

STATE OF THE JUDICIARY ADDRESS

Delivered by The Honorable Chief Justice F. Philip Carbullido

April 29, 2022

Greetings and Acknowledgements

Recognition of the 2022 Hustisia Award Recipient

Before I begin, there is a particular distinguished guest that I would like to take a few moments to recognize, and that is the 2022 recipient of the Hustisia Award: The Honorable Retired Judge Elizabeth Barrett-Anderson. Judge Barrett-Anderson – fondly known to us at the court as simply “EBA” – is a pioneer in her own right. The first female CHamoru attorney admitted to practice law in Guam, Guam’s first woman and longest-serving Attorney General, a two-term senator, and a judge, Judge EBA not only broke barriers, but dedicated her intellect, skill, and positions of influence toward bettering the lives of our people and improving the work of justice in our community.

Her contributions over four decades of work in the legal and legislative fields demonstrate a life in service to the law and to advocacy for social change. As a member of the bench, she was at the forefront of the movement toward establishing therapeutic court programs to target the root causes of criminality, such as substance abuse, and in advancing the concept of juvenile justice.

The Hustisia Award is bestowed each year in recognition of someone whose work exemplifies a dedication to advancing the cause of justice in our community. As a lawyer, an advocate, a senator, Attorney General, and a judicial officer, Judge Barrett-Anderson epitomizes the essence of every quality the Hustisia Award celebrates. Please join me in applauding Retired Judge Elizabeth Barrett-Anderson

and thanking her for her decades of ground-breaking and dedicated service to the people of Guam and the work of justice.

Introductory Thoughts

I began my current term as Chief Justice in January 2020 – just two months before we found ourselves in the grips of a worldwide pandemic that left us all in a state of uncertainty, scrambling to figure out how – *or even whether* – we could continue our operations. I could never have predicted, nor would I have ever desired, that a virus would shape my entire term at the helm of the Judicial Branch. But the reality is that, in many ways, it has. In my last two addresses to this body, much of what I reported was how our courts of justice shifted gears, innovated, and strategized to continue providing our mandated services while adhering to COVID restrictions and protocols. And reflecting on these past couple of years, I feel confident in saying we did our absolute best under the circumstances. I continue to express my deepest appreciation to all judicial officers, court employees, and stakeholders for the role they played in ensuring that our most critical court services never ceased.

As I prepared to give my final State of the Judiciary Address for this term, it got me thinking a lot about my last two addresses and how I can only hope they captured our efforts during this tumultuous snapshot in history – how we navigated some rough seas, how we managed to stay open, how we adapted our delivery of justice services in ways we never had before. And the word that kept coming to my mind was “infrastructure” – that our stability and adaptability are rooted in our having laid in place a solid infrastructure over the years, which, in retrospect, became the key reason we stayed afloat during the pandemic.

I also got to thinking about what these State of the Judiciary addresses mean and how they vividly document the incredible evolutionary journey of our Judicial Branch. In 1998, the Judiciary was described in the State of the Judiciary Address as “a broken branch.” Four years later, as being “in recovery.” Then in 2020, even as we grappled with the COVID onslaught, I confidently described the state of our branch as “steady, stable, and safe.”

As you might imagine – or as some of you might even remember – it took a lot for us to get from “a broken branch,” to “steady, stable, and safe.” It was some journey – and I tell you this from experience, because I was there for most it. If you don’t recall just how far our branch has come, a look back at these addresses over the years will serve as a great lesson in Guam’s recent judicial history.

To be clear, less than 20 years ago, Guam’s judicial branch was neither equal to nor independent from the other two branches of government, but instead had the precarious position of being subject to change at the will of the executive or legislative branches.

Back then, the Judiciary operated with two distinct courts: the trial court, and the appellate division. A unified judiciary for Guam was considered by many to be a pipe dream. Please pause for just a moment and consider that. It is easy for us to take for granted the justice system we have today – defined, stable, organized, and no longer subject to the political whims of any other branch. But just two short decades ago, our judicial branch as we know it did not exist.

