

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



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December 20, 2024

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President and Members of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

The Honorable Nadine K. Nakamura
Speaker and Members of the
House of Representatives
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 431
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear President Kouchi, Speaker Nakamura, and Members of the Legislature:

For your information and consideration, I am transmitting a copy of the Department of the Attorney General's Report on Proceedings under the Hawaii Omnibus Criminal Forfeiture Act, as required by section 712A-16(6), Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS). In accordance with section 93-16, HRS, I am also informing you that the report may be viewed electronically at <http://ag.hawaii.gov/publications/reports/reports-to-the-legislature/>.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me at (808) 586-1500.

Sincerely,

Anne E. Lopez

Anne E. Lopez
Attorney General

c: Josh Green, M.D., Governor
Sylvia Luke, Lieutenant Governor
Legislative Reference Bureau (Attn: Karen Mau)
Leslie H. Kondo, State Auditor
Luis Salaveria, Director of Finance, Department of Budget and Finance
Stacey A. Aldrich, State Librarian, Hawaii State Public Library System
David Lassner, Ph.D., President, University of Hawaii

Enclosure

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REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS UNDER THE HAWAII OMNIBUS CRIMINAL FORFEITURE ACT

Pursuant to Section 712A-16(6), Hawaii Revised Statutes

Fiscal Year 2023-2024

Submitted to the Thirty-Third State Legislature
Regular Session of 2025

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I. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 712A, HRS, provides for the forfeiture of property used or acquired in connection with the commission of certain criminal offenses and the distribution of the property, or its proceeds, to law enforcement agencies for law enforcement purposes. The Prosecuting Attorney¹ may initiate the administrative forfeiture of property by filing a petition with the Attorney General pursuant to section 712A-10, HRS, or may initiate judicial in rem forfeiture proceedings concerning real property, or personal property valued at more than \$100,000, by filing a petition for forfeiture in the circuit court pursuant to section 712A-12, HRS. The Attorney General processes petitions for administrative forfeiture of personal property valued at less than \$100,000 or any vehicle or conveyance regardless of value. In a case initiated as an administrative forfeiture, a person who owns or otherwise has a legal interest in seized property may file a petition for remission or mitigation with the Attorney General or choose to pursue judicial resolution of a case by timely filing a claim and bond with the Attorney General who shall notify the Prosecuting Attorney who may continue to seek forfeiture by petitioning the circuit court.

All property forfeited to the State pursuant to chapter 712A, HRS, is transferred to the Attorney General, who may transfer, sell, pay claims with, or make any other disposition of the forfeited property authorized by law, pursuant to section 712A-16(1), HRS. All forfeited property and the sale proceeds thereof, after costs, up to three million dollars per year, that are not previously transferred pursuant to 712A-16(1), HRS, shall be distributed to law enforcement agencies pursuant to section 712A-16(2), HRS, and shall be used for law enforcement purposes. Forfeited currency and the proceeds of sales of forfeited property are distributed according to a specific formula. The agency that seized the property and the prosecutor that filed the petition each receive a twenty-five percent share. The remaining fifty percent is deposited into the criminal forfeiture fund established by section 712A-16(4), HRS, and administered by the Attorney General. The Attorney General expends moneys from the criminal forfeiture fund for purposes including to defray administrative expenses incurred in processing forfeiture cases; to maintain and store seized property; and to provide grants

¹ "Prosecuting attorney" means the prosecuting attorney or deputy prosecuting attorneys of the various counties, or the Attorney General or deputy attorneys general when engaged in the prosecution of a criminal offense. Section 712A-1, HRS.

to law enforcement agencies for law enforcement purposes pursuant to section 712A-16(4), HRS.

Section 712A-16(6), HRS, requires the Attorney General to report to the Legislature "on the use of the Hawaii omnibus criminal forfeiture act during the fiscal year preceding the legislative session." The report shall include the following information:

- (a) The total amount and type of property seized by law enforcement agencies;
- (b) The total number of administrative and judicial actions filed by prosecuting attorneys and the disposition thereof;
- (c) The total number of claims or petitions for remission or mitigation filed in administrative actions and the dispositions thereof;
- (d) The total amount and type of property forfeited and the sale proceeds thereof;
- (e) The total amount and type of property distributed to units of state and local government;
- (f) The amount of money deposited into the criminal forfeiture fund; and
- (g) The amount of money expended by the Attorney General from the criminal forfeiture fund under section 712A-16(5), HRS, and the reason for the expenditures.

