

SUNSHINE LAW MEETING
MINUTES OF THE HAWAI'I STATE ETHICS COMMISSION

STATE OF HAWAI'I

Date: November 19, 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

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

Attendance: State Ethics Commission Members

Wesley F. Fong, Chair (in person)
Robert Hong, Commissioner (via Zoom)
Cynthia Thielen, Commissioner (in person)
Roderick Becker, Commissioner (in person)

State Ethics Commission Staff

Robert D. Harris, Executive Director (in person)
Bonita Y.M. Chang, Compliance Director (via Zoom)
Kee Campbell, Enforcement Director (via Zoom)
Nancy C. Neuffer, Staff Attorney (via Zoom)
Jennifer M. Yamanuha, Staff Attorney (via Zoom)
Jodi L. K. Yi, Staff Attorney (via Zoom)
Jared Elster, Investigator (via Zoom)
Patrick Lui, Computer Specialist (via Zoom)
Melissa Vomvoris, Administrative Assistant (in person)

Guests and Members of the Public

Candace Park, Deputy Attorney General (via Zoom – joined at 9:22am)
Judith Mills-Wong, League of Women Voters (via Zoom)
Nancy L. (Zoom profile name)
Richard Wiens (Zoom profile name)
Fritz (Zoom profile name – joined at 9:14am)

CALL TO ORDER (0:05)

Chair Fong called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Chair Fong, Commissioners Thielen and Becker attended in person, and Commissioner Hong participated via Zoom. All Commissioners participating remotely confirmed that no one else was present at their respective locations. Executive Director Harris reminded participants that the meeting was being recorded for the official record and would be posted online.

Chair Fong asked if any guests would like to identify themselves. Public Member Judith Mills-Wong, representing the League of Women Voters, introduced herself.

Agenda Item No. I: Consideration and Approval of the Minutes of the October 15, 2025, Meeting (2:33)

Upon a motion by Commissioner Thielen, seconded by Commissioner Hong, the Commission unanimously approved the minutes of the October 15, 2025 meeting. All Commissioners present (Fong, Thielen, Hong, and Becker) voted in the affirmative.

Agenda Item No. II: Directors' Report (3:24)

1. Education & Disclosures – Report/Updates (3:32)

Compliance Director Bonita Chang reported that one final MCLE webinar for government attorneys is scheduled for early December. Updates to self-guided training modules are underway to ensure ADA compliance with newly adopted accessibility standards.

Executive Director Harris pointed out that Attachment 2 reflects the proposed Training Schedule for the 2026 calendar year.

2. Guidance and Assignment Statistics – October 2025 (5:00)

Enforcement Director Kee Campbell reported the following:

- 31 complaints were opened and 26 were closed in October.
- Year-to-date, 330 complaints have been opened, with 299 closed.
- The Enforcement team worked on closing out consolidated assignments, which consist of groups of related complaints that often involve multiple submissions regarding the same issue or individual.
- Enhanced statistical reporting is currently in development.

3. Miscellaneous Office Projects/Updates (7:40)

None reported.

Agenda Item No. III: Discussion of Media Reports Concerning Ethics or the Ethics Commission Since the Last Meeting (7:50)

Executive Director Harris reported on several media articles:

- November 17, 2025, Hoodline article titled "Hawaii Ethics Cops Take Aim at Pay-to-Play and Political Family Perks" <https://hoodline.com/2025/11/hawaii-ethics-cops-take-aim-at-pay-to-play-and-political-family-perks/>
- November 16, 2025, Civil Beat article titled "From Fundraisers To Favors, Ethics Panel Wants To Crack Down On State Workers" <https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/11/from-fundraisers-to-favors-ethics-panel-wants-to-crack-down-on-state-workers/>
- November 11, 2025, Hawaii Free Press article titled "EXPOSED: How AG Lopez Stalling Bribery Investigation Until Statute of Limitations Runs Out" <https://www.hawaiifreepress.com/Articles-Daily-News/ID/46356/November-11-2025-News-Read>
- November 10, 2025, Hawaii News Now article titled "State agencies declined to investigate third legislator in bribery case, internal letters show" <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2025/11/11/state-agencies-declined-investigate-third-legislator-bribery-case-internal-letters-show/>
- November 9, 2025, Civil Beat article titled "The Sunshine Blog: Charter Commission Gets Slammed With More Than 200 Proposals" <https://www.civilbeat.org/2025/11/the-sunshine-blog-charter-commission-gets-slammed-with-more-than-200-proposals/>
- November 9, 2025, Honolulu Star-Advertiser "Longtime OHA trustee was outspoken advocate for Hawaiians" <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2025/11/09/hawaii-news/longtime-oha-trustee-was-outspoken-advocate-for-hawaiians/>
- November 7, 2025, Hawaii News Now article titled "Office of Hawaiian Affairs issues statement on death of former trustee" <https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2025/11/07/office-hawaiian-affairs-issues-statement-death-former-trustee/>
- November 5, 2025, HPR article titled "State Sen. Awa contests election ethics violation over social media video" <https://www.hawaiipublicradio.org/local-news/2025-11-04/state-sen-awa-contests-election-ethics-violation-social-media>
- October 30, 2025, Rollingout.com article titled "Efforts intensify in Hawaii bribery investigation" <https://rollingout.com/2025/10/30/efforts-reveals-bribed-hawaii-lawmaker/>
- October 27, 2025, iLind.net article titled "Prior Hawai 'gag orders' have been struck down as unconstitutional" <https://www.ilind.net/2025/10/26/prior-hawai-gag-orders-have-been-struck-down-as-unconstitutional/>