I cannot emphasize enough how significant it is that we have journeyed so far in such a relatively short time. And I thank my predecessor justices, my fellow judicial officers in the Superior Court, our advocates in the Legislature, Congresswoman

Madeleine Bordallo who shepherded the Organic Act amendments through Congress, and the many others whose tenacity and foresight contributed to our successful efforts to establish our branch and nurture it as it matured. And I must thank and recognize Presiding Judge Alberto Lamorena for the partnership that has developed between us over these years. Together, we have endured the natural growing pains that come with any change, and I am very grateful to have him as an invaluable partner in justice today.

Judicial Infrastructure

I firmly believe that everything that took place on that evolutionary journey – the good, the difficult, and all that happened in between – were critical and necessary parts of our story. They helped lay the infrastructure that has allowed us to remain operational even during these most challenging and unpredictable of times.

Twenty years ago, at the very core of its structure, our judicial system was a divided operation with two courts separate from each other in organization, administration, and leadership. All those who fought the difficult battle to establish a unified judiciary understood that, as a divided operation, we lacked the solid foundation to function as an independent and co-equal branch of government. Infrastructure. A simple enough word, but one so steeped with significance. It is defined as the foundation of a system or organization. For those with vision, the word infrastructure draws to mind a smoothly paved road with few potholes or bumps. It is a word descriptive of a seamless path forward.

I have always maintained that a strong and stable justice system is a critical component of any community's infrastructure – like power, water, roads, and public safety. But unless the justice system *itself* has a solid infrastructure in place, then it

is as cumbersome or useless as a road riddled with potholes or a downed power line. Investing in our infrastructure has always been my priority as the leader of this branch, and I know my colleagues on the Supreme Court each committed to this investment during their terms as Chief Justice. And because of that, the proverbial wheels of justice have never stopped turning – even now as we enter into our third year of COVID operations.

Responsive and Rooted

Madame Speaker and Senators, Governor Leon Guerrero and Lt. Governor Tenorio, my fellow judicial officers and court employees, ladies and gentlemen: I am proud to report that the state of your Judiciary is responsive and rooted – responsive to the ever-changing demands of providing quality justice services even under pandemic conditions; rooted in the solid infrastructure that makes our operations possible.

Now, with your indulgence, I would like to share with you some of what the Judicial Branch has done in the past year to invest in, strengthen, and shore up *our* infrastructure so we can remain a well-functioning component of *our island's* infrastructure.

Case Updates

I would like to first update you on the status of our case management and our efforts to eliminate the pandemic backlog. I know that, for the lawyers and parties who come before the court, this is what matters most to you. When I last addressed this body, I reported on how we worked diligently – exhausting every option possible – to minimize the negative impact of the pandemic on our delivery of justice services. Despite the challenges of pandemic operations, we kept things moving; despite our best efforts, however, I know that this may not have felt like enough. As I stand

before you today, I can report that our judicial officers are as committed as ever to hearing and resolving disputes effectively and expeditiously.

Even as new cases are filed every day, our Superior Court Judges, magistrates, and referees work tirelessly to address the mounting backlog of cases. Because we could not safely hold jury trials in our trial courtrooms, last year our trial judges held nearly 50 jury trials in our two makeshift high-capacity courtrooms at our San Ramon and Route 4 buildings and in our appellate courtroom. I especially want to thank Presiding Judge Lamorena and our trial judges for addressing and tackling the backlog of asserted criminal trials.

However, the asserted criminal cases were not the only cases that needed to be resolved. Our judicial officers remained focused on adjudicating other cases including adoption, probate, civil litigation, and juvenile matters. This past year, our trial judges held nearly 23,000 hearings, with roughly 17,000 of those conducted remotely. Although we have made great progress in moving cases forward, we acknowledge that there is still so much more to be done. We appreciate the efforts of our stakeholders – and, in particular, the practitioners and litigants – who continue to assist us in moving these cases toward closure as quickly as possible. We thank them also for their flexibility in adapting to the new order of business, which is heavily reliant on technology.

