

SUNSHINE LAW MEETING
MINUTES OF THE HAWAII STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

STATE OF HAWAII

Date: July 16, 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/

Public Meeting Location

Hawaii State Ethics Commission Conference Room
1001 Bishop Street
American Savings Bank Tower, Suite 970
Honolulu, Hawaii 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)
Bonita Y.M. Chang, Compliance Director (via video conference)
Kee Campbell, Enforcement Director (via video conference)
Nancy C. Neuffer, Staff Attorney (via video conference)
Jennifer M. Yamanuha, Staff Attorney (via video conference, joined at 9:15am)
Jodi L. K. Yi, Staff Attorney (via video conference)
Jared Elster, Investigator (via video conference)
Barbara A. Gash, Investigatory Analyst (via video conference)
Patrick Lui, Computer Specialist (via video conference)
Melissa Vomvoris, Administrative Assistant (present in the conference room)

Guests and Members of the Public

Chad Blair, Civil Beat (via video conference)

CALL TO ORDER (0:06)

Chair Fong called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. All Commissioners confirmed that no one else was present at their respective remote locations. Executive Director Harris reminded participants that the meeting was being recorded for the official record and posted online.

Agenda Item No. I: Consideration and Approval of the Minutes of the June 25, 2025, Meeting (2:39)

Commissioner Thielen moved to approve the minutes of the June 25, 2025 meeting, and was seconded by Commissioner Becker. The motion passed unanimously with all Commissioners present voting in the affirmative.

Agenda Item No. II: Election of Officers (4:02)

Executive Director Harris explained that, per custom, the Commission has elected to defer officer elections until newly appointed commissioners are onboard. Commissioner Thielen moved to postpone the election of officers until a new commissioner is appointed, and motion was seconded by Commissioner Hong. The motion passed unanimously with all Commissioners present voting in the affirmative.

Agenda Item No. III: Directors' Report (6:34)

Education & Disclosures – Report/Updates (6:45):

Compliance Director Chang reported that a live training session is scheduled for Friday, July 18, 2025, and that initial courtesy reminders were sent to board administrators regarding mandatory training and financial disclosure requirements for new board members. Staff anticipates an increase in disclosure activity this month due to new board filers and the revised gift disclosure deadline, which now aligns with the fiscal year.

On August 7, 2025, staff will be participating in a COGEL Connect Webinar to share best practices on how to track training attendance and completions. Chair asked whether the staff would be presenting at the COGEL conference, noting that there is a lot of information exchanged during the sessions.

Guidance and Assignments Statistics – June 2025 (11:35):

Enforcement Director, Kee Campbell, reported that:

- 37 complaints received and 29 closed in June
- Year-to-date: 172 complaints received and 157 closed.
- 53 Travel requests processed.

- Projected 316 total complaints for 2025, with most complaints involving no jurisdiction, fair treatment, harassment, and retaliation. Many are resolved due to a lack of jurisdiction or evidence and are referred to the appropriate agency.
- For the quarter, 239 AOD requests were opened and 231 were closed, with the majority relating to gift and fair treatment issues.
- 39 written summaries (emails) and three formal guidance letters issued.

Executive Director Harris noted these statistics reflect improved transparency enabled by the Commission's new case management system. The office aims to publish performance metrics, such as average time to close complaints, by the end of the year.

Miscellaneous Office Projects/Updates (15:52):

Executive Director Harris reported in the Q4 Financial Report, that \$21,709 lapsed back to the general fund due to prudent budget control. The office saved approximately \$8,000 by transitioning to Microsoft Teams for its telecommunications needs. New expenses for training functions, Salesforce licensing and consulting services to upgrade the financial disclosure system in line with legal requirements.

Agenda Item No. IV: Discussion of Media Reports Concerning Ethics or the Ethics Commission Since the Last Meeting (18:08)

Executive Director Harris reported on two media mentions:

- June 29, 2025 Civil Beat article titled "State Watchdogs Keeping Pressure on Government Reform." <https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/06/state-watchdogs-are-keeping-the-pressure-on-for-government-reform/>
- June 28, 2025 blog post by Ian Lind discussing lobbying and influence peddling. <https://www.ilind.net/2025/06/27/lets-not-confuse-lobbying-with-influence-peddling/>

Agenda Item No. V: Discussion of Legislative Proposals within the Commission's Jurisdiction (19:28)

Commissioner Thielen proposed an amendment to a draft bill that would prohibit executive branch officers and employees with procurement authority from engaging in political fundraising. She recommended raising the threshold from \$5,000 to \$100,000 to align with state procurement thresholds and reduce the potential for overbreadth. There were no objections from the Commissioners.

Executive Director Harris noted that staff and the Deputy Attorney General are reviewing the draft bill and will provide comments. Chair Fong confirmed the Commission will revisit the bill in the next meeting to allow time for legal review and finalization before legislative submission in December.

Chair Fong requested that the Staff prepare a draft bill broadening the application of the nepotism law for the Commissioners to consider.

Agenda Item No. VI: 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) (27:58)

Executive Director Robert Harris reported that there are no updates. The matter remains pending before the Hawai'i Supreme Court.

Agenda Item No. VII: Adjournment of Sunshine Law Meeting (29:47)

At approximately 9:31 a.m., Commissioner Hong moved to adjourn the meeting, and Commissioner Thielen seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:31 a.m.

Minutes approved on August 20, 2025.