



# **INTERFAITH COMMUNITY TOWN HALL & IFTAR DINNER**

Tuesday, April 2nd, 2024  
5:30pm-8:30pm, HST

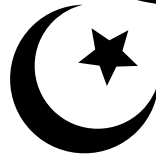
Honpa Hongwanji  
Hawai'i Betsuin  
Honolulu, Hawai'i

**ACLU**  
HI



Ramadan Mubarak





# Program Agenda

- 5:30pm    Quranic Recitation in the Main Temple
- 5:35pm    Welcome to the Hawai'i Betsuin from Reverend Hasebe
- 5:40pm    Town Hall Intention by ACLU-HI Executive Director, Salmah Y. Rizvi
- 5:45pm    Remarks by Interfaith Community Leaders
- 6:20pm    Remarks by ACLU of Hawai'i Legal & Policy Departments
- 6:40pm    Closing Benediction by Reverend Higa
- 6:45pm    Call to Maghrib Prayer in Annex Temple
- 7:00pm    Iftar Dinner with Q&A in Social Hall

*The Iftar Dinner marks the end of a day of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, observed by our Muslim ohana.*





## Taylor Brack

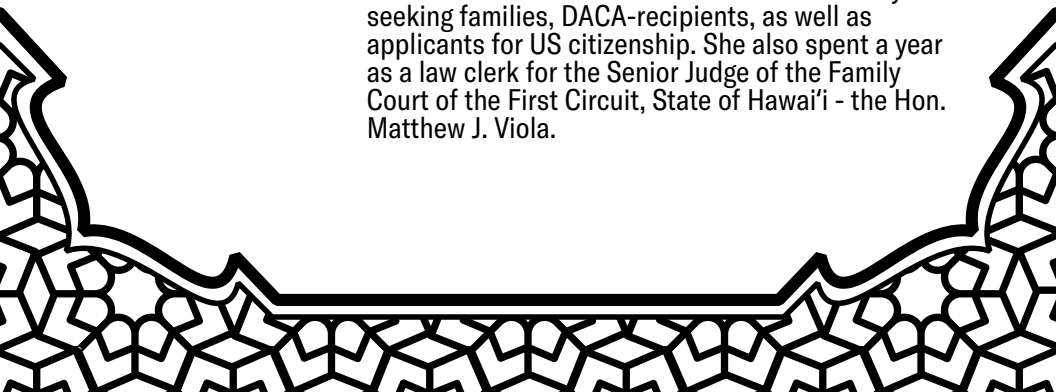
### Staff Attorney, ACLU Hawai'i

Taylor Brack is the Staff Attorney at the ACLU of Hawai'i where she fights for the dignity and legal rights of people who come from communities that are often excluded from the legal process and denied equal protection under the law.

Born and raised in Mississippi, Taylor graduated from the University of Mississippi with a bachelor's degree in International Studies and Chinese. In 2016, she moved to O'ahu to attend the William S. Richardson School of Law at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa where she received a J.D. focused in international law.

During law school, Taylor interned with the Hawai'i Immigrant Justice Center at the Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i where she helped immigrants who experienced domestic violence or trafficking to apply for visas as victims of crime. She also interned at the Medical-Legal Partnership where she completed legislative research on the issue of equal access for Micronesian drivers at Hawai'i DMVs and unethical Marshallese adoptions. Her paper: "Health as a Human Right in China, Singapore, South Korea, and the United States," was published in the twentieth volume of the Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal. She received the American Association of University Women's (AAUW) Selected Professions Fellowship to support her studies.

She joined the Refugee & Immigration Law Clinic (RILC) as a student in her last year at Richardson and after graduating, she began her legal career as a law fellow at RILC where she continued to serve asylum-seeking families, DACA-recipients, as well as applicants for US citizenship. She also spent a year as a law clerk for the Senior Judge of the Family Court of the First Circuit, State of Hawai'i - the Hon. Matthew J. Viola.