Treatment Court Accomplishments

Embedded within our case updates is our treatment courts, which are often overlooked in our case data reports. Throughout the pandemic, our Superior Court Judges and Probation teams held the line and, as much as possible, continued to live up to the fidelity of our treatment court structures. Treatment courts, by their very

nature, are labor intensive for all involved – be it the judicial officer, the treatment providers, or the participants. Many hours are dedicated to ensuring that every opportunity is given for a participant to succeed.

Even with drive-through graduation ceremonies and virtual commendations, we never let the pandemic take away the honor that each of these graduates so deserved. In this past year, the Judiciary hosted graduation ceremonies for our Driving While Intoxicated Treatment Court, Adult Drug Court, Juvenile Drug Court, Veterans Treatment Court, Family Recovery Program, and Adult Reentry Court Program. We thank all the court staff who made these possible, and most of all, we congratulate all the treatment court graduates.

Expanding and Improving Technology Infrastructure

Like most other government and private entities, the Judiciary's use of technology in the age of COVID skyrocketed. Everything from court hearings to client counseling to appellate arguments – at some point – was done either by Zoom, teleconference, or some other virtual means. Once the pandemic hit, technology shifted from being a pre-COVID convenience to a necessary component in fulfilling our mandates. We quickly discovered that the prefix “tele” could be added to almost any word! Telework, teleconference, telehealth. You name it, we tele-did it. And although we thankfully had a basic infrastructure in place to allow us to shift at a moment's notice to remote and virtual operations, the pandemic exposed critical IT shortfalls.

With our judicial officers, therapeutic providers, and court employees conducting business on a largely virtual platform, this placed a growing strain on our technology infrastructure and shortened the life span of our servers. Our cable and fiber highway

quickly became overly congested and sorely in need of upgrades, as did our operating systems and software.

As the island has now begun to slowly return to pre-pandemic operations, a growing number of our stakeholders and court clients have expressed a strong desire to maintain virtual court platforms, and understandably so. They offer many advantages for justice-involved persons, the greatest of which is the ease of participation. Anyone with a cell phone or laptop and access to the internet can take part in virtual hearings and services, without necessarily having to take the day off from work, arrange childcare, or physically drive to court. With the exorbitant gas prices these days, having one less place to drive is a welcome break. As I reported last year, we continue to see success in virtual appearances with our child support hearings and our weekly therapeutic sessions held virtually at our Client Services and Family Counseling Division.

Transparency Through New System of Media Access

Going virtual has also helped us increase our transparency. As the pandemic persisted, the Judiciary availed of various mainstream communications technologies to ensure the public and news media had uninterrupted access to judicial proceedings, despite limitations placed on indoor gathering. Many Superior Court hearings can be accessed by teleconference and Zoom. All appellate hearings are livestreamed, and also recorded for later viewing on the Judiciary's YouTube channel. And for patrons without access to these technologies, the court provides streaming and Zoom rooms on-site.

Cybersecurity

Although the virtual platform has its undeniable benefits, we have learned that remote hearings take longer than those held in person. Many hearings are hybrid hearings with attorneys appearing on Zoom, some parties on a teleconference line, and others in the courtroom with the judge and court staff. These hearings require significant technical assistance and resources, but we continue to improve the remote-hearing platform because the bottom line is that, even after pandemic restrictions subside, virtual platforms are here to stay. Because of this, we continue to invest in acquiring and upgrading the technology tools necessary to safely and securely continue our operations virtually in the digital world.

Assisted by ARP money, we are upgrading servers and firewalls, laying new fiber lines, and purchasing the equipment to function as a state-of-the-art third branch of government. Governor Leon Guerrero, please know that the ARP money you have allocated to the Judiciary is being used not only for the cleaning and sanitization of our facilities, but also to support and strengthen our virtual platforms and operating systems. And we thank you for that.

