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The Mailbox Conspiracy: An Inside Look at the Greatest Corruption Case in Hawai'i History

When Honolulu police chief Louis Kealoha and his wife, Katherine, the city's third-highest ranking prosecutor, reported their mailbox stolen, it was only the beginning of an elaborate conspiracy – and a corruption case that soon became the most notorious in Hawai'i's history. Meticulously reported by the public defender who learned the story from the inside, *The Mailbox Conspiracy: The Inside Story of the Greatest Corruption Case in Hawai'i History* – a new release from Watermark Publishing hitting bookstores in December – is a fascinating study in the corruption of power and the abuse of public office.

Author Alexander Silvert, a federal public defender, took on Kealoha family member Gerard Puana's felony theft case mostly out of curiosity: Why would someone steal a mailbox, especially one belonging to prominent law enforcement figures like the chief of police and a city prosecutor? And why was the United States Attorney's Office involved in such a low-level neighborhood theft case? Puana, his client, claimed not just innocence, but that he had been framed. "I was beginning to think Gerard had watched way, way too many movies," recalled Silvert. Yet as he began to peel away layer after layer of Puana's story, it became clear that the allegations and the evidence didn't line up. Infamous for each new stranger-than-fiction revelation, the so-called "Kealoha mailbox trial" unearthed a chain of bumbling coverups, multiple instances of financial fraud stretching back a decade, and an alleged family drug trafficking enterprise – all served up with a generous helping of arrogance on the part of Louis and Katherine Kealoha.

A tenacious defense attorney with decades of experience, Silvert led the team of investigators who painstakingly unearthed evidence to prove Gerard Puana's innocence. Their seven-year effort turned the tables on the Kealohas, resulting in the couple's federal prosecution, and the ramifications – and legal wrangling – of the case continue today.

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"I wrote *The Mailbox Conspiracy* to explain how and why Gerard Puana was framed for a crime he didn't commit," Silvert says, "but the larger story here is about public corruption and what happens when it's left unchecked. The Kealohas and their co-conspirators were some of the highest members of Honolulu's law enforcement community, who used their authority and the heavy hand of law enforcement to frame an innocent man. It's only the checks and balances by government oversight agencies and the courts that ensure that law enforcement serves justice in a fair, impartial and unbiased manner. When these institutions fail, people like the Kealohas flourish."

Alexander Silvert was raised in New York City and Vermont. A graduate of UCLA and Boston College Law School, he worked as a state and federal public defender in Philadelphia before moving to Honolulu in 1989. He served as the first assistant federal public defender from 1992 to his retirement in October 2020 and was named Federal Defender of the Year in 2000 by the National Association of Federal Defenders. During his tenure he handled numerous high-publicity cases, including representing two defendants in potential federal death penalty cases. Silvert wrote *The Mailbox Conspiracy* based on his personal involvement in the Louis and Katherine Kealoha case from 2013 to 2020. He currently provides legal consultation services to defense attorneys in federal criminal cases.

The Mailbox Conspiracy: The Inside Story of the Greatest Corruption Case in Hