

PRESS RELEASE

Maui Police Department Lieutenant Charged with Taking Bribes from Criminals to Protect Chicken Fighting and Drug Operations on Maui

Thursday, August 6, 2026

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, District of Hawaii

HONOLULU – United States Attorney Ken Sorenson announced today that Michael Vaituulala, 53, a lieutenant with the Maui Police Department (MPD), was arrested and charged by criminal complaint with conspiracy to commit honest services wire fraud.

According to the criminal complaint, Vaituulala used his position as a lieutenant in the Maui Police Department for personal gain over many years. Vaituulala accepted regular cash payments from individuals organizing illegal chicken fights in exchange for using his official position to ensure that MPD did not enforce animal fighting laws against those individuals. Vaituulala and others met with organizers of the chicken fights to discuss logistics and conditions for holding the fights, with Vaituulala providing his approval for the organizers to open a chicken fighting location and the days on which fights could take place.

Vaituulala also protected individuals engaged in drug trafficking and improperly shared confidential law enforcement information with them in exchange for cash payments. The information he shared included the identities of confidential sources, evidence photos, the existence of a sealed federal wiretap, the existence of a sealed arrest warrant, and details regarding the subjects and targets of ongoing federal investigations. According to one cooperator, Vaituulala aspired to become the “Larry Mehau” of Maui – a reference to a former Big Island police officer long alleged to have served as the godfather of organized crime in Hawaii.

“It is deeply troubling that a long-tenured and trusted law enforcement officer who swore to serve the people of Maui County faces these allegations, which involve a complete betrayal of his oath of service. Hawaii’s law enforcement officers are critical to the safety and security of our local communities, and nearly always perform with honesty, integrity, and valor,” said U.S. Attorney Ken Sorenson. “But on those occasions when one of them elects to betray their commitment to Hawaii and violate the law, or protect the very criminals they are charged to investigate, we will vigorously pursue and

prosecute them to the fullest extent permissible under the law.” Sorenson added, “We acknowledge and thank the leadership of the Maui Police Department for its assistance and cooperation with federal enforcement operations this week.”

“As law enforcement officers, we all swear an oath to protect and serve our communities,” said FBI Honolulu Special Agent in Charge David Porter. “The overwhelming majority of law enforcement works honorably every day to meet that responsibility. But when an officer violates that oath—breaching the trust contract with their community—they betray the very people they were entrusted to serve and the brave men and women in law enforcement who put their lives on the line each day. This investigation reflects the FBI’s unwavering commitment to protect the public and uphold the integrity of law enforcement, and we will continue to work closely with our partners to ensure that those who misuse their positions of authority are held fully accountable under the law. Additionally, we appreciate the leadership of the Maui Police Department for its cooperation and assistance with our enforcement operations this week, and we value our shared commitment to protecting the community and upholding the highest standards of law enforcement.”

If convicted, Vaituulala faces up to twenty years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000, plus a term of supervised release.

The charge in the criminal complaint is merely an accusation, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. In the case of conviction, any sentence would be imposed by a United States District Judge based on the statutory sentencing factors and the advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The FBI is investigating the case with assistance from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Criminal Investigation Division.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jeannette Graviss and Michael Nammar are prosecuting the case.

Contact

Aislinn Affinito

Aislinn.Affinito@usdoj.gov

Updated August 6, 2026