Electronic Monitoring

One technological advancement that we embarked on even prior to the pandemic is the use of electronic monitoring as an alternative to detention at the overcrowded Department of Corrections. With budgetary assistance in 2019, we launched the electronic monitoring, or EM, program, which included use of bands able to track the movement of participants. By the start of the pandemic, the Judiciary's EM numbers had increased into the double digits. At one point, we were providing EM supervision for some 65 participants, but due to budget constraints, we have now had to cap that number at just 50. I am told that we have a waitlist for participants in this program.

While I am tempted to use this accomplishment to push forward our upcoming budget, I will refrain, for now. The story to be told here is the success that the Judiciary has had with a technological answer to an overcrowded prison system. Under the direction of Chief Probation Officer Rossanna Villagomez-Aguon and Probation Officer Supervisor Hill Leon Guerrero, and assisted by our Marshals Division, under the direction of Marshal of the Courts Troy Pangelinan, the EM program is the Judiciary's success. And I thank and recognize the hard work of all involved.

Facilities Infrastructure Upgrades

As much as we have been doing and will continue to do virtually, certain aspects of our mission, such as jury trials, need to be conducted in person. Ten days ago, the Judiciary, along with the rest of the island, lifted social distancing requirements within our facilities. This means that our Superior Court judges can now return to their own courtrooms to hold jury trials, which, for the past couple of years, have been held in one of only three high-capacity courtrooms. This, in turn, means that we can return some of our focus to getting our facility upgrades back on the radar: specifically, the completion of an eighth trial courtroom, the renovation of the San Ramon building, and the long-awaited restoration of the Guam Historic Courthouse, which is the original Superior Court building.

With the Governor's inclusion of an eighth judge in the executive budget, we are in the process of converting the space that once functioned as our MIS server room into a high-capacity courtroom for the additional trial judge. And now that the San Ramon building is no longer needed for jury trials, we can return to our original plans of renovating that space and relocating some of our administrative divisions there. This will help us finally address our overcrowded workspaces.

I am also excited to report that the restoration of our historic courthouse is finally underway. The restoration plan will offer enhanced workspaces for our Probation Division, while still preserving and honoring the historic features of this building. I hope to cut the ribbon on this restored space before the end of the year.

While on the topic of our Capital Improvement Projects, I would be remiss if I did not mention our Procurement and Facilities Administrator Carl Dominguez, Deputy Administrator Marissa Antonio, and Contract Supervisor Joleen Cepeda. These three have worked non-stop since the start of the pandemic. Carl has taken charge of designing most of our temporary high-capacity courtrooms and the other facility upgrades now underway. Marissa and Joleen work the procurement side of the house and have probably purchased more in the past two years than the last ten years at the Judiciary. To the three of you, and your entire team, I want to acknowledge and thank you for your dedication and hard work, especially during these past two years.

Employee Excellence

Last year, I told you about the launch of two major in-house training and education efforts, which are intended to ensure continuity in the Judiciary's leadership team and promote ethical conduct from all ranks of our Familian Kotte. One effort is the Judiciary's Leadership Development Academy, which aims to prepare employees to rise to leadership positions within our branch, or wherever their careers may take them. The other major training effort launched last year is the Judiciary's Ethics Academy, which trained our entire workforce on our Revised Code of Conduct adopted by the Judicial Council. By focusing on ethical matters unique to the role of judicial employees, our Ethics Academy complements the training provided by the Guam Ethics Commission, which is required by law.

We have also undertaken the overwhelming but important task of updating, revising, and modernizing our personnel rules. We are now reviewing employee comments and feedback on the proposed rules with a targeted Judicial Council adoption date within a few months.

With our law enforcement employees, we continue to fulfill our statutory mandate by holding the Guam Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission's Physical Fitness Qualification Test, or PFQT. In February – even in the middle of the surge of COVID-positive employees – our HR team tested approximately 114 law enforcement officers under our PFQT standards – consisting of sit ups, push-ups, and a timed run. I am proud to report that our law enforcement officers had a solid pass rate of 83 percent. I am also proud to report that Chief Rossanna of Probation excelled in her age group and scored the highest in each category tested. Impressive, even if she was the only person in that age group. Great job, Chief!