# Willow Chang

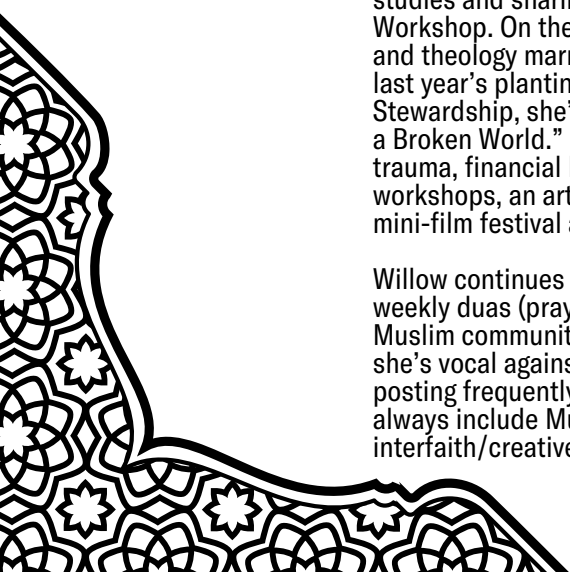
## Lutheran Church of Honolulu

As a daughter of Hawai'i, and being hapa (mixed heritages), seeking the sacred and cultural is a guiding star for Willow Chang. A professional artist, educator, poet, activist and performer, she's spent 30+ years in the disciplines of world dances (from Hawaiian Hula to Middle Eastern Raks Sharki, Bollywood and classical Indian dances, Yoga, Japanese Butoh, Argentine Tango and modern dance), in addition to being a classically trained jazz song stylist.

A self professed 'spiritual freelancer', she explored beyond Lutheran beginnings, with self-driven studies of Buddhism, Tao, Hinduism and Islam, and world mythologies. All shaped her productions, from her annual Dearly Departed (Day of the Dead), the PUJA International dance concerts, the Art & The Ink: Journey to the Heart Sutra, and her annual holiday Songs of the Season- with music and stories from Christian, secular and Islamic traditions. For the past 17 years, she curated artists for the annual Gandhi International Institute for Peace event, and currently is an organizing member of Hawai'i for Palestine.

Since 2017, Willow's an active member of Lutheran Church of Honolulu, on council for 6 years, representing at 2 Pacifica Synods, co-producing the Arts in Faith showcase, attending weekly Bible studies and sharing her poetry at Writer's Workshop. On the Earth Day committee, ecology and theology marry in education and actions- like last year's planting of 200 native trees. For Stewardship, she's helped with the focus "Healing a Broken World." LCH had guest speakers on trauma, financial health classes, poetry workshops, an arts showcase, and she curated a mini-film festival and taught veil dance and yoga.

Willow continues learning of the sacred, with weekly duas (prayers) and education with the local Muslim community. A fierce advocate for justice, she's vocal against all forms of Islamophobia, posting frequently on social media, and strives to always include Muslim voices in interfaith/creative endeavors.





## Rose Elovitz

### Jewish Voices for Peace



Rose Elovitz (they, she) grew up as a settler on Chumash land on Turtle Island. In childhood, their diasporic experience kindled a deep desire to reconnect to Jewish spirit. This pursuit led Rose's Jewishness to be informed by the memory of their ancestors' endurance to prevail against oppressive forces. The quest for knowledge led them to O'ahu, Hawai'i, where they obtained a BA in Ethnic Studies.

Today, they fight to reclaim Jewish identity by returning to the Jewish value of non-violence as a pathway to a just future. Their vision for liberation is built on the legacy of radical Jews who stood in solidarity with marginalized peoples and queer perspectives on strength through communal love. In their free time, Rose enjoys sharing meals with loved ones, spending time with her cat Miso, and laughing.

