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Hawaii News

Kenoi admits possible card misuse

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Hollyn Johnson / Hawaii Tribune-Herald

Mayor Billy Kenoi testifies during his trial in Hilo Circuit Court.

Hawaii island Mayor Billy Kenoi has acknowledged in an agreement there is probable cause that he violated the county ethics code by using a county-issued credit card for personal purchases.

Kenoi's lawyers, Todd Eddins and Richard Sing, issued the advisory opinion Wednesday as part of a deal with the Hawaii County Board of Ethics.

The agreement will prevent an investigative hearing from taking place in response to an ethics complaint, the Hawaii Tribune Herald reports.

It comes just more than a week after a jury acquitted Kenoi on all counts for the card purchases that prosecutors alleged did not qualify as county business.

Before offering Wednesday's deal, Kenoi's attorneys argued that the trial outcome proved Kenoi did nothing wrong.

"It's been established the mayor is not a thief. The mayor is not a liar," Sing said. "We object to the process. He's been acquitted."

Some board members expressed dissatisfaction that Kenoi did not attend the meeting, which took place in the same building as his Hilo office.

"This really warranted his presence," said Chairwoman Ku Kahakalau, who had prepared questions for Kenoi.

Kapaau resident Lanric Hyland filed the complaint in the spring of 2015, alleging the violation of county ethics code, which prohibits the use of public property for anything other than a public purpose.

The board delayed the complaint multiple times because of concerns that it could impact Kenoi's trial in Hilo Circuit Court.

Hyland said he was satisfied with the agreement.

"That's the best I'm going to get, so that'll do," he said. Hyland added that "it would have been nice if it was a bit more timely."

The agreement recommends that the mayor stop using the credit card, which Kenoi has not had since the state Procurement Office revoked it in April 2015. Kenoi's attorneys have said he has paid back the county for his personal purchases.

Eddins and Sing declined to comment following the decision and said the mayor would not comment.