

BEFORE THE BOARD OF ETHICS
COUNTY OF HAWAI'I

In the Matter of the Petition by

BENSON MEDINA,

Petitioner.

PETITION NO. 2025-09

INFORMAL ADVISORY OPINION

Initial Review: April 23, 2025

INFORMAL ADVISORY OPINION

By Petition dated February 25, 2025, with the Hawai'i County Board of Ethics (hereinafter "the Board"), Petitioner BENSON MEDINA (hereinafter referred to as "Petitioner") who is employed as the Director of the County of Hawai'i, Department of Research and Development ("R&D"). Petitioner was a former board member of the Hawai'i Agricultural Tourism Association, founded by his sister, Lani Weigert, and niece, Pomai Weigert, who is the Ag Tourism Specialist for GoFarm. Petitioner requested an Informal Advisory Opinion from the Board regarding application of section 2-84, Conflicts of Interest, of the Hawaii County Code. Petitioner sought guidance regarding the current contracts held by R&D with the Island of Hawai'i Visitors Bureau ("IHVB") and an on-going contact between R&D and GoFarm.

At its duly noticed meeting on April 23, 2025, in an open hearing, the Board reviewed and considered the above-captioned Petition pursuant to Rule 4 of the *Rules of Practice and Procedure of the Board of Ethics*. Petitioner identified he is currently employed as the Director of R&D. In Petitioner's prior petition, 2025-08, heard by the Board at the same hearing, Petitioner explained that the types of subjects handled by his department are: economic

development, workforce development, agriculture, tourism, early childhood development, to include matters relating to the film commissioner, and special projects prioritized by the Mayor.

Prior to becoming the Director of R&D, Petitioner was a board member of the Hawai'i Agricultural Tourism Association, founded by his sister and niece. His niece, Pomai Weigert, is the Ag Tourism Specialist for GoFarm, the agricultural extension of the University of Hawai'i Agricultural Department. His niece, Pomai Weigert, is also on the board of the Island of Hawai'i Visitors Bureau (IHVB). There is a current contract between R&D and GoFarm, a grant, to which Petitioner has recused himself as a potential conflict of interest and deferred all inquiries, communications, and meetings to his Deputy Director Dennis Lin. It is anticipated that R&D will continue to do work in the future with GoFarm and IHVB in the future.

The Board, having deliberated and considered and giving appropriate weight to the testimony and petition submitted by the Petitioner, and having considered the arguments presented, hereby renders the following Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Order.

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. To the extent that any of these Findings of Fact are Conclusions of Law, they are to be so construed.

A. The Petition

2. Petitioner is employed as the Director of the County of Hawai'i, Department of Research and Development.

3. Petitioner was previously a board member of the Hawai'i Agricultural Tourism Association, to which, Lani Weigert, and niece, Pomai Weigert, continue to be members.

4. Petitioner's niece, Pomai Weigert, is the Ag Tourism Specialist for GoFarm and was on the board of IHVB. Petitioner clarified that Pomai Weigert is no longer on the board of IHVB.

5. R&D has existing contracts with IHVB and GoFarm, and will likely have additional contracts with said organizations in the future.

6. Petitioner has taken affirmative steps to recuse himself from all inquiries, communications, and meetings regarding these two organizations, and has deferred such R&D work to his Deputy Director Dennis Lin.

B. Board's Ruling

7. Based on the evidence and testimony presented, the Board finds that there is no conflict of interest for the Petitioner provided the Petitioner continues to recuse himself from all inquiries, communications, and meetings regarding IVHB and GoFarm, and has deferred such R&D work to his Deputy Director Dennis Lin.

8. Board Member Eric Allende and Rachel Short jointly moved that the Board find that there is no conflict of interest under the Hawai'i County Code of Ethics, if the Petitioner recuses himself from any future work with representatives from the Hawaii Agricultural Tourism Association, affiliates of GoFarm, and/or the branch of UH Agriculture Department. The Deputy Director of R&D shall maintain all contact, e-mails, and communications with said entities on behalf of R&D. The Board further instructs the Director to memorialize the aforementioned recusal process within a departmental memo.

9. Board Member Christopher Ho seconded the motion. The motion passed 5 in favor, 0 against.

CONCLUSION OF LAW

Based upon the evidence presented and the Board's review of the Hawai'i County Charter, Hawai'i County Code of Ethics and the *Rules of Practice and Procedure of the Board of Ethics*, the Board finds and concludes there is no conflict of interest under the Hawai'i County Code of Ethics, if the Petitioner recuses himself from any work and not interact with anyone

from the Hawaii Agricultural Tourism Association, affiliates of GoFarm, and/or the branch of UH Agriculture Department.

ORDER

Pursuant to Rule 4.9 of the *Rules of Practice and Procedure of the Board of Ethics*, this Informal Advisory Opinion shall be filed and a copy shall be sent to the Petitioner.

Dated: Hilo, Hawai'i, May 14th, 2025.

BOARD OF ETHICS, COUNTY OF HAWAI'I

By: 

RACHEL SHORT
Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM
AND LEGALITY:



SYLVIA A. WAN
Deputy Corporation Counsel

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