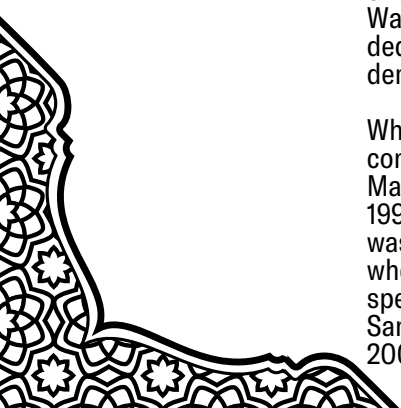


## Paul Gracie

### Interfaith Alliance Hawai'i

Paul Gracie has lived in Honolulu since 1978, when he arrived with a new bachelor's degree in Japanese looking for work. He found work in Honolulu and also continued volunteering with the American Friends Service Committee, the international Quaker social justice organization. He eventually also became active with the Open Table, a successor organization to the Hawai'i Council of Churches which itself was succeeded by the Interfaith Alliance Hawai'i (TIAH), a local and very autonomous affiliate of the national Interfaith alliance based in Washington DC. TIAH is a US focused organization dedicated to building a resilient and inclusive democracy.

While working and doing volunteer work, he continued his studies at the University of Hawai'i Manoa, completing his Ph.D. in sociolinguistics in 1993. He did his field work in Malaysia and his focus was on 'foreigner talk' or strategies of simplification when speaking with a perceived foreign semi speaker of Malay. Paul is married to Keo Sananikone, they have twins, a boy and a girl, born in 2002. In 2022, he was elected President of TIAH.





## Reverend Yuika Hasebe Hawai'i Betsuin

Reverend Yuika Hasebe was born and raised in Toyama-prefecture, Japan. Hasbe's home temple is the Hoshoji Temple and the Reverend was ordained in Tokudo in 2004 and Kyoshi certification in 2007. She graduated from Ryukoku University with an English Literature degree in 2007. Hasbe has worked as a Kaikyoshi minister, Fuku Rimban (Assistant of Chief Minister), and as an associate minister. She is currently the Rimban (Chief Minister) of Hawaii Betsuin.



## Reverend Blayne Higa Kona Hongwanji

Rev. Blayne Higa is the Resident Minister of the Kona Hongwanji Buddhist Temple in Kealahou. Born and raised in Hilo, he holds a Master of Divinity from the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley, California with a focus on Shin Buddhist ministry and chaplaincy. He has been a contributor to Tricycle, Lion's Roar, and Buddhadharma, and is a frequent speaker and seminar leader for Buddhist communities in Hawaii and around the nation.

Rev. Blayne received Tokudo ordination and Kyoshi certification from the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha in Kyoto, Japan. He is the Chair of the Committee on Social Concerns and Ministerial Training Committee for the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. He was also a co-planner for the 2022 Future of American Buddhism Conference.

Prior to entering ministry, he had careers in state government and non-profit sector for over seventeen years. He holds a Master of Public Administration and a certificate in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He received a BA from Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. Committed to civic engagement, Rev. Blayne serves on the boards of the American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii and Vibrant Hawaii. He is also a member of the Advisory Board of The Interfaith Alliance Hawaii.





## Imam Matiullah Joyia

### Ahmadiyya Community

Born in Pakistan and raised in Canada, Matiullah Joyia earned his Shahid degree in theology from the Ahmadiyya Institute of Islamic Studies of Canada in 2010. He spent time in Pakistan and West Africa as part of his training to become an imam for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Matiullah served in the Marshall Islands for five years, where he got the opportunity to serve the Muslim community and the local population through the community's charitable organization, Humanity First, in multiple sustainability projects. He has served as an Imam of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Hawaii since 2017 and believes in interfaith dialogue for peaceful coexistence. Matiullah assisted Humanity First USA in managing projects like the medical clinic, tutoring classes for children, and legal aid to the victims of the Maui wildfires in August 2023.







## Wookie Kim

### Legal Director, ACLU Hawai'i

Wookie Kim is the Legal Director at the ACLU of Hawai'i, where he works to defend people's civil rights and civil liberties through litigation, lobbying, public education, and other forms of community advocacy. Among the issues Wookie works on are the criminalization of poverty, police misconduct, bail reform, reproductive freedom, gender equity, mass incarceration, and freedom of expression.

Before joining the ACLU of Hawai'i, Wookie was an associate at Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP in Washington, D.C., where he litigated high-stakes business disputes involving things like advanced high strength steel and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. While there, Wookie also maintained an active pro bono practice, including representing undocumented Latino immigrants in challenging a landlord's discriminatory rental practices under the Fair Housing Act.

