	1,194,615	0.461	85.89%	14.11%
4	AIRAI	46,481,192	17.946	41,376,572	15.976	5,104,620	1.971	89.02%	10.98%
5	PELELIU	15,695,811	6.060	14,421,387	5.568	1,274,424	0.492	91.88%	8.12%
6	NGARDMAU	31,169,315	12.035	16,027,287	6.188	15,142,028	5.846	51.42%	48.58%
7	ANGUAR	7,977,525	3.080	6,760,677	2.610	1,216,848	0.470	84.75%	15.25%
8	KAYANGEL	1,576,861	0.609	1,576,862	0.609	0	0.000	100.00%	0.00%
9	AIMELIJK	38,687,741	14.937	19,083,943	7.368	19,603,798	7.569	49.33%	50.67%
10	NGATPANG	34,209,985	13.209	16,231,597	6.267	17,978,388	6.941	47.45%	52.55%
11	NGEREMLENGUI	58,913,227	22.746	53,682,892	20.727	5,230,335	2.019	91.12%	8.88%
12	NGARAARD	28,418,419	10.972	19,604,246	7.569	8,814,173	3.403	68.98%	31.02%
13	NGIWAL	15,332,725	5.920	4,097,299	1.582	11,235,426	4.338	26.72%	73.28%
14	NGCHESAR	36,444,437	14.071	35,893,132	13.858	551,305	0.213	98.49%	1.51%
15	SONSOROL	2,977,666	1.150	1,399,756	0.540	1,577,910	0.609	47.01%	52.99%
16	KOROR	12,250,852	4.730	10,744,162	4.148	1,506,690	0.582	87.70%	12.30%
TOTAL AREA/AVERAGE =		364,049,573	140.560	270,013,815	104.253	94,035,758	36.307	74.17%	25.83%



^[1] “Disposed claims” means either determinations of ownership or certificates of title have been issued, or the claims have been submitted to the Land Court for hearing, or they are duplicates, or untimely.

Special Highlights

Renovation (Phase 2)

The Restoration/Renovation of the Historical Building

The work began in earnest in 2024. The first phase was the rehabilitation of the support columns. This began with chipping out the old and cracking concrete and excavating the soil around the footing. This took a substantial amount of time and manpower.

Following the removal of the cracked concrete, the rusted rebars were replaced, and epoxy concrete was poured into forms surrounding and reinforcing the columns.

This reinforcement work took place on the exterior and the interior of the building.

Phase two involved the demolition and removal of the failing concrete roof on the second floor. This involved jackhammering and cutting the old rebars. This process weakened the beams on the second floor, which had to be reinforced prior to the addition of the aluminum roof. This process took much of 2024.



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Chief Justice Oldiais Ngiraikelau attending Guam Judiciary's 50th Anniversary



Chief Justice Oldiais Ngiraikelau attended the 50th anniversary of the Guam Judiciary that was commemorated on July 5-6, 2024, with a series of events marking the milestone. This anniversary marked 50 years since the enactment of the Court Reorganization Act of 1974 which restructured Guam's judicial system.

Outreach Program on Domestic Violence



In 2024, Mr. Kambes Kesolei held a live radio talk show on TMC with Ms. Sylvia Bekebekmad, Ms. Stella Fixico, and Ms. Makka Oimei, members of the Gender-Based Advisory Committee. The group disseminated information on Domestic Violence signs, survival tips, victim services, and ways to obtain a restraining order with the courts.

Peter D. Huffman Sworn in as Associate Justice of the Trial Division



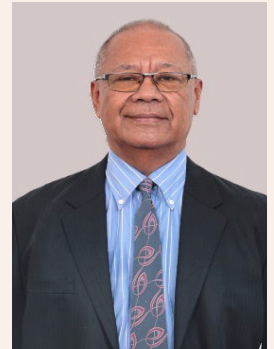
On December 16, 2024, Peter D. Huffman was officially sworn in as an Associate Justice of the Trial Division of the Palau Judiciary. Justice Huffman brings a diverse background in law, public service, and environmental advocacy. Originally from Indiana and Alabama, he earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry from the U.S. Naval Academy before serving seven years as a Navy officer aboard the USS John S. McCain and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower. Following his military service, Justice Huffman attended Yale Law School, where he was an articles editor for the *Yale Law Journal*. He practiced complex litigation in New York City and later clerked for Judge Henry Floyd of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. In 2016, he first came to Palau as Senior Court Counsel for the Judiciary. Most recently, he worked with the Natural Resources Defense Council, litigating environmental protection cases and mentoring junior attorneys. The Judiciary welcomes Justice Huffman back to Palau and looks forward to his contributions to the Trial Division.



