

Honolulu agrees to pay \$4.7M to end police race bias case

Friday, March 18, 2016, 11:30 a.m.

Share this story

HONOLULU — Honolulu City Council members agreed to pay \$4.7 million to settle a lawsuit that says the Honolulu Police Department engaged in racial and sexual discrimination.

ADVERTISING

HONOLULU — Honolulu City Council members agreed to pay \$4.7 million to settle a lawsuit that says the Honolulu Police Department engaged in racial and sexual discrimination.

The federal lawsuit was filed in 2010, saying that the Honolulu Police Department put officers' lives in danger when they were refused backup during nighttime traffic stops. The plaintiffs say they faced retaliation after speaking out about racial discrimination, and police and city officials hid evidence that would have bolstered their case.

ADVERTISING



This settlement comes at a time when the Honolulu Police Department has come under scrutiny by lawmakers who are calling for more oversight. In recent years, the department has come under fire for problems such as domestic violence and excessive use of force.

The plaintiffs in the 2010 case are Sgt. Shermon Dowkin and former officers Federico Delgadillo Jr. and Cassandra Bennett Huihui. The problems started in 2004 when Dowkin, a black officer, was leading the DUI team in Kailua, which included former officer Federico Delgadillo, who was Mexican-American. The suit alleges that Dowkin found out patrol commanders, who were Asian American and mixed race, had ordered other officers not to provide backup for his DUI team.

After numerous close-calls, Dowkin and Delgadillo filed a complaint in 2008 with the police chief, the lawsuit said. The third plaintiff, Huihui, was interviewed about the complaint, and he said it was likely the officers were treated that way because of racial bias.

Huihui said she was retaliated against for speaking up for the other officers. In 2010, she was seriously injured when wasn't given backup when entering a bar to confront a potentially armed and dangerous felon.

A second lawsuit was filed by the plaintiffs in 2012 and is included in the \$4.7 million settlement. The case says that police and city officials tried to cover up the fact that the defendants had made racially derogatory remarks, which could have helped the plaintiffs' case.

Victor Bakke, the plaintiffs' attorney, would not comment.

Lawmakers say the settlement should be a wake-up call to city officials. The \$4.7 million is in addition to over \$900,000 the City Council approved to pay for legal fees.

"It certainly shows that there's a need for more oversight of the police department, and when you look at the specific case itself, there's some very disturbing items in there that need to be reviewed," said Sen. Will Espero, who introduced a number of police reform bills this year. "We need to see if other officers need to be disciplined."

The settlement could be one of the largest in the Honolulu Police Department's history, Espero said.

The Honolulu Police Department said no one was disciplined for

ADVERTISING

misconduct. Deputy Chief Marie McCauley says the allegations do not reflect the values of the department and that kind of behavior won't be tolerated.

Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell said there is no place in the city for racial or gender discrimination, and retaliation for speaking up isn't acceptable.