Wookie received a B.A. in Ethics, Politics and Economics from Yale University, and a J.D. from Harvard Law School, where he was a member of the Board of Student Advisers and a finalist in the Ames Moot Court Competition. After law school, Wookie served as a law clerk to the Honorable Catherine C. Blake of the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland.

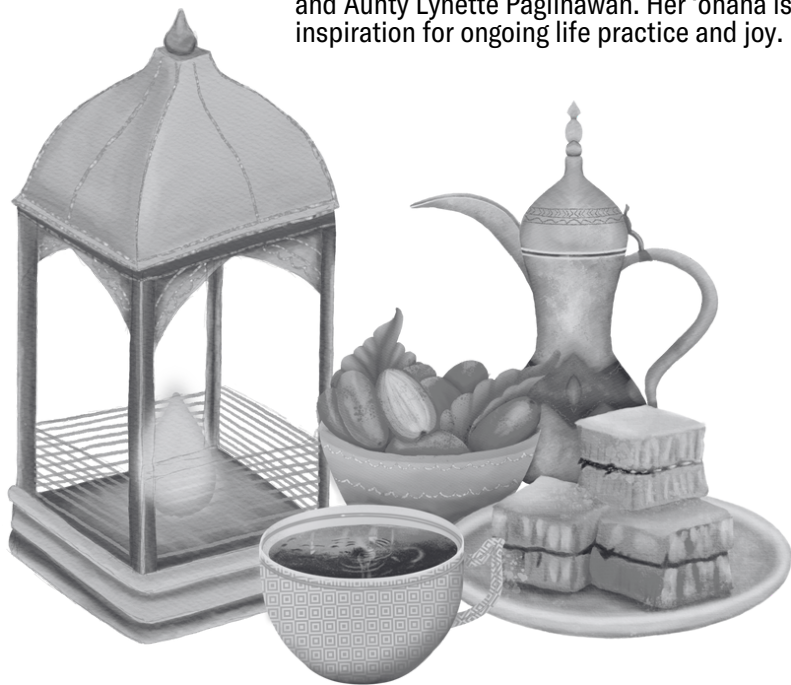
Outside of his ACLU work, Wookie is also a Lecturer in Law at the William S. Richardson School of Law, where he teaches first-year legal writing. In his free time, Wookie trains for and competes in 100-mile trail races, and otherwise takes advantage of the many opportunities for outdoor exploration in Hawai'i with his wife.



## Meleanna Aluli Meyer

### Artist and Educator

Meleanna Meyer's prayers are found in her art, paintings, films—As a practicing artist and educator she has been on a mission to bring spirit, culture, and all forms of creativity through the arts to all that she does. As a life-long practitioner of 'ike hawai'i, and of a range of spiritual traditions, she has journeyed from a strict Catholic upbringing through to deep understandings of Vajrayana Buddhism, to a thorough appreciation of Nature in all its aspects as revered in Hawaiian culture. Animism encompasses many of these beliefs for her, as she stands in awe acknowledging all sentient life forms and beings. Church of the Crossroads has offered her a place to feel at home. Her insights have brought her to universal truths; the mutual practice of compassion, actionable works towards justice and peace, and love, or aloha as the most elemental energy of all life and part of her daily practice. Whether in the classroom or in varied and diverse community settings, Meleanna's beliefs are grounded in these shared tenets. Her kumu for Ho'oponopono are Malena Kaulukukui, and Aunty Lynette Paglinawan. Her 'ohana is great inspiration for ongoing life practice and joy.

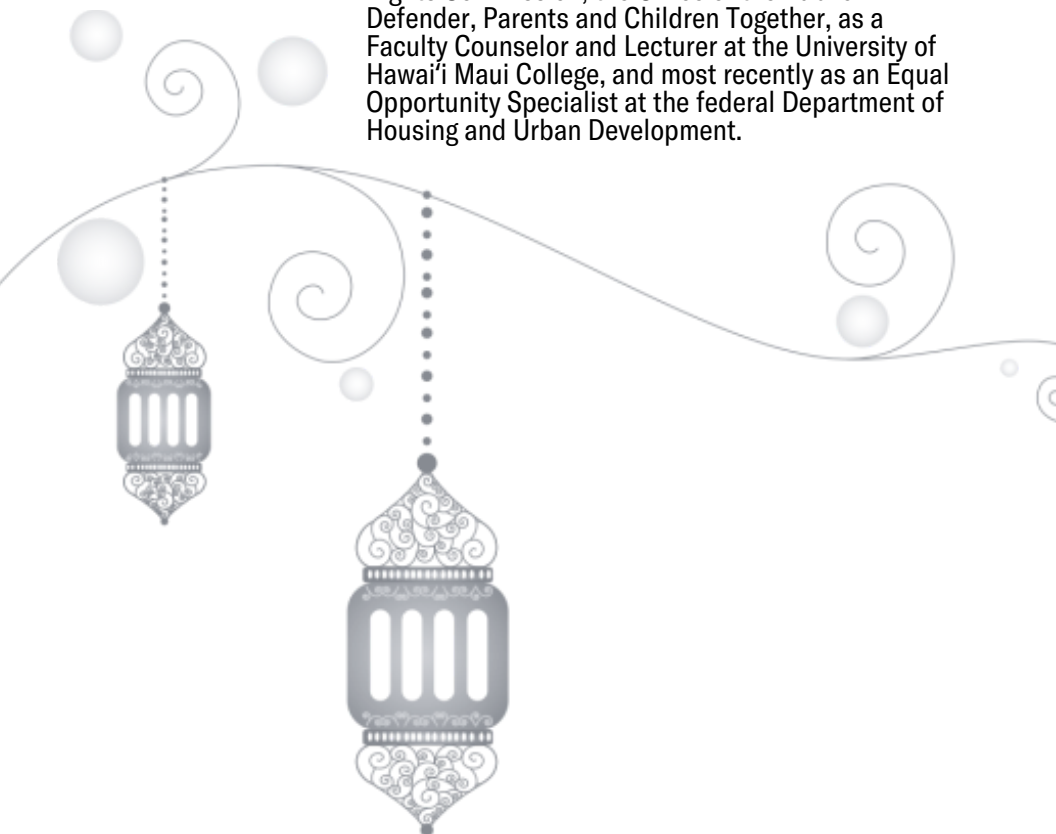




## *Carrie Ann Shiota* Policy Director, ACLU Hawai'i

Carrie Ann Shiota is the Policy Director of the ACLU of Hawai'i. Born and raised on Maui, Carrie Ann is a graduate of Baldwin High School, Santa Clara University in California, and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa William S. Richardson School of Law. She is an attorney, community educator and advocate who supports system changes from an anti-oppression and collective liberation intersectional lens. Combining theory and action, her life's work has centered on sowing seeds of transformative justice to build safe, healthy and equitable communities – not only for her son but for all of our precious keiki who teach us how to live and love.

Carrie Ann has also worked for the Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission, the Office of the Public Defender, Parents and Children Together, as a Faculty Counselor and Lecturer at the University of Hawai'i Maui College, and most recently as an Equal Opportunity Specialist at the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.





# Salmah Y. Rizvi

## Executive Director, ACLU Hawai'i

Salmah Y. Rizvi is the Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer of the American Civil Liberties Union of Hawai'i. She is an appellate impact litigator, community organizer, and crisis manager. She works to build lasting peace that safeguards civil rights, by seeking truth, justice, and healing.

