

## EX-STATE WORKER AWARDED TEN-YEAR SENTENCE FOR STEALING AND FORGERY



Wesley Choi, a former state worker with the Department of Land and Natural Resources Boating Division, accused of stealing from the state, was awarded a ten year sentence. Circuit Court Judge Richard Perkins, failed to elicit any explanation from the accused, as why he stole nearly \$125,000 from the state. In February, Wesley Choi was accused of stealing \$125,000 from recreational boaters' fees. The 49-year-old Oahu assistant district boating manager stole money habitually over a two-year period beginning in 2008. William Aila, director of Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources told KHON news that "Basically Mr. Choi embezzled funds from the state ... just below \$100,000. It's money intended for personnel costs, for repair and maintenance." Aila said Choi was working with them for more than 20 years and worked his way to the top, since starting as a janitor "We are saddened and very surprised because Wesley was an integral part of the boating family so it hit us very hard," he said. "Definitely the boaters lost out because that's money that would've been used either for repair and maintenance or operational costs." Commenting on the sentence, Deputy Attorney General Vince Kanemoto said, that had Choi paid the full restitution amount of \$124,966.43, before the verdict was to be announced, he would have received probation with only 18 months in jail, but because he didn't do it he has to do the full prison term,". "Ten years in counts one and two," he added. Choi was, prior to his arrest, employed to oversee many of the harbors under state care. He pleaded guilty to four of the charges made against him – stealing, unofficial use of a computer in the commission of a crime and to two counts of forgery. Deputy Attorney General Vince Kanemoto, describing his modus operandi said, "He set up this scheme where he made up false bids on non-existing procurement jobs, and he awarded the jobs to himself. And he just pocketed the money." Kanemoto also revealed how Choi was exposed and his scheme uncovered. "I think there was a person who, a boater at one of the boat harbors, I believe she found some documents and she turned them into the authorities, and this investigation commenced and they found out what he did." Kanemoto says that Choi indulged in illegal activities for around two years. Choi's minimum sentence will be set by the Hawaii Paroling Authority. The sentence also carries the order, to pay back the \$125,000 as restitution. A boater, Monica Mundell, expressed happiness that Choi was caught and received a harsh punishment, "If he wasn't caught he'd still be sitting fat and sassy spending our money. Everybody is happy that he was caught."

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