The Department of the Attorney General adopted chapter 5-51, Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR), entitled "Administrative Asset Forfeiture," on December 31, 2019, which went into effect on January 17, 2020. The rules clarify the procedures applicable to county law enforcement officials and those seeking remission or mitigation of an asset forfeiture decision. Chapter 5-51, HAR, also establishes policies and procedures that facilitate consistent and timely processing of prosecuting attorneys' petitions for administrative asset forfeiture. Additionally, chapter 5-51, HAR, requires that all seizing and prosecutorial agencies comply with the National Code of Professional Conduct for Asset Forfeiture.

II. HISTORY OF ASSET FORFEITURE

The first statute authorizing civil forfeiture was enacted by Congress in 1789 as a sanction for the use of ships in customs violations.² In 1978, Congress expanded the law to permit the civil forfeiture of all money used in or acquired from the illegal drug exchange³ and authorized the forfeiture of real property in 1984.⁴ Federal civil and criminal forfeiture statutes now reach substantially the same offenses and types of

² Act of July 31, 1789, §§ 12, 36; 1 Stat. 39, 47.

³ 21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(6).

⁴ 21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(7).

property. All fifty states and the District of Columbia have some type of civil and/or criminal forfeiture statutes in effect.⁵

As a result of these statutes, criminals are deprived of their working capital and illicitly obtained profits, thereby preventing them from operating even where traditional criminal sanctions have not otherwise deterred them. A secondary benefit of the forfeiture laws is that forfeited property, or the proceeds of its sale, is turned over to law enforcement and used to fight crime. While the primary purpose and benefit of a forfeiture program is crime deterrence, it is appropriate to use the forfeited property to hinder those who profit from criminal activity.

III. ASSET FORFEITURE UNDER STATE LAW

In 1988, a law enforcement coalition consisting of the Attorney General and the four county prosecutors and police chiefs, proposed that a new, uniform forfeiture law be enacted. This effort is now codified as chapter 712A, HRS, and represents a combination of federal forfeiture law, the forfeiture act adopted by the State of Arizona in 1986, and the provisions of Hawaii's various laws relating to forfeiture. The purpose was to create a law that would be both procedurally and substantively comprehensive and, to the extent possible, uniform across the State.

Chapter 712A, HRS, provides for administrative forfeitures and judicial forfeitures. Chapter 712A, HRS, also provides for forfeitures of substitute assets from convicted criminals where the assets originally subject to forfeiture have been secreted or otherwise dissipated or disposed of. Chapter 712A, HRS, also expands the number and kinds of offenses that give rise to forfeiture. At the same time, it provides explicit procedural and substantive rights to claimants, especially innocent owners. The Legislature placed a ceiling of \$3,000,000 per year on the amount of forfeited property that could be retained by law enforcement, with any excess going into the state general fund.

The Attorney General administers distribution of forfeited property up to the ceiling according to the criteria of section 712A-16, HRS. In 1990, the Legislature amended chapter 712A, HRS, to require an annual report on the use of the Hawaii omnibus criminal forfeiture act and the disposition of property forfeited pursuant to it, including the amount of money deposited into and expended from the criminal forfeiture fund. In 1996, the Legislature further amended chapter 712A, HRS, to make the state forfeiture law permanent.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE FORFEITURE

Perhaps the most important advantage afforded by chapter 712A HRS, is a provision pursuant to which forfeiture of personal property worth less than \$100,000, or

⁵ National Criminal Justice Association, Assets Seizure and Forfeiture: Developing and Maintaining a State Capability, App. A (1988).

forfeiture of any vehicle or conveyance, regardless of value, is administratively processed. Previously, all forfeitures were handled through judicial proceedings, resulting in the consumption of judicial resources even where the forfeiture was uncontested.

