Conflict-of-Interest Bill Faces Uphill Battle in House

An ethics measure that cleared the Senate now has four House committees to get through.

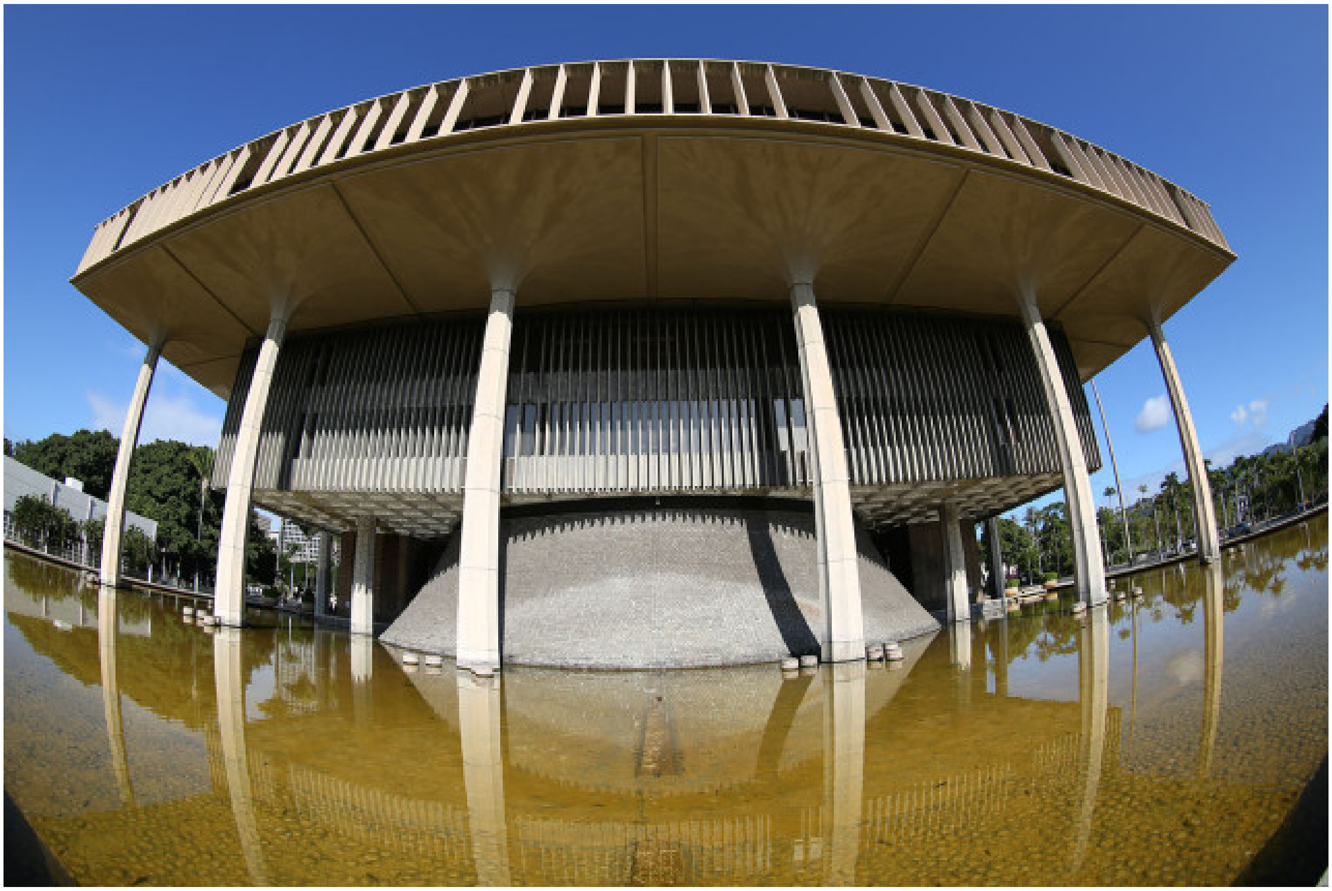
MARCH 16, 2015 • By Nathan Eagle

A proposed law that would make it illegal for state employees to take any official action that might directly affect a business that their extended family has a financial interest in will have a tough time clearing the House.

Senate Bill 451, which cleared the Senate last week, has been referred to four committees in the House as of Monday.

It's a triple referral that starts with the Legislative Management Committee, then goes to a joint hearing before Consumer Protection and Judiciary, and finally on to Finance.

Cory Lum/Civil Beat



State lawmakers are considering legislation to broaden the conflicts-of-interest section of the Ethics Code.

By comparison, when the bill was in the Senate it only had to clear the Judiciary and Labor Committee, a single referral, before moving to a vote before the full Senate.

Civil Beat reported in February how lawmakers can use the referral process to kill a bill by throwing multiple hurdles in its path. Sometimes a measure is rightfully referred to more than one subject-matter committee, sometimes it's legislative maneuvering done quietly by a handful of lawmakers in leadership positions to derail a measure.

The state Ethics Commission has tried for years to expand a provision in the Ethics Code to prohibit state employees from taking official action directly affecting a business or undertaking in which an employee knows a parent, sibling or adult child has a substantial financial interest.

It's a move supported by good-government groups like Common Cause Hawaii, whose executive director, Carmille Lim, testified that it will “take a step toward mitigating citizen concerns of conflicts of interests and potential corruption within government.”

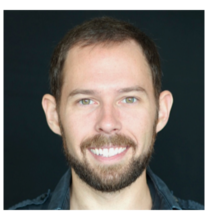
The Ethics Commission noted as an example how under current law, an employee cannot award a state contract to a business owned by the employee’s spouse but it can award a state contract to a business owned by the employee’s parent, brother, sister or emancipated son or daughter.

“Such actions clearly create the appearance of a conflict of interest and undermine public confidence in government,” Ethics Executive Director Les Kondo said in his testimony earlier this month.

You can track the bill’s progress here.

Follow Civil Beat on Facebook and Twitter. You can also sign up for Civil Beat’s free daily newsletter.

About the Author



CIVIL BEAT STAFF

Nathan Eagle

Nathan Eagle is a reporter for Civil Beat. You can reach him by email at neagle@civilbeat.com or follow him on Twitter at @nathaneagle.

Use the RSS feed to subscribe to Nathan Eagle's posts today