High Court Brings Oral Arguments To UH Law School Evening Students

Law students had front row seats on a late afternoon this week as the Hawai‘i Supreme Court took a recent case to the William S. Richardson School of Law, specifically so that students in the Evening Part-Time Program would have a chance to see the high court in action.

The students heard a lively session in which the Justices actively questioned attorneys about whether 25 seconds is adequate time for several “knock and announce” actions before police officers with a search warrant broke down the door of a suspected meth house.

Deputy Public Defender Phyllis Hironaka argued that the 19 police officers involved did not give the defendant adequate time to respond, while Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Brian Vincent stated that the officers knocked four times and feared the evidence could be destroyed if they didn’t act quickly.

While the justices took the case under advisement to make a decision, the court experience listening to arguments in an actual case was especially interesting for Mark Clemente ‘22, who hopes to go into criminal law.

“This gives us an opportunity to learn things that otherwise we’d have to wait to learn after we graduate,” said Clemente, who works during the day as a member of the full-time staff at the State Legislature. “It’s significant for the Supreme Court to hold oral arguments at the Law School because the Evening Part-Time students don’t have the same opportunities as the day students to get exposure to the legal field.”

Hannah Caddle ‘22, a former social worker, feels the same way. “An opportunity for the Evening students to witness something like the Supreme Court coming to campus- it’s huge,” she said. “They really took our schedule into consideration. And some of us have already taken Criminal Procedure, so it’s nice to see it applied in an actual case when it affects real people.”

Chief Justice Mark Recktenwald launched the program to bring oral arguments to the Law School when he became Chief Justice nine years ago, and he and his judicial colleagues have continued the program and hear arguments at the Law School at least once - and sometimes twice – every year since.

As the arguments ended and the law students had a chance to ask questions of law clerks to the Supreme Court Justices, and later the Justices themselves, Recktenwald took a moment to thank the Law School for welcoming the court so warmly.
“We have a great relationship with this Law School,” he said, praising Dean Avi Soifer’s leadership over the years and the good planning by the Evening Part-Time Program administrators who put that day’s session together.

“Our ties goes back to the beginning of this Law School,” he continued, mentioning the four new judges he swore in two weeks ago who are Richardson alumni, as well as the ongoing assistance by law students who regularly brief high school students on cases as part of the ‘Courts in the Community’ program that Recktenwald also launched.

For the law students themselves, listening to the arguments was one thing, but having a chance to meet the justices themselves was an added major benefit. “One day we may be up there in front of them, arguing a case,” said Caddle.

Added Clemente: “This speaks volumes about this school and this court to be so flexible and to offer us this opportunity to learn.”