Under section 712A-10, HRS, a prosecuting attorney files a petition for administrative forfeiture of seized property with the Department of the Attorney General. Persons who own or otherwise have an interest in the seized property ("claimants"), have thirty days to respond from the date they receive notice of the pending forfeiture by publication, personal service, or mail, whichever occurs first. Claimants may file a Petition for Remission or Mitigation of Forfeiture, which does not challenge the sufficiency of evidence supporting the forfeiture or the actions of any government official. Instead, the petitioner asks the Attorney General to invoke the executive power to "pardon" the property, in whole or in part, because of extenuating or mitigating circumstances not otherwise amounting to a legal defense to forfeiture. Depending on the circumstances, the Attorney General may pardon the property in its entirety and "remit" (return) it to the claimants or "mitigate" the forfeiture by returning the property on payment of a fine.

Alternatively, the claimant can file a claim asserting under oath that the property is not subject to forfeiture and request the forfeiture be removed to court for judicial review. To file a claim, except for persons who are indigent, claimants must also post a cost bond equal to ten percent of the estimated value of the seized property or \$2,500, whichever is greater. The purpose of the cost bond is to ensure that, if the claimant frivolously removes the forfeiture action to court, expenses incurred by the State in judicially prosecuting the forfeiture will be borne by the claimant, with the bond serving as security.

Finally, the claimant may take no action, in which case forfeiture is ordered after the expiration of thirty days. Alternately, if the Attorney General identifies a procedural or substantive issue with the case, the Attorney General may dismiss the prosecuting attorney's petition on the Attorney General's own accord. This dismissal can be without prejudice (allowing the petitioner to correct the issue in the petition) or with prejudice (if the Attorney General determines no legal means exist to correct the petition).

By these means, forfeiture proceedings can be handled administratively without unnecessary consumption of valuable judicial resources and while still providing claimants the opportunity to challenge the forfeiture.

V. DISTRIBUTION OF PROCEEDS

Once property has been forfeited to the State through administrative or judicial proceedings, the Attorney General is charged with its disposition pursuant to section 712A-16, HRS. Pursuant to section 712A-16(1), HRS, the Attorney General may transfer forfeited property, such as automobiles, to state and county agencies; sell property by public sale; pay valid claims against forfeited property; or destroy contraband or raw materials or equipment used to manufacture controlled substances.

Pursuant to section 712A-16(2), HRS, the Attorney General distributes a twenty-five percent share of forfeited currency or sale proceeds of forfeited property, if any, to each agency that seized the property and the prosecuting attorney that initiated the administrative or judicial forfeiture proceeding respectively. The remaining fifty percent of the forfeited currency, or sale proceeds, if any, is deposited into the criminal forfeiture fund, which is administered by the Attorney General. Pursuant to section 712A-16(4), HRS, the Department of the Attorney General may distribute money from the criminal forfeiture fund to law enforcement agencies and prosecuting attorneys as requests are made.

Property and money distributed pursuant to section 712A-16, HRS, must be used for law enforcement purposes and may be used to supplement, but not supplant, funds appropriated to law enforcement agencies. Strong emphasis has been placed on spending money from the criminal forfeiture fund to meet the training and education needs of law enforcement personnel. For example, in recent years, the money has been used to facilitate handgun training, to attend and provide seminars on combatting the detrimental effects of heroin, fentanyl, and opioids, and to purchase body armor to help protect police officers.

In addition to vehicles and currency, other property is often seized. Other property is anything other than vehicles and currency, and it can include jewelry, electronics, appliances, art, and anything else. Some other property cannot legally be resold, such as firearms or gambling machines, so that other property is either destroyed or used by one of the police departments for training purposes.

