

## Access to justice/enabling rights workshop

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### Court

The FSM Supreme Court, with the support of the Pacific Judicial Strengthening Initiative (PJSI), conducted a three day Access to Justice/Enabling Rights Workshop from May 23-25, 2017 at the Governor's Conference room in Kolonia, Pohnpei. A week prior to the workshop, from May 15-20, FSM Supreme Court staff, including General Counsel Danny Rescue, Jr., Acting Director Atarino Helieisar, and Pohnpei State Justice Ombudsman Johnny Peter, along with PJSI Technical Director Dr. Livingston Armytage, went out to various offices, agencies, outer islands, and municipalities in Pohnpei to conduct an Access to Justice Assessment.

The initiative was the first of its kind in the FSM

An Access to Justice Assessment is a tool that can assist courts in planning their work, allocating resources and responding to community concerns. It can assist the courts to improve service delivery by identifying justice needs within the FSM, however, because of limitations on funding and time to conduct the study, only Pohnpei State was assessed. The Assessment provides people with an opportunity to give feedback on their needs and how the National, State, Land, and Municipal Courts are addressing those needs. They also provide the courts with an opportunity to evaluate this feedback and develop a plan of action, taking the views of users and potential users into consideration. The key aspect of the Assessment is not that they are conducted, but how the findings are used. The courts need to be committed to taking action to address community needs expressed in the Assessment and using the findings to improve court performance and increase the public's access to justice.

The first day of the workshop involved interested stakeholders and court users, and allowed them to give comments on obstacles that individuals may face when accessing courts in Pohnpei. The information gathered during the first day of the training supplemented the data gathered during the Assessments taken during the previous week. Judges and court staff from the FSM Supreme Court, Pohnpei State Court, Court of Land Tenure, and Municipal Courts were in attendance during day 1 of the training.

The second and third day of the workshop were limited to judges and court staff, who discussed the findings of the Assessments, reviewed the comments from the Assessments, and discussed ways to address issues regarding access to our courts. The topics of pro se litigants (individuals who appear before the court without an attorney), and enabling rights were also discussed in the three day training.

A main focus throughout the workshop was access to the courts for victims of domestic violence, child and spousal abuse, human trafficking, people with physical and mental disabilities, and the need for translation as a barrier to justice for many FSM citizens. As a result of the training, various court plans were developed to address the issues raised in regards to access to justice, which will be initiated in the coming months. Scheduled public awareness of people's rights and community outreach efforts to explain court functions and procedures will be some of the first activities to be implemented by the courts in Pohnpei.