A TRIBUTE TO THE HONORABLE JOHN K. RECHUCHER



By Chief Justice Oldiais Ngiraikelau
and Chief Ngiraked Yukiwo P. Dengokl



Few Palauans have achieved the distinction of being lawyers. Fewer still have achieved the rank of Justice in the highest level of the Judicial Branch of the Republic of Palau: the Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court. The late Associate Justice John K. Rechucher was one of the select few Palauans who held both distinctions.

Justice Rechucher grew up in Palau at a time when Palau was still recovering from the effects of the Second World War. Life was very difficult, especially for anyone seeking an education. Given the limited resources available during those trying times, it was difficult to imagine how far any student in Palau would progress. Yet despite the difficulties, Justice Rechucher persevered in his studies, from boarding school to college to eventually enrolling in the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco, California (now known as the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco), and graduated with his JD degree in May of 1974.

After being admitted to practice law in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Justice Rechucher became one of the select few Palauans to achieve the rank of an attorney at law and began work at the District Attorney's office in Saipan. Among his legal contemporaries in the early Trust Territory days were the late Mamoru Nakamura, who became the first Chief Justice in 1981 when Palau achieved limited self-government and its own Constitution took effect; Arthur Ngiraklsong, who succeeded Mamoru Nakamura as the next Chief Justice; and lawyers Kaleb Udui, John Tarkong, Carlos H. Salii, Mariano Carlos, and Johnson Toribiong. Justice Rechucher and his "Palauan brothers in the law" were the early trail blazers in the legal field in Micronesia in general and Palau in particular. For those of us who aspired to become lawyers, they were our role models, and we followed in their footsteps many years after they returned home to set up their law practices.

Justice Rechucher, like his Palauan legal contemporaries, established a thriving private law practice in Palau, which he maintained until his appointment to the Bench. His law firm lasted many years, and its success was a testament to his legal talent. Before joining the Bench, Justice Rechucher bore various traditional titles, eventually ascending to that of Beouch, the highest-ranking traditional chief in Ngardmau State. As Beouch, Justice Rechucher was a member of the Palau Council of Chiefs.

In 2016, with a vacancy in the Appellate Division of the Palau Supreme Court, Justice Rechucher was appointed by the President to the position of an Associate Justice of the Palau Supreme Court's Appellate Division, where he served until his untimely death on September 16, 2024. During his tenure as a high court judge, Justice Rechucher served with integrity, dedication, and commitment. He embodied the principles of impartiality, compassion, and patience. He gave the parties and counsel who appeared before him his undivided attention, affording them the time they needed to present their cases. More often than not, he permitted parties to take more time than the rules allowed. He did this because he understood the gravity of the issues before him and how his determination would affect real people.

He firmly believed in the preservation of our traditions and customs, and he championed the role of traditional law and custom in our jurisprudence. His judgments were not only a testament to his legal acumen but also a reflection of this belief and deep respect for our traditions and customs. His contributions to our small legal community and his indelible impact on Palau's judicial system will forever be remembered and cherished.

Beyond the courtroom, Justice Rechucher was a mentor, a leader, and a friend to many. Those of us who knew Justice Rechucher and befriended him during part of his lifetime found him to be a man of many talents extending beyond the law. One of his nonlegal talents was that of an excellent storyteller. When he told a joke, it came with punchlines that, augmented by his unique facial expressions and bodily movements, would invariably make his listeners spit their food or drink onto whomever happened to be seated across the table; he was that good. Though we never heard him sing in person, from stories told by others, he was also quite a talented singer. He could chant Palauan chants and do "llall," which is a special type of humorous Palauan chant that makes fun of or ridicules someone.

A patient, soft-spoken, gentle person, Justice Rechucher was a good family man and friend who will be missed by all. May his memory inspire us to pursue justice with courage and compassion, and may he rest in eternal peace.



Neil Ringang

Marshall II

09/5/2010 – 05/29/2024



"We couldn't have achieved our success without the dedication and hard work of our fellow colleagues (no longer with us) who put in long hours, made sacrifices and in some cases placed themselves in harm's way for their job. Their invaluable contributions have left a lasting impact on our lives and our work."

- Palau Judiciary