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VI. ASSET FORFEITURE: FY 2023-2024

a. Total amount and type of property seized by law enforcement agencies

ESTIMATED VALUE⁶ OF SEIZURES FOR FORFEITURE⁷ IN FY 2023-2024
(BY SEIZING AGENCY⁸)

Seizing Agency	Currency	Vehicles	Other Property⁹	Total	Percentage
HCPD	\$61,482.00	\$129,215.00	\$10,270.00	\$200,967.00	25.49%
HPD	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%
KPD	\$43,826.00	\$140,000.00	\$45,000.00	\$228,826.00	29.03%
MPD	\$311,255.00	\$45,000.00	\$2,276.00	\$358,531.00	45.48%
TOTAL	416,563.00	\$314,215.00	\$57,546.00	\$788,324.00	100.00%

⁶ Forfeited property, including contraband, is given an estimated value by the seizing agency. The sales proceeds of a particular forfeited property may not equal its estimated value. The total estimated value of seizures for forfeiture listed in the forfeiture petitions may include contraband (such as untaxed tobacco, firearms, and gambling machines) and property found to be unsafe or in poor condition that is eventually destroyed.

⁷ "Seizure for forfeiture" means seizure of property by a law enforcement officer coupled with an assertion by the seizing agency or a prosecuting attorney that the property is subject to forfeiture. Section 712A-1, HRS.

⁸ Seizing agencies may include all County Police Departments, the Department of the Attorney General, the Department of Land and Natural Resources, and the Department of Public Safety.

⁹ Estimated value of seized "Other Property" may include firearms, ammunition, double-bladed knives, smart phones, and other properties. These items cannot be legally resold but may be requested for training purposes or destroyed by seizing agencies. Final disposition may not have occurred yet because the Asset Forfeiture Program may not have received and processed required documents from seizing agencies.

ESTIMATED VALUE OF SEIZURES FOR FORFEITURE IN FY 2023-2024
(BY TYPE OF PROPERTY)

	Estimated Value	Percentage
Currency	\$416,563.00	52.84%
Vehicles	\$314,215.00	39.86%
Other Property	\$57,546.00	7.30%
TOTAL	\$788,324.00	100.00%

b. Total number of administrative and judicial actions filed by prosecuting attorneys and the disposition thereof

In fiscal year 2023-2024, prosecuting attorneys filed thirty-four petitions for administrative forfeiture with the Department of the Attorney General¹⁰. Of the thirty-four petitions, five were adjudicated. Of these five cases, four final orders were issued by the Department, and one petition was withdrawn by the prosecuting attorneys. The twenty-nine remaining petitions are pending various actions, including service, publication, the outcome of a related judicial claim, and a decision on a petition for remission or mitigation.¹¹ No petition was denied in this reporting period.

In fiscal year 2023-2024, the Department of the Attorney General processed a total of forty-six cases. Of the forty-six cases, five cases were filed in fiscal year 2023-2024 and forty-one cases were pending from previous fiscal years. Of the forty-six cases, thirty-six cases involved uncontested forfeiture (i.e., persons with an interest in the property did not respond to the notice of pending forfeiture); five cases involved a petition for remission or mitigation; and five cases were dismissed with or without prejudice, denied, or voluntarily withdrawn by the prosecuting attorney.

c. Total number of claims or petitions for remission or mitigation filed in administrative actions and the dispositions thereof

In fiscal year 2023-2024, there were no claims seeking judicial review of seizures filed in administrative forfeiture actions. If there had been, the claims would have been

¹⁰ Of the thirty-four petitions, fourteen were filed by Hawaii County, and two of those were adjudicated; seven were filed by Maui County, and three of those were adjudicated; and thirteen were filed by the City and County of Honolulu County, and they have not yet been adjudicated. No other counties filed petitions in this reporting period.

¹¹ A petition for remission or mitigation of forfeiture does not challenge the sufficiency of the evidence supporting the forfeiture or the actions of any government official. Instead, the petitioner asks the Attorney General to invoke the executive power to "pardon" the property, in whole or in part, because of extenuating or mitigating circumstances not otherwise amounting to a legal defense to forfeiture. Depending on the circumstances, the Attorney General may pardon the property in its entirety and "remit" (return) it to the claimants or "mitigate" the forfeiture by returning the property on payment of a fine.

referred to the respective prosecuting attorney to determine whether, pursuant to section 712A-10(9), HRS, the claims should be honored, or the forfeiture action should be brought to court for judicial resolution. At the close of fiscal year 2023-2024, there were no claims to be settled.

