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Hawaii News

# Campaign spending case against Arakawa's softball team is dropped

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STAR-ADVERTISER

**"I've been doing this for 20-something years, and we've never done anything that would be against the law or willingly against the rules."**

**Alan Arakawa**

*Maui mayor*

State officials are dropping a complaint against Maui Mayor Alan Arakawa that accused him of using campaign funds for personal purposes by sponsoring a softball team.

Campaign officials noted that Arakawa, who has announced he is running for lieutenant governor, plays on the team.

Arakawa in his official filings listed nearly \$3,400 in campaign money he spent on bats, softballs, uniforms and tournament entry fees for the team as "advertising" that was directly related to his campaign, which didn't sit well with the staff of the state Campaign Spending Commission.

#### ADVERTISING

Campaign Spending Commission General Counsel Gary Kam argued softball gear and entry fees are unlike campaign television ads, signs and bumper stickers and don't qualify as advertising under the law. An "advertisement" under campaign spending law identifies a candidate and advocates for the election or defeat of that candidate, Kam said.

Arakawa, who has decades of experience in politics and has played softball since the fourth grade, replied it is "ludicrous" for a state lawyer to tell him how to campaign.

"For a Campaign Spending Commission lawyer to pretend that he knows all of this stuff and that the way that we're advertising, and the way that we have to get our name out there, to say that's improper and illegal, obviously he's not run for political office, and he doesn't know how it really works," Arakawa said.

Lettering on one sleeve of the purple softball uniform shirts says the team is "Sponsored by Friends of Mayor Arakawa," and Arakawa said he is introduced at tournaments as the mayor and the team sponsor.

The events offer him a chance to meet and greet participants from all over the state, and "the publicity that we get from this I cannot buy in a newspaper," he told the commission.

"I've been doing this for 20-something years, and we've never done anything that would be against the law or willingly against the rules," he said. Arakawa said he has sponsored teams in the past and never been challenged before, and said other candidates also sponsor youth teams.

Commission staff asked the commission to rule that there was probable cause that the campaign finance law has been violated, fine Arakawa \$1,694 and order him to use his own money to reimburse his campaign funds for the amount he spent on the softball team.

Commission Chairman Bryan Luke refused, saying he believes at least the uniform expense should be considered legitimate advertising. Commissioner Kenneth Goodenow agreed.

"Just on this, that's what sponsorship is," he said. "You pay money, and you get your name associated with the team."

The commission deadlocked in a 2-2 vote, with Gregory Shoda and Adrienne Yoshihara voting to continue with the complaint. Eldon Ching abstained, which means the case will be closed with no further action, campaign spending staff said.

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