

## Honolulu police officer arrested on federal drug charges

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HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - A Honolulu police officer is in federal custody on federal drug possession, distribution, and conspiracy charges. Officer Michael Chu, 41, is accused of being involved in a marijuana growing operation. The 13-year HPD veteran patrols Wahiawa, Mililani and the North Shore. Now he has been placed on leave without pay. He is due in court on Wednesday for a detention hearing along with another defendant in the case.

Wayne and Ellen Autele have lived on Puneki Street in Mililani for 18 years. News of their neighbors being arrested came as quite a shock, especially since Wayne is a retired Honolulu police officer.

"Everything was closed. You couldn't tell if anyone was home, really. Once in awhile when I get up at two in the morning you could see a light on. That was it. No noise, nothing, and no smell," said Wayne Autele.

Drug Enforcement Administration agents found roughly 10 to 20 marijuana plants growing in the master bedroom, according to a criminal complaint. They also recovered documents showing that Chu and Athena Lee lived there. Chu used the address when he registered for a medical marijuana card. According to the Autele's, the Mililani house is owned by another HPD officer. The suspects moved in just a few months ago, and the home has been rented to different tenants in the past.

"Totally surprised. In fact, I'm embarrassed as a policeman for 32 years and I cannot even pick up a criminal right next door to me," said Wayne Autele.

"I just couldn't like even imagine it. I was thinking, wow, right next door!" said Ellen Autele.

Authorities moved in after a security manager at FedEx seized a suspicious package on Thursday that was flown to Honolulu from California. The parcel, containing eight young marijuana plants, was being sent to an apartment at the Moana Pacific on Kapiolani Boulevard. A day later, DEA agents executed a federal search warrant of the apartment. A manager told agents that a woman by the name of Athena Lee lived in the unit and may be living with Chu. While searching the apartment, DEA agents said they recovered more than 20 marijuana plants and large amounts of US currency. Lee showed up with Chu during the raid. She was carrying \$12,000 and he was holding a bag with material used to grow plants indoors, according to court documents. Chu's subsidized police vehicle in the parking garage contained a pound of marijuana and several money orders, authorities said.

According to the criminal complaint, Chu waived his constitutional rights and answered questions from authorities by stating that he just works for Lee and helps her carry things for the grow operation.

"It's scary. I didn't even think or imagine about that. Surprised," said Moana Pacific resident Keiko Ishino.

Chu also told authorities that he lives in an apartment in a building on Young Street. Last July, DEA agents intercepted a package containing 14 pounds of marijuana addressed to the same unit.

Honolulu Police Chief Louis Kealoha released the following statement:

*"This is a very serious allegation, and we are cooperating with the DEA in its investigation. The HPD has also initiated its own internal administrative investigation into the alleged activity. In the meantime, the officer's police powers have been removed, and he will be placed on leave without pay. Any officer or civilian employee who violates the public trust by engaging in this type of activity should not be a part of the Honolulu Police Department."*

"I'm sad it had to be a policeman, but it's one of those things. But I'm glad anytime you have criminals caught," said Wayne Autele.

As for Chu having a medical marijuana card, HPD said a permit does not exempt an employee from drug testing, and that using marijuana is a violation of policy.