

HONOLULU

Honolulu Ethics Director On Leave After Internal

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Investigation

Chuck Totto has clashed repeatedly with Mayor Kirk Caldwell's administration and his appointees on the commission.

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Honolulu Ethics Commission executive director Chuck Totto is on leave following an internal personnel investigation and won't be back until April 4.

Chairwoman Victoria Marks said the commission received an internal complaint regarding Totto's management of staff and hired an outside investigator to evaluate the situation.

"The commission took appropriate corrective action and believes that the internal management and personnel are resolved," Marks said, reading from a statement during a phone interview.

Marks wouldn't respond to follow-up questions.



Ethics Commission director Chuck Totto is expected back in April.

According to [meeting minutes](#) from Nov. 18, 2015, the commission approved a motion to “hire an independent investigator to investigate office conditions, including management and personnel procedure issues.”

On Jan. 20, the commission [decided to hold a special meeting](#) Feb. 1 in executive session to discuss the investigator’s report.

Totto has been gone since March 1 and plans to return on April 4. He didn’t reply to messages seeking comment Monday.

Totto, who has served as executive director of the commission for over a decade, has had a contentious relationship with Mayor Kirk Caldwell and, increasingly, the commission over the last three years.

The friction started when the commission [investigated the mayor’s inaugural 2013 luau](#), which was largely funded by lobbyists and city contractors.

That was followed by disagreements over the commission’s budget and allegations that

the Caldwell administration was stonewalling ethics investigations. Totto even [considered issuing subpoenas](#) to members of Caldwell's cabinet.

Last year, the city's lead attorney, Donna Leong, criticized Totto after he said publicly that possible ethics violations could invalidate votes on Honolulu's controversial \$6.6 billion rail project.

Not long after, the commission — led by a cadre of retired judges (including Marks) appointed by Caldwell — tried to [muzzle Totto with a restrictive media policy](#) that effectively stopped him from talking to the press about ethics decisions. Under pressure from the media and good government advocates, the commission [rescinded](#) the policy a few days later and [adopted](#) a different one.

Commission business has continued in Totto's absence. The commission is planning to [hold a meeting Wednesday](#) that will discuss the agency's budget and pending complaints, among other items.

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