

SUNSHINE LAW MEETING  
MINUTES OF THE HAWAII STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

STATE OF HAWAII

Date: May 21, 2025

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Location: Hybrid meeting held via Zoom video and audio conference

Recorded video available at

[https://ethics.hawaii.gov/category/commissionmeetings/comm\\_videos/](https://ethics.hawaii.gov/category/commissionmeetings/comm_videos/)

Public Meeting Location

Hawai'i State Ethics Commission Conference Room  
1001 Bishop Street  
American Savings Bank Tower, Suite 970  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Present: State Ethics Commission Members

Wesley F. Fong, Chair (present in the conference room)  
Beverley Tobias, Vice Chair (via video conference)  
Robert Hong, Commissioner (via video conference)  
Cynthia Thielen, Commissioner (present in the conference room)  
Roderick Becker, Commissioner (present in the conference room)

State Ethics Commission Staff

Robert D. Harris, Executive Director (present in the conference room)  
Kee M. Campbell, Enforcement Director (via video conference)  
Bonita Y.M. Chang, Compliance Director (via video conference)  
Nancy C. Neuffer, Staff Attorney (via video conference)  
Jennifer M. Yamanuha, Staff Attorney (via video conference)  
Jodi L. K. Yi, Staff Attorney (via video conference)  
Patrick W.C. Lui, Computer Specialist (via video conference)  
Jared Elster, Investigator (via video conference)  
Barbara A. Gash, Investigatory Analyst (via video conference)

### **CALL TO ORDER (0:03)**

Chair Fong called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Present at the meeting were Chair Fong, Vice Chair Tobias, Commissioner Hong, Commissioner Thielen, Commissioner Becker, and Commission staff. All participating Commissioners confirmed that no one was in the room with them at their respective remote locations.

### **Agenda Item No. I: Consideration and Approval of the Minutes of the March 19, 2025 Meeting (1:45)**

Commissioner Hong moved to approve the minutes of the March 19, 2025 meeting, and Vice Chair Tobias seconded. The motion passed unanimously with all Commissioners present voting in favor.

### **Agenda Item No. II: Directors' Report (3:12)**

#### **Compliance and Education:**

Compliance Director Chang reported on recent training sessions, including one for Tier 1 state officials subject to the live training requirement and a second one for the State Charter School Commission's annual conference for public charter school administrators and governing board members. Staff will be working on making updates to the self-directed training modules to reflect recent changes in the law.

#### **Annual Filings:**

Annual financial disclosure filings are ongoing. Over 100 boards were contacted for updated member lists. Continuing filers have until June 2, 2025, to file their annual disclosures, while new board filers have until the end of July to do so. Staff have been receiving a high volume of emails and calls for assistance.

#### **Statistical Reporting:**

Enforcement Director Campbell presented new statistical dashboards illustrating complaint trends, attorney-of-the-day data, and resolution types. The data shows significant increases in the number of complaints over the past five years. The Commission discussed making the information publicly available and including it in future reports to the Governor, the Legislature, and the Chief Justice.

#### **Quarterly Financial Report:**

Executive Director Harris reported that the Commission remains on track and under budget for the fiscal year. He noted that temporary hazard pay related to COVID-19 had been disbursed and that any unused funds would lapse back to the general fund.

**COGEL Annual Conference (December 2025):**

The Commission discussed attendance at the 47th Annual COGEL Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. Commissioners Fong, Becker, and potentially Vice Chair Tobias (pending reappointment) expressed interest in attending.

**Staffing Updates:**

Executive Director Harris announced the departure of Administrative Assistant Myles Yamamoto. He noted that Melissa Vomvoris was recently hired, who brings over 20 years of legislative experience.

**Brand Guidelines:**

The Commission reviewed updated branding and logo materials, including a Hawaiian-language translation of the Commission's name.

**Agenda Item No. III: Discussion of Commission Jurisdiction & Complaint Management (26:20)**

Executive Director Harris provided an overview of the Commission's jurisdiction under the State Constitution and Chapters 84 and 97, emphasizing that the Commission does not address issues of policy disagreements, allegations of incompetence, or county-level conduct. Commissioners requested that a binder of key jurisdictional documents be kept in the conference room for reference.

**Agenda Item No. IV: Discussion of Media Reports Concerning Ethics or the Ethics Commission Since the Last Meeting (33:40)**

Executive Director Harris highlighted a recent PBS Insights appearance where he discussed ethics and campaign finance legislation alongside representatives from Common Cause and the League of Women Voters. Commissioners were invited to raise other reports as appropriate.

**Agenda Item No. V: Discussion of Ethics Oversight over the Judicial Branch (35:27)**

Staff Attorney Yamanuha reported on changes to the Judiciary's ethics rules, including new gift disclosure requirements and the establishment of an administrator for the Commission on Judicial Conduct. Commissioners discussed ongoing concerns about administrative independence and potential future engagement with the new Chief Justice.

#### **Agenda Item No. VI: 2025 Legislative Matters (41:33)**

Executive Director Harris summarized the status of ethics-related bills:

- **SB 289:** Authorizes streamlined enforcement procedures, allowing the Commission to issue small fines akin to a “parking ticket.”
- **HB 412:** Expands lobbying definitions to include pre-procurement discussions with executive officials.
- **HB 413:** Clarifies jurisdictional roles between the Ethics Commission and Campaign Spending Commission for lobbyist contributions.
- **SB 1545:** Sought to extend nepotism laws to legislators but was deferred in the House. The Commission discussed the political dynamics and philosophical opposition to external oversight.

Commissioner Thielen advocated for the Commission to consider introducing legislation addressing pay-to-play practices. The Commission agreed to place the matter on the June agenda and directed staff to begin researching potential approaches, including constitutional and jurisdictional limitations.

#### **Agenda Item No. VII: Akana v. Hawai‘i State Ethics Commission and Daniel Gluck, Civil No. 18-1-1019-06 (JHA); Akana v. Hawai‘i State Ethics Commission, Civil No. 19-1-0379-03 (JHA); State of Hawai‘i, Ethics Commission v. Rowena Akana, Civil No. 20-1-0453 (BIA) (1:04:56)**

Executive Director Harris reported that there were no new developments in the matter. The appeal remains pending before the Hawai‘i Supreme Court.

#### **Agenda Item No. VIII: Adjournment of Sunshine Law Meeting (1:06:29)**

At approximately 10:06 a.m., Commissioner Thielen moved to adjourn the meeting. Vice Chair Tobias seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:06 a.m.

Minutes approved on June 25, 2025.