

## Passenger Charged With Groping Sleeping Woman on 11-Hour Flight

A woman said she was repeatedly touched as she slept in a window seat.

By ABC News - August 22, 2012, 9:14 AM

A passenger onboard a flight from the Philippines to Hawaii faces federal charges after he allegedly groped a woman several times as she slept on the nearly 11-hour flight.

The alleged victim, identified only as M.W. in court documents, had taken a spoonful of NyQuil to help her sleep but woke up several times throughout Hawaiian Airlines flight 456 on Aug. 16.

She initially thought her seatmate, Luavalu Seuva'ai, 22, a resident of American Samoa, was "touching her by accident," grazing her legs and arms as he tried to get comfortable in his seat, court documents state.

Trying to ignore the frequent movements of her seatmate, the woman went back to sleep. A short time later, she woke up to realize her hand had been placed on "the private region of Seuva'ai's pants," according to the criminal complaint.

"M.W. was still drowsy, but from the placement of her hand, she recalled that Seuva'ai seemed to have an erection," FBI Special Agent Timothy Judah Pent wrote in the criminal complaint filed in U.S. District Court for Hawaii.

The woman pulled her hand away but said nothing to Seuva'ai and went back to sleep.

After several other "touching" instances and a verbal command for him to stop, the woman again awoke to find Seuva'ai's hand "fondling her breast underneath her bra."

"[She] pushed Seuva'ai's hand away and told him to leave," Pent wrote in the complaint.

The woman alerted a flight attendant, who moved Seuva'ai to another seat for the duration of the flight.

When the flight landed in Honolulu, Seuva'ai was taken into federal custody.

When questioned, Seuva'ai told authorities that the woman had made the first move by placing her hand on his leg, and he "was merely flirting with her." At first Seuva'ai denied that he'd touched the woman sexually, but he later changed his statement and wrote and signed a confession stating he'd touched the woman's side and breast without her consent, according to the criminal complaint.

ABCNews.com could not reach Sean Coutain, the public defender who represented Seuva'ai until Aug. 21, but Coutain told [Hawaii News Now](#) this is a "classic case of 'he said, she said.'"

"It's really early at this point to be jumping to any kinds of conclusions," he said.

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/man-accused-groping-woman-slept-flight/story?id=17057775>

ABCNews.com's attempts to reach Seuva'ai's new attorney at the Office of the Federal Public Defender in Hawaii were not successful.

Seuva'ai appeared in court on Monday where he entered a not guilty plea.

He has since been released on a \$25,000 signature bond into the custody of his sister.

A preliminary hearing is scheduled for Sept. 7.