And while I am proud of these endeavors to elevate the quality and caliber of our workforce, I am reminded regularly by our HR administrator Barbara Jean Perez that morale is just as important as training – especially during these past 25 months, when the anxiety and stress of the pandemic have caused emotional turmoil for even the strongest among us. So, although gatherings were restricted and face-to-face meetings scarce, we found innovative ways to connect with each other. We have learned that a little appreciation and positivity go a long way. And when employees feel better, they work better. In these difficult and strenuous times, morale really does matter.

Investing in Justice Through Collaboration and Partnerships

I have now shared with you some steps we have taken in the past year to invest in the internal infrastructure of our branch – our technology, our facilities, and our personnel. But we also recognize the great value that comes from investing in our partnerships – lending whatever assistance we can to help build stronger justice and community infrastructures for Guam. Probably the most rigorous of these investments is the work contemplated in Bill No. 146-36, which – if enacted into law – would mandate the first comprehensive review of Guam’s statutory criminal codes in nearly 50 years.

Our laws are the foundation of our justice system, and it is time for a comprehensive review that will both update laws on substantive offenses, and identify purely procedural provisions to be placed within new Guam Rules of Criminal Procedure, to be adopted by the Supreme Court of Guam.

With these important and timely goals in mind, the Judiciary has been preparing the framework to implement Bill 146 if it is enacted. The new Guam Criminal Law and Procedure Review Commission, established under the Judiciary, will be comprised of stakeholders from all three branches of government, to include the Office of the Attorney General and the Public Defender Service Corporation, law enforcement agencies, and the general public.

Through this collaboration, Guam will have a criminal statutory scheme consistent with the times, and rules of criminal procedure that comport with the current structure of our Judicial Branch. Bill 146-36 is an important investment in our justice infrastructure, and we are eager to do our part in that process. I thank Senator Frank F. Blas, Jr., for leading this long-overdue effort. We look forward to working

with Senator Blas and members of the Legislature in improving the administration of justice.

Community Outreach

At the start of my term in 2020, I set a community outreach goal for the court. I informed my managers I wanted the Judiciary to immerse itself into the community and find ways to contribute to bettering our island. As but one recent example, just a few days ago, our Marshals and Probation teams went out to various schools to present on much-needed drug education and awareness programs. As with all our outreach efforts – be they island cleanups or food and supply drives to benefit those in need – I am always thankful for the Judiciary employees, who contribute enthusiastically and generously – undeterred even during a global pandemic.

“Law Day”

A regular part of our community outreach are the various activities that take place each year at about this time. May 1 marks Law Day, and, at least in Guam, the beginning of Law Month. Law Day celebrates the rule of law in our society and cultivates a deeper understanding of the legal profession. Each year, the Law Month Planning Committee, chaired by Justice Robert Torres, puts on innovative programming designed to engage people of all ages – but especially the island’s youth – in developing an appreciation for the rule of law, the role of the courts, and the part we all play in ensuring the continued functioning of our democracy.

Through our efforts over the past several years, we have reached almost an entire generation of our island’s students who, as young as kindergarten, get a taste of the justice system by participating in fairy tale mock trial plays and various law-themed competitions.

And each year, the Supreme Court of Guam brings the courtroom to the classroom, hearing oral arguments in a real appellate case at one of the island's high schools. In a couple of weeks, the Supreme Court will hold session at Simon Sanchez High School, where the students will not only watch a live appellate argument but will get the chance to ask non-case-specific questions of the lawyers and justices after the hearing.

The Judiciary's efforts, in partnership with the District Court led by Chief Judge Frances Tydingco-Gatewood and the Guam Bar Association led by President Jacqueline Terlaje, have not gone unnoticed, as Guam's Law Month committee has received the prestigious ABA Law Day Outstanding Activity Award for Best Public Program for 9 of the last 14 years. Please join me in recognizing their outstanding work.