Discussion included the Commissions response to legislative inquiries and the importance of not interfering with ongoing federal investigations. (10:30)

Agenda Item No. IV: Discussion of Possible Legislative Proposals within the Commission's Jurisdiction (12:50)

1. *Proposed Bill: Restricting State Employees from Taking Official Action on Pre-Employment Matters and Amending the Post-Employment Law (13:42)*

Executive Director Harris explained that the proposed bill would restrict state employees from taking official action on pre-employment matters and would amend the post-employment law to include certain employees in the Governor and Lt. Governor's office.

Commissioner Thielen moved to approve the proposed legislation, seconded by Commissioner Hong. The motion passed unanimously with all Commissioners present (Fong, Thielen, Hong, and Becker) voting in the affirmative.

2. *Proposed Bill: Expanding Categories of Board and Commission Members Required to File Public Financial Disclosure Statements (20:08)*

Executive Director Harris explained that the proposed bill would expand the number of boards and commissions whose members are required to file public financial disclosure statements, based on their substantive fiscal or policy decision making responsibilities.

Commissioner Thielen moved to approve the proposed legislation, seconded by Commissioner Hong. The motion passed unanimously with all Commissioners present (Fong, Thielen, Hong, and Becker) voting in the affirmative.

3. *Proposed Bill: Requiring Nominees to Positions Subject to Senate Confirmation to File Financial Disclosures before their Confirmation Hearings (21:50)*

Executive Director Harris explained that the proposed bill would require all nominees subject to Senate confirmation to file a public disclosure statement prior to their confirmation hearing. He noted that the intent is to provide the public with an opportunity to review the filings and to ensure that any potential conflicts of interest are discussed openly before the nominee is confirmed.

Commissioner Becker moved to approve the proposed legislation, seconded by Commissioner Thielen. The motion passed unanimously with all Commissioners present (Fong, Thielen, Hong, and Becker) voting in the affirmative.

Agenda Item V: Proposed Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget (25:27)

Executive Director Harris presented the proposed budget, noting that there were no significant changes from prior years. He explained that the largest increase was for computer consulting services to support accessibility compliance and the development of an internal AI bot to assist with legal inquiries.

Commissioner Hong moved to approve the proposed legislation, seconded by Commissioner Thielen. The motion passed unanimously with all Commissioners present (Fong, Thielen, Hong, and Becker) voting in the affirmative.

Agenda Item VI: Consideration and Adoption of Legislative Delegation Policy (31:02)

Executive Director Harris presented a draft policy aimed at formalizing staff authority to submit testimony on legislation that aligns with existing Commission policy. Commissioners reviewed and discussed the proposed language and scope. Commissioner Thielen expressed concern about delegating too much authority to staff. After further discussion, the Commission agreed to defer the item to the January meeting to allow for further revisions and consideration.

Agenda Item VII: Meeting Calendar (50:33)

The Commission discussed the proposed 2026 meeting calendar. Chair Fong noted that meetings are typically held on the third Wednesday of each month. The Commission agreed to maintain the current schedule and to cancel the December 2025 meeting unless urgent business requires otherwise.

Agenda Item No. VIII: 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) (52:51)

Executive Director Harris reported that two civil cases involving former OHA Trustee Rowena Akana remain pending. One is an appeal of a lawsuit against the Commission, and the other is a collection action by the Attorney General's office.

The commission entered executive session pursuant to Haw. Rev. Stat. § 92-5(4) to consult with its attorneys regarding the Akana litigation.

RECESS OF SUNSHINE LAW MEETING AND CONVENING OF EXECUTIVE SESSION

At approximately 9:54 a.m. Chair Fong requested a motion to recess the public meeting and convene in executive session pursuant to Haw. Rev. Stat. § 92-5 (4) to consult with the Commission's attorneys and/or the Department of Attorney General on questions and issues pertaining to the board's powers, duties, privileges, immunities, and liabilities regarding the pending litigation. The motion was brought by Commissioner Thielen and seconded by Commissioner Becker. The motion passed unanimously, with all Commissioners voting in the affirmative. (Fong, Thielen, Tobias, Hong, and Becker).

All members of the public were excused to the Zoom waiting room. The Commission met in executive session to discuss the two civil cases involving former OHA Trustee Rowena Akana.

ADJOURNMENT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION AND RECONVENING OF SUNSHINE LAW MEETING

At approximately 10:08 a.m., the Commission reconvened the Sunshine Law meeting.

Chair Fong summarized the Commission's discussion regarding the pending lawsuit *Akana v. Hawai'i State Ethics Commission and Daniel Gluck*, including the Attorney General's planned actions and the issue of attorney's fees received by Akana from a private source.

Agenda Item No. IX: Adjournment of Sunshine Law Meeting (56.44)

At approximately 10:09 a.m., Commissioner Hong moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Thielen. The motion passed unanimously, with all Commissioners present (Fong, Thielen, Hong, and Becker) voting in the affirmative.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:09 a.m.

Minutes approved on January 21, 2026.