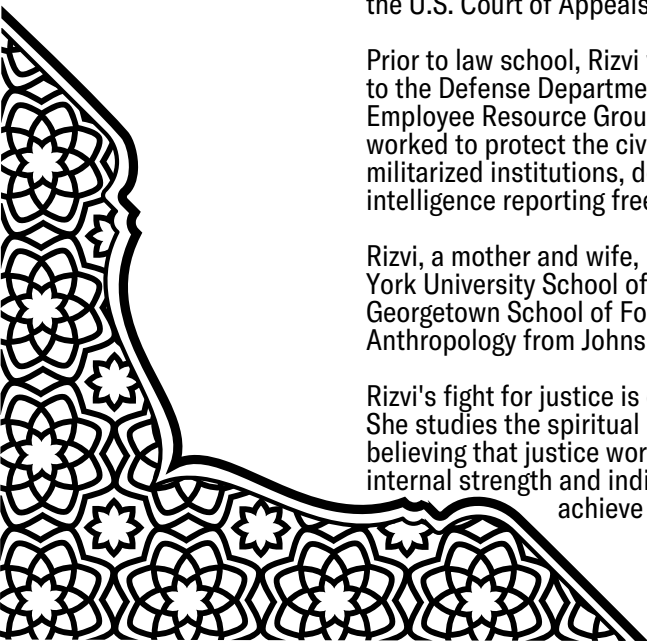
Rizvi's civil rights litigation, research, and advocacy have focused on increased monitorship of prisons, enhanced living conditions for incarcerated people, integrative mechanisms for reentry courts, religious freedom, protection of free speech rights of LGBTQIA+ students and activists, reproductive care expansion, and racial justice. Her work intersects human rights and Native Hawaiian rights.

Rizvi founded the the 501c3/501c6 American Muslim Bar Association, and sat on the Board of Directors for Witness to Mass Incarceration. Rizvi served as a Washington D.C. Rizvi served as a Washington D.C. Associate at the law firm Ropes & Gray LLP, which named her a Chambers Rising Leader. Rizvi clerked for Judge Theodore A. McKee of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit and Judge J. Michael Seabright of the U.S. District Court for the District of Hawai'i. Rizvi has argued at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Prior to law school, Rizvi was the first Chairwoman to the Defense Department's Islamic Cultural Employee Resource Group, through which she worked to protect the civil rights of Muslims within militarized institutions, demanding accountable intelligence reporting free from Islamophobia.

Rizvi, a mother and wife, holds a J.D. from the New York University School of Law, an M.S. from the Georgetown School of Foreign Service, and a B.A. in Anthropology from Johns Hopkins University.

Rizvi's fight for justice is embedded in her creed. She studies the spiritual dimensions of faith, believing that justice work must be accompanied by internal strength and indigenous wisdom in order to achieve holistic change in society.





## Fahreen Sayed

### Ahlul Bayt Collective



Fahreen Jaffar is a steadfast and dedicated member of the Shia Muslim community, driven by a profound desire to foster a positive environment conducive to the growth and flourishing of the community. With a deep-rooted belief in the transformative power of unity and collaboration, Fahreen has dedicated herself to initiatives aimed at nurturing a supportive and inclusive community atmosphere.

Born into a family deeply rooted in Shia traditions, Fahreen's upbringing instilled in her a strong sense of responsibility towards her community. Recognizing the challenges faced by Shia Muslims in maintaining their identity and values in today's world, Fahreen with other members of the community, embarked on a journey of service aimed at creating spaces where individuals could come together to learn, worship, and support one another.





## Dr. Saquib Usman

### Zawiyah Foundation Hawai'i

Professor Saquib Usman is a sociocultural anthropologist currently teaching courses in The Anthropology of Food, Culture & Health, and Environment & Society at the University of Hawai'i - Mānoa.

For the past decade, Dr. Usman's research through the University of Michigan has focused on the extraordinary social worlds of blindness in Islamic, Arabic-speaking, and African worlds. For his doctoral work, he conducted long-term immersive ethnographic field research in Mauritania, living in a remote Saharan village whose population is predominantly blind from birth due to an inherited condition which has been present there for the past seven generations. During Dr. Usman's visits between 2017 and 2021, he lived in close proximity to the village chief, Muhammad Mahmud (d. 2022), who was a Quranic exeget, renowned blind water dowser, and founder of over 1,000 wells across the arid region of the Saharan west.