Mes CHamoru

The Judiciary also took an active role in the government-wide celebration of our culture and history during Mes CHamoru this past March. I'd like to take a moment here to boast about our recent participation in the Mes CHamoru Academic Challenge Bowl Trivia Extravaganza Contest (I understand they could not decide what to call the event!) held at PBS Guam and sponsored by the Department of CHamoru Affairs. Our team of Dr. Juan Rapadas and Dr. Lisa Baza from our Client Services Division, Dorothy Cruz from our Financial Management Division, and Dorianne Walker from our Probation Division took first place! I am told that Team Kotte soundly defeated the Governor's Office in the first round! As a CHamoru, I

am heartened to see a resurgence in our community's collective desire and commitment to learn about our culture; as the leader of this branch, however, I must admit that I am elated our team brought home the prize!

A Fair Budget, Adequate Staffing

And now this brings me to the final portion of this address, which is our annual budget request. This is the time of year when our senators are besieged by every agency and branch of our government, each one making its case for a viable piece of the pie. Last fiscal year, with the assistance of Senator San Agustin, the Judicial Branch received a budget that amounted to a little over 5 percent of the General Fund available for appropriation – which, although not ideal, was fair.

Our 2021 Annual Report, provided to you today and available on our website, sets forth the many accomplishments by our various court divisions in the first quarter of this fiscal year. The report demonstrates what we can do when given a fair and reasonable budget. With adequate support, we can ensure that our divisions are sufficiently staffed and able to perform the many statutory mandates imposed on us, and then some.

One of the recent examples of how we have done more can be found in the work of our Procurement Division. This division, being adequately staffed this fiscal year, was not only able to manage the procurement and purchase of the many technology and sanitization items we needed to continue our operations and to oversee the many ongoing capital improvement projects, but they also reached out to the Guam Police Department and assisted them with the renovations and improvements desperately needed for the island's crime lab to prepare for its upcoming accreditation.

Equitable Pay Adjustments

The Judiciary will once again come to the budget table requesting our fair share of the government revenues. In a few days, we will submit our budget – a “bare bones” request that considers the statutory mandates required of our branch of government. Our FY2023 budget submission includes the organic growth dictated by statutory mandates, and now pay adjustments for all our employees.

During the pandemic, our HR team took a hard look at the pay for our employees. This review was accelerated, in part, by the recent increase in law enforcement pay in the Executive Branch. The inequity of pay for our employees is now a glaring concern in the wake of the pandemic. Judicial branches across the nation are facing worker retention issues, as pay scales have not been increased in years. The Conference of Chief Justices revealed employee pay as one of the hot topics of discussion. Other Chief Justices have confronted this issue in their own State of the Judiciary addresses, and now I am compelled to do the same.

I am privileged to go to work every day with some of the hardest working and most dedicated employees in the government of Guam. The Judiciary’s employees come from all walks of life and their skills cover a diverse range of expertise. They are law enforcement officers, facilities workers, clerks, social workers, accountants, counselors, lawyers, cyber security technicians, and educators. Together, they work to deliver effective and efficient justice to those who seek our services. And each day, after giving their all to our operations, they go home to families and responsibilities that require as much attention as they dedicate to us. Our employees as a whole, and not just law enforcement, need respectable pay adjustments.

Guam law requires that public employee compensation be reviewed regularly for internal equity and external competitiveness. We have seen that such review is occurring across the Executive Branch with adjustments made to compensation plans for nurses, and more recently, for law enforcement officers. The Judiciary has also undertaken its review and has determined that it is both appropriate and financially reasonable to offer all our employees a moderate increase to their salaries in the upcoming fiscal year. This adjustment, if funded, would allow us to better retain and attract valuable employees.

The Judiciary does not come to the budget table asking for more than what we need to perform our constitutional and statutory obligations. In reality, it comes down to our mandates, and the mandates are largely driven by the Legislature, which introduces laws meant to better the community. In this cycle, the Judiciary invariably carves out a modest budgetary request. And we have done so again this time.

