

2018 Hawai'i Access to Justice Conference
"Fighting for Access to Justice for All"
June 29, 2018

Workshop summary:¹

"Sexual Harassment and Access to Justice"

Presenters: Mihoko Ito, Ashford & Wriston (facilitator); Dr. Marie Vorsino, Vice President of Intervention Programs at Parents and Children Together; Elizabeth Fujiwara; Gemma Weinstein, President, Unite Here Local 5; Rachael Wong, founder, One Shared Future

Facilitator Mihoko Ito introduced the workshop before opening the discussion up to panelists to share more on their experiences with sexual harassment and strategies for creating conditions to work towards ending it.

Panelist Rachael Wong started by sharing her experience and the support she received after filing a very public sexual harassment complaint with the Hawai'i State Ethics Commission. The complaint was against made against the former Speaker of the House of Representatives for an incident that occurred while Ms. Wong was the director of the Hawai'i Department of Human Services. Panelist Local 5 Union President Gemma Weinstein also shared her personal survivor story, which occurred while she was working as a housekeeper in a large hotel. Ms. Weinstein expressed concerns over the failure of the hotel industry to respond to employees in a meaningful way when sexual harassers are paying guests, like they were in her case, as opposed to fellow employees. Ms. Weinstein also noted that low-wage, immigrant housekeepers are a particularly vulnerable population. She is using her platform to push for a law that requires hotels to provide housekeepers with panic buttons as one form of protections against sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Panelist Elizabeth Fujiwara, civil rights attorney and sexual harassment expert, then talked about legal protections and legal strategies for how to respond when a client is being or has been sexually harassed/assaulted. She also provided helpful handouts, such as the sexual harassment section in the Hawaii Employment Law Manual and a cheat sheet on how to protect oneself at work. Panelist Dr. Marie Vorsino of Parents and Children Together discussed the mental health implications of a culture plagued with sexual harassment and sexual assault, noting a link between the topic and domestic violence. Ms. Wong shared an update on community resources and employer services that are planned for Hawai'i.

¹ A draft was prepared by Ashlee Drake Berry, staff attorney, Legal Aid Society of Hawaii, and reviewed by the presenters.