

Honolulu Police Corruption

An Ex-Cop Who Went To Jail On Felony Drugs Charges Is Getting His Record Wiped Clean

Alan Ahn, who was a bit player in the Kealoha scandal, says he deserves the chance to restore his reputation without the stigma of a criminal history.



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By Nick Grube    / September 25, 2023

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For the past several years, Alan Ahn, a former Honolulu police officer who was convicted on felony drug charges in 2017, has been quietly trying to seal his criminal record from public view.

Now it looks like he might succeed.

In 2019, Ahn, who had already served his [60-day jail sentence](#), persuaded First Circuit Court Judge Edward Kubo to allow him to change his plea in the case to “deferred acceptance,” which would allow his record to be expunged so long as he continued to stay out of trouble.

Kubo's decision came despite the fact that a previous judge in the case, Rom Trader, had denied a similar request in 2017 during Ahn's sentencing hearing.



Alan Ahn has asked the Hawaii Supreme Court to seal some of its records after having his criminal history expunged. (Cory Lum/Civil Beat/2022)

At the time, Trader said there needed to be some level of accountability given the seriousness of the crimes and the fact that Ahn was a police officer when those crimes were committed.

“You had an obligation, and with that obligation comes responsibility,” Trader told him.

It's unclear why Kubo, a former U.S. attorney, reversed Trader's decision in part because he filed his order granting the plea change under seal, meaning it's not available to the public.

Since then the Hawaii Attorney General's Office has signed off on an expungement certificate that will ultimately erase Ahn's criminal past from the official public record.

Over the past two months Ahn himself has sent letters to the Hawaii State Judiciary and Hawaii Supreme Court asking officials there to start the process of sealing his records.

His request includes sealing the filings that were part of the Supreme Court case [Grube v. Trader](#), a decision that reaffirmed citizens' constitutional right to access court proceedings and records.

“This is simple,” Ahn told Civil Beat. “I messed up, I fessed up and I’m fighting to restore my good reputation.”

Brian Black, executive director of the [Civil Beat Law Center for the Public Interest](#), has since filed a position statement with the Supreme Court justices asking them to narrowly tailor any sealing decisions in the case, arguing that barring access “does a disservice to individuals using court records to research this critical case about sealing court records.”

In an interview, Black said he was similarly concerned about the fact that Kubo’s order granting Ahn’s plea change was filed under seal.

“The public was never given an explanation as to why a police officer who had multiple felony drug convictions was entitled to deferred acceptance,” Black said.

Kubo retired in December 2019. He told Civil Beat that he couldn’t recall much about the specifics of the case. Even if he did, he said, he likely wouldn’t be able to say much considering his order is still under seal.

Ahn’s case presents a complicated question as it relates to police accountability — should an officer convicted of a serious crime even be eligible to have their record expunged?

In recent years, there’s been a push across the country for state legislatures to enact so-called “clean slate” legislation that would automatically seal the arrest and conviction records of individuals who completed their sentences and stayed out of trouble for a set period of time.

The idea behind the legislation is to reduce the stigma of a criminal record and make it less likely that someone will be discriminated against when it comes to finding jobs or housing, which in turn lessens the likelihood of reoffending.

Already 12 states, including Pennsylvania, Utah and California, [have passed legislation](#) to automatically seal criminal records, according to the Clean Slate Initiative, an advocacy group that is pushing to expand similar programs across the U.S.



A mugshot of Alan Ahn from his arrest in 2015. (HPD)

In 2023, Hawaii State Sen. Chris Lee was the lead sponsor on legislation that would have [enacted a clean slate law](#) in Hawaii, but the bill failed to garner much support.

The Legislature did, however, pass a bill that will require the Hawaii State Judiciary to [automatically seal or remove](#) from its publicly accessible databases any information related to an individual's case if they've successfully obtained an expungement certificate.

Currently, a person must petition the judiciary to have those records removed, which is the process that Ahn is going through now.

But questions remain about whether these efforts can conflict with others related to ensuring that officers with criminal pasts aren't easily forgotten.

“I messed up, I fessed up and I’m fighting to restore my good reputation.”

Alan Ahn, former HPD officer

Across the country, there are concerns about bad cops [bouncing from department to department](#) after getting fired for misconduct in part because information about their misdeeds wasn’t easily accessible or shared among law enforcement agencies.

There can also be a lack of transparency when it comes to accessing officer misconduct records, which is one of the reasons public court filings can be so important.

Ahn’s case in particular is one that involves a high degree of public interest in large part because it’s tied to one of Hawaii’s [most notorious public corruption scandals](#).

Ahn and a co-defendant in his case, Tiffany Masunaga, were key figures in a federal investigation targeting former Honolulu prosecutor Katherine Kealoha and her brother, Rudy Puana, an anesthesiologist who operated a pain clinic on the Big Island.

According to federal prosecutors, Puana had been running a prescription drug ring and was providing fentanyl to Masunaga in exchange for cocaine.

When Ahn and Masunaga were arrested in 2015 with Puana’s fentanyl in their possession, Kealoha, who was married to then-Honolulu police chief Louis Kealoha, worked to steer HPD’s investigation away from her brother.



Tiffany Masunaga was arrested with Alan Ahn on a series of drug charges. (Cory Lum/Civil Beat/2017)

Puana has since been convicted and sentenced to [more than seven years in prison](#) while the Kealohas are serving their own prison sentences for a series of other crimes, including those related to framing a family member for

stealing their mailbox.

Masunaga, meanwhile, has yet to stand trial on drug charges stemming from her 2015 arrest.

For Alexander Silvert, a retired federal public defender who [helped break open the Kealoha scandal](#), there needs to be a balancing act whenever officials are considering the expungement of an officer's criminal record.

While it might be appropriate to seal certain records after someone has completed their sentence, he said, the public trust must also be considered.

"I'm all in favor of expungements and, in general, it is the right thing to do in the right case," Silvert said. "But I do think that special attention has to be given by judges to former police officers who, if their case is expunged, are once again going to be able to become police officers and once again be given a weapon. That needs to be given greater weight than maybe it has in the past."

Ahn himself doesn't agree.

In an interview with Civil Beat, he said police officers should be treated like all other criminal defendants when it comes to clearing their records and obtaining a second chance.

Ahn said he's struggled with the stigma of being a labeled a bad cop and convicted felon ever since he was arrested and sentenced to jail. While he doesn't know for certain, he said, he suspects that he's lost out on at least a few jobs due to his criminal past.

Expungement is an opportunity to regain his good standing in the community, he said. He's completed his sentence, which included four years of probation and has stayed out of trouble. He's even earned a college degree.

Ahn said he doesn't want another job in law enforcement, although he refused to say what he's currently doing for employment.

State licensing data shows that in 2022, before he obtained his expungement certificate from the Hawaii Attorney General's Office, he had obtained a license to work as a security guard.

Ahn bristled at the idea that because he's a former police officer he somehow needs to still be held accountable for the actions of the past.

He said he's already atoned for his crimes, both spiritually and in the eyes of the law. He questioned why anyone should have the right to continue to dredge up his criminal records simply by entering his name in a public database, something he hopes will be taken care of soon.

"I would say I did my best to pay my penance," Ahn said. "I did the right thing. I did everything that the court asked me to. Isn't that accountability?"



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