We Stand With The Front-Liners

By now, we have all been touched by COVID – not just by the disruption the pandemic has caused in all our lives, but by the actual virus – either infecting us or those close to us. This pandemic has caused us all to appreciate even more and to herald the work of medical professionals – and rightly so. They have battled at the front lines of this health crisis, and their recognition is so well-deserved. Nothing compares to what our healthcare workers have lived through – the emotional and physical toll of over two years of fighting a pandemic that has claimed the lives of far too many of our loved ones. When COVID is but a distant memory, let us never forget the tremendous sacrifice of the countless nurses, doctors, public health

workers, and other medical professionals who put so much on the line to keep us safe and to literally save lives.

Though perhaps minor in comparison, in some ways, Judiciary employees are on the front lines, too – doing our part to protect the community and stem the spread of the virus. Our marshals and probation officers have spent the better part of the last two years conducting COVID screening for anyone entering the courthouse, and even COVID testing of probationers and detainees. Our dedicated Contact Tracing Team has been at the front lines in keeping our employees safe and well-guided when exposures and positive cases among staff have threatened the continuity of court operations. And our facilities team has worked day in and day out to sanitize every square foot of our campus. They all stand ready for the next COVID wave or new variant that comes our way, and they remain ready to provide whatever is needed in making sure that our facilities are safe – not just for our employees, but for the many court patrons who enter through our doors.

We are also front-liners in a metaphorical sense. Across the nation, courts have become a government emergency room where society's worst afflictions are brought. Family violence, drug offenses, and violent crimes: these remain among the highest case types filed in our court for the third year in a row. Just as it is critical that our hospital and its professionals are adequately funded and compensated, it is also critical that our court receives the funding we need to address the social ills that run rampant in our community and fall upon our doorstep, and that we fairly compensate our dedicated employees without whom we could not do the work of justice.

Governor, Senators, I ask for your support of our branch, of our employees, and of the work that the Constitution and our laws demand of us. I look forward to being a partner with each of your branches in this budget process.

Concluding Thoughts

As I wind down my remarks, and my term as Chief Justice, I can't help but reflect with astonishment, pride, and gratitude on all that we have been able to accomplish as your third branch of government. When I took the bench in 2000, about 22 years ago, I could never have imagined how drastically the world would change in what feels like the blink of an eye. Back then, the internet was still in its infancy, and anything resembling Zoom was still the stuff of movies like *Back to the Future*, when a future Marty McFly was fired over video call. I could never have imagined how technology would be integrated into our everyday lives and the impact such advances would have on the delivery of justice.

We have come a long way from our analog days, and we will continue to improve and adapt with the changing times and needs of the community. I say this with utmost confidence because I believe that the judicial officers and employees of the Judiciary of Guam exemplify what it means to be a public servant – to work each day to achieve our mission and vision; to do what is fair and just; to serve the people of Guam, no strings attached. So, if I haven't said it enough, please know how proud and thankful I am to work alongside all of you as servants of the people of Guam.

Speaker Terlaje, I want to thank you once again for opening the legislative halls to the Judiciary today. I am always grateful for the opportunity to come before this body and the people of our beautiful island to tell you about the accomplishments and the needs of your third branch of government. Governor Leon Guerrero and Lt.

Governor Tenorio, I look forward to continuing to work with you and with Speaker Terlaje and members of the Legislature in everything that we do in service to Guam.

I must confess that it is with a tinge of nostalgia that I bring to a close this last address. It has been an incomparable experience to have served our Judiciary for the past 22 years, and especially to have served as your Chief Justice for 11 of those years by the end of my current term – doing my utmost to fairly and expeditiously resolve disputes that came before me, working with an amazing team of professionals to administer our branch, and forging friendships that will last long after I have relinquished this robe. In all that I have done in my legal career for the past 44 years, public service has – by far – been my greatest honor.

Un dāngkolo na Si Yu'os Ma'āse for your time and attention this morning. May God continue to bless us all.