Dr. Usman also documented how local strategies, environments, and ideologies of disability have led to the development of an inclusive space for blind and sighted villagers. Based on this research work, he published his dissertation, "Blindness & Water Divination in the Saharan West," (2024), which is the first ethnographic monograph on blindness in the Islamic world. His writing is a productive domain to contemplate themes of disability, the senses, inclusivity, divination, and the changing role of water in contemporary time.

Outside of his academic pursuits, Professor Usman serves as Director of the Zawiyah Foundation of Hawai'i - a grassroots organization dedicated to building community spaces on the islands through cultivating goodness, inclusivity, spiritual growth, intellectual exchange, and community healing, through the remembrance of the Divine.





# Norma Wong

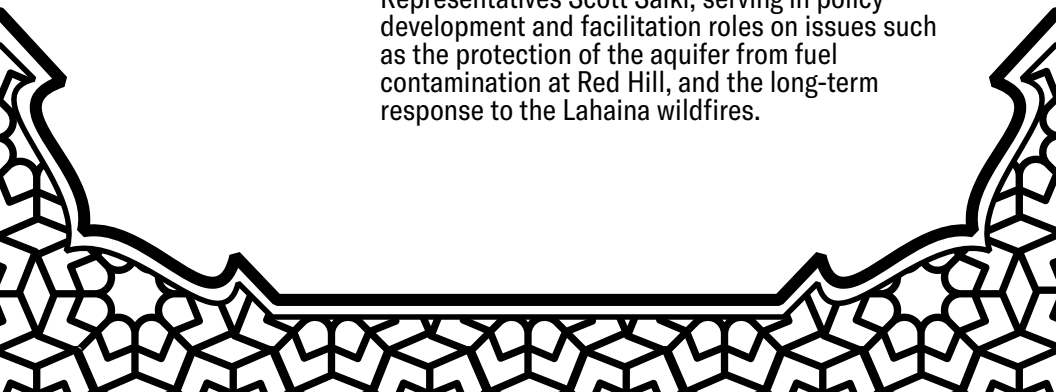
## Institute of Zen Studies



Norma Wong (Norma Ryuko Kawelokū Wong Roshi) is a Native Hawaiian and Hakka life-long resident of Hawai'i. She is the abbot of Anko-in, an independent branch temple of Daihonzan Chozen-ji and serves practice communities in Hawai'i, across the continental U.S., and in Toronto, Canada. She is an 86th generation Zen Master, having trained at Chozen-ji for over 40 years. Her book on the necessity and ways to leap beyond this fraught societal moment will be published in the fall of 2024 by North Atlantic Books/Penguin Random House.

In earlier years, Wong served as a Hawai'i state legislator, on the policy and strategy team for Governor John Waihee with federal and Native Hawaiian portfolios. She led teams to negotiate agreements on the munitions cleanup of Kaho`olawe Island, ceded land revenue for Native Hawaiians, and the return of lands and settlement of land for Hawaiian Home Lands. She was active in electoral politics for over thirty years.

In recent years, Wong has been called back into service to facilitate breaking the impasse and transforming policy and governance on issues of seeming contradiction. In the conflict between native culture/science and western discovery science posing as a dispute over the construction of a telescope on Mauna Kea, Wong was a team member narrating and facilitating a path forward through mutual stewardship. She is currently an advisor to Speaker of the Hawai'i House of Representatives Scott Saiki, serving in policy development and facilitation roles on issues such as the protection of the aquifer from fuel contamination at Red Hill, and the long-term response to the Lahaina wildfires.



# ACLU HAWAII

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Send us an [email](mailto:assist@acluhawaii.org) to [assist@acluhawaii.org](mailto:assist@acluhawaii.org) or call (808) 522-5900 (voice messages only, this line does NOT accept inquiries for our legal program.)

The mission of the ACLU of Hawai'i is to protect the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the U.S. and State Constitutions. The ACLU of Hawai'i fulfills this through legislative, litigation, and public education programs statewide. The ACLU of Hawai'i is a non-partisan and private non-profit organization that provides its services at no cost to the public and does not accept government funds. The ACLU of Hawai'i has been serving Hawai'i for over 50 years.

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