

HPD officer accused in pot plot free on bond

Published: Apr. 12, 2012 at 2:24 AM PDT Updated: Apr. 12, 2012 at 7:01 PM PDT

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) – The Honolulu Police Officer facing federal drug charges for allegedly running a marijuana growing operation walked out of court Wednesday without having to post bail.

Michael Steven Chu and co-conspirator Athena Sui Lee were released on \$25,000 unsecured bond. They did not have to give the court any money, but if either defendant fails to show up for trial or violates other terms of his or her release, he or she may have to forfeit the \$25,000.

Chu wore a white prison jump suit. His hands and legs were shackled as he stood next to Lee before the court for their detention hearing.

Court documents indicated the U.S. Attorney wanted both defendants held without bail. During the hearing the federal public defender representing Chu told the court people arrested with hundreds of plants are allowed to post bail and it would be unfair if his defendant were held to a different standard. After hearing little argument from U.S. Attorney Susan Cushman Federal Judge Richard Puglisi issued the order for \$25,000 unsecured bond.

Chu and Lee are accused of possessing 48 marijuana plants. More than 20 were found in her Kapiolani Boulevard condo. Another ten to 20 plants were found in his rented Mililani home. And eight juvenile plants were found in a package addressed to Lee's condo. A pound of marijuana was found in Chu's HPD subsidized police vehicle.

Both Chu and Lee are wearing electronic tracking devices and he is confined to his father's home.

Chu holds a valid state medical marijuana card.

"A medical marijuana permit does not exempt an officer from drug testing and an officer who tests positive is in violation whether or not s/he has a permit," Honolulu Police Chief Louis Kealoha said in a written statement.

Keith Kamita, Deputy Director for Law Enforcement in the Department of Public Safety, told Hawaii News Now there is no way the state would know if a person applying for a medical marijuana permit is a police officer. And he said even if it knew, it could not alert the police department.

"This is a medical privacy issue. We're talking about his medical record that claims he has a debilitating medical condition. The law doesn't allow us to just go out and tell anybody," Kamita explained.

The most likely way for HPD to find out one of its officers has a pot permit is if they test positive for marijuana or get arrested with marijuana in their possession.

"There have been other cases where policemen, prison guards, have come up with medical marijuana cards and during request for verification. That's when we find out they are police officers," Kamita said.

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