Senator Mazie K. Hirono—the first Asian Pacific American woman to serve in the U.S. Senate—knows only too well the difference that one individual can make in one’s life. For Senator Hirono, it was her mother, who brought the senator’s brother and her from Japan to start a new life in the United States. The senator was nearly eight years old. Her mother's courageous decision to escape an abusive marriage in Japan and to take charge of her life changed who the senator was to become and shaped her decision to be of service to others.

Upon graduation from the University of Hawaii, Senator Hirono first became involved in politics by working on campaigns for the Hawaii House of Representatives. She then earned a law degree from Georgetown University and worked in the office of the Hawaii attorney general. In 1980, she ran as a Democrat for a seat in the Hawaii House of Representatives and won, holding that seat for 14 years. She joined with other women in the state legislature to form a bipartisan women’s caucus, and the group was able to advance causes that had been stuck for years, including unpaid family leave and childcare tax credits.

In 1994, Senator Hirono was elected to the first of two terms as the lieutenant governor of Hawaii. Following an unsuccessful campaign eight years later for governor, she ran in 2006 for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, easily beating her opponent in a district that had never elected a Republican. Senator Hirono became the first Asian immigrant woman to serve in Congress. Upon Hawaii Senator Daniel Akaka’s decision to retire in 2012, she gave up her safe congressional district to run for the U. S. Senate and won.

Throughout her career, first as a lawyer and then in public service, Senator Hirono has consistently mentored, supported, and encouraged women in pursuit of careers in the law and in public service. Her background and upbringing have influenced her approach to issues such as protecting Social Security and Medicare and advocating for universal preschool. Prior to going to Congress, she helped form the Patsy T. Mink Political Action Committee to elect progressive, pro-choice women to state office, the steppingstones for national politics.

Senator Hirono has been a community leader who has been active in advocating, promoting, and mentoring the rise of women in leadership positions throughout the legal and political worlds. She has actively reached out to mentor other women and further their careers, supported other women in their endeavors, and encouraged women of all ages to step forward, be active, and take leadership roles. During her political career, Senator Hirono has maintained an outstanding voting record on women’s issues and serving the needs of children, seniors, and small business. She fights for the underdog and those less fortunate.

In 2013, she chaired a Senate hearing on immigration and sent a letter to the immigration “gang of eight,” the bipartisan group of senators negotiating comprehensive immigration reform legislation, urging them to focus on the human element of immigration as they crafted their bill. She also noted, “While immigration reform is clearly an economic issue, it is first and foremost about people. People like me.”

In spite of, or perhaps due to, a childhood where resources were few, the senator continues to show her strong commitment to the profession and women in the profession by her active participation in the Women’s Leadership Committee of the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA). She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Women’s Leadership Award presented by the Women’s Leadership Committee of NAPABA and the Trailblazers Award presented by NAPABA.

Senator Hirono’s mother taught her that there are risks worth taking—for ourselves and for others. As an immigrant, she knows what it feels like to be powerless. Equality and justice are not just words but guiding principles in her life ... and the life of a Margaret Brent Award honoree.