



PRESS RELEASE

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CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU AND HPD SUED FOR VIOLATING INNOCENT CRIME VICTIM'S CIVIL RIGHTS BY SILENCING, FALSELY ARRESTING, AND RETLIATING AGAINST HER

***The lawsuit seeks to end HPD's continuing policy of allowing officers with
conflicts of interest to abuse their police powers for personal benefit.***

Honolulu, Hawai'i: On Wednesday, June 9, 2021, Robin Hall filed a federal civil rights complaint against the City and County of Honolulu ("City"), several officers of the Honolulu Police Department ("HPD"), and private citizen Leonard Letoto for numerous illegal and unconstitutional actions they took against Ms. Hall. The harmful violations were exacerbated by conflicts of interest involving HPD officers that HPD and the City have failed to address.

As detailed in the complaint, in June 2019, Ms. Hall ended her employment with the dog-training business, "Exceptional Obedience, LLC," which was owned by Letoto. While meeting to exchange final payment and a business phone, Letoto terrified and injured Ms. Hall by trying to forcibly enter her residence when he disagreed with her about payment. Letoto rammed the home's front door into her body, leaving her screaming for help. Ms. Hall called 911 seeking police assistance, not realizing that the officer who would respond was in fact a close friend and business partner of Letoto.

Although Ms. Hall was unaware of it at the time, the responding HPD Officer, Christopher Koanui, co-owned Exceptional Obedience with Letoto, making Officer Koanui Ms. Hall's other employer, whom she had never met. When he arrived at Ms. Hall's home—instead of protecting her from Letoto—Officer Koanui refused to allow Ms. Hall to file a police report. Then, in retaliation—and to silence her—Officer Koanui wrote up a criminal complaint falsely claiming that Ms. Hall had stolen the work phone. Finally, Officer Koanui threatened to arrest her in the future if she persisted in trying to report Letoto's crimes to the police. Ms. Hall spoke with multiple members of HPD over the

following days trying to correct the record, to no avail. Her physical injuries slowly healed, but the criminal theft charge on her record has remained open for nearly two years, leaving her constantly fearful of police and of additional retaliation.

Plaintiff Robin Hall said: “We need policing, but who oversees officers’ wrongs? Why isn’t someone admitting this situation was improper and then changing the way HPD operates? HPD should be required to implement police training on preventing and managing conflicts of interest, as well as formulating a policy on disciplinary action for violations. I don’t want what happened to me to happen to anyone else.”

The American Civil Liberties Union of Hawai’i (“ACLU of Hawai’i”) represents Ms. Hall in the lawsuit, which asserts that Officer Koanui and the other involved officers violated Ms. Hall’s First Amendment petition rights by preventing her from filing a police report, maliciously abused the criminal legal process, retaliated by opening a false criminal complaint against her, falsely arrested her, and violated her equal protection rights by unlawfully discriminating in the provision of police services.

Wookie Kim, Legal Director of the ACLU of Hawai’i, said: “What happened to Ms. Hall is deeply alarming. Ms. Hall was an innocent crime victim. When she tried to exercise her First Amendment right to report a crime in progress, she was silenced and retaliated against by an HPD officer because the person who was attacking her was the officer’s close friend and business partner. Making matters worse, other HPD officers—including supervising sergeants—conspired to help frame Ms. Hall. What happened to her almost perfectly mirrors former police chief Kealoha’s abuses. That this cycle of misconduct hasn’t stopped—and continues to harm innocent citizens every day—should trouble our entire community. We filed this lawsuit to stop the cycle.”

The lawsuit alleges that HPD itself is, in three key ways, responsible for the rights violations that Ms. Hall suffered.

First, based on its widespread custom of condoning police officers’ selective enforcement of the law and abuse of power in matters related to officers’ personal affairs. The suit lists several well-known examples, including the Kealoha case and the \$150,000 settlement recently paid to the Rivera family after their teenage son was improperly targeted and arrested by an HPD officer.

Second, based on HPD’s failures to implement an adequate conflict-of-interest policy, and its failures to train, supervise, and discipline officers.

Third, based on its after-the-fact ratification of Officer Koanui’s misconduct. Specifically, HPD Interim Chief Rade Vanic defended Officer Koanui’s actions and refused to conduct an investigation in response to the ACLU’s demand letter

on behalf of Ms. Hall. To this day, Officer Koanui has not been subject to any known disciplinary action as a result of Ms. Hall's false arrest.

The lawsuit also asserts, among other claims, that Letoto conspired with Officer Koanui to interfere with Ms. Hall's civil rights, and committed assault and battery against her.

Joshua Wisch, Executive Director of the ACLU of Hawai'i, said: "It is amazing that HPD still lacks a conflict-of-interest policy. This is despite the ACLU's recent successful lawsuit against HPD and the City in another police misconduct case. This is despite the Honolulu Police Commission calling for the creation of a conflict-of-interest policy for HPD. This is despite questions raised by the City Auditor about the lack of an HPD conflict of interest policy. And the result of this failure to set appropriate policy is what prompted today's filing: unaccountable officers violating the constitutional rights of the very people they are sworn to protect with impunity."

Attached is a copy of the filed complaint.

The mission of the ACLU of Hawai'i is to protect the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the U.S. and Hawai'i 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.