In fiscal year 2023-2024, there were five cases filed involving petitions for remission or mitigation. At the close of the fiscal year, no petitions were pending inquiry by the Department of the Attorney General pursuant to sections 712A 10(6) and (7), HRS.

d. Total amount and type of property forfeited and the estimated value thereof

ESTIMATED VALUE OF FORFEITURES¹² ORDERED IN FY 2023-2024

Seizing Agency	Currency	Vehicles	Other Property	Total	Percentage
HCPD	\$40,288.00	\$39,657.00	\$10,270.00	\$90,215.00	13.31%
HPD	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	0.00%
KPD	\$43,826.00	\$140,000.00	\$45,000.00	\$228,826.00	33.77%
MPD	\$311,255.00	\$45,000.00	\$2,276.00	\$358,531.00	52.91%
TOTAL	\$395,369.00	\$224,657.00	\$57,546.00	\$677,572.00	100.00%

No auctions were held in fiscal year 2023-2024. While the Asset Forfeiture Program had decided in 2023 to use an online auction platform instead of the live auction format it had previously used, the development of the website necessary for an online auction is not complete. The Asset Forfeiture Program continues to work with the contractor, Tyler Technologies, to develop the online auction website. The current projection is that the new online auction site will be active in early 2025, with the first auction occurring as soon as possible after that.

e. Total amount and type of property distributed to units of state and local government

During fiscal year 2023-2024, no auctions were held to liquidate forfeited property. Because of this, only forfeited currency is accounted for in the distribution.

¹² Contraband (including untaxed tobacco, firearms, ammunition, and gambling machines) and property found to be unsafe or in poor condition may be destroyed and not auctioned.

Pursuant to the formula set forth in section 712A-16(2)(a) and (b), HRS, \$203,818.00 in forfeited currency was distributed to the Honolulu, Kauai, Maui, and Hawaii County Police Departments and Prosecuting Attorneys' offices (because there were no auctions held in FY 2023-2024, no auction proceeds were distributed).

Pursuant to 712A-16(1)(a), HRS, requests for forfeited property other than currency were approved by the Asset Forfeiture Program and the Attorney General. The property, which included 3 vehicles with an estimated total value of \$95,000.00, was transferred to the Maui Police Department.

f. Amount of money deposited into the criminal forfeiture fund

The total currency forfeited totaled \$395,369.00 (see table d. on page 9)

Pursuant to the formula set forth in section 712A-16(2)(c), HRS, one half of \$395,369.00 (total of currency forfeited) or a total of \$197,684.50 was deposited into the criminal forfeiture fund.

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g. Amount of money expended by the Department of the Attorney General from the criminal forfeiture fund and the reason for the expenditures

Purpose	Amount	Explanatory Notes
Newspaper Publication of Legal Notice	\$3,429.90	Notice of Pending Forfeiture
Upkeep/Storage of Forfeited Assets	\$4,684.90	Alarm system operation and utilities (including electricity and phone line for alarm); equipment; real property upkeep, insurance, parking, fuel
Auction Expenditures	\$9,274.57	Automotive repair and parts; all shipping and towing of vehicles; parts; repair; batteries. These expenditures are incurred when forfeited property is conveyed by law enforcement to the Attorney General Asset Forfeiture Program. Due to the condition of some of the vehicles, expenditures for repair and maintenance varies.
Payroll Expenditures for the Asset Forfeiture Unit	\$155,023.55	Asset Forfeiture Program Manager, legal assistant, and secretary salaries; related payroll taxes
Other Operating Expenses	\$3,316.36	Office supplies; petty cash replenishment, reimbursement, air fare/car rental, software, and PRODCICS ¹³ . The increase for fiscal year 2023-2024 is primarily due to updating the FileMaker program.
TOTAL	\$175,729.28	

¹³ PRODCICS stands for Production Customer Information Control System. It is the City and County of Honolulu’s secured mainframe online transaction processing environment that allows users to access mainframe-based programs like the Motor Vehicle Registration system. The Department uses PRODCICS to search for vehicle, registered owner, and legal owner information and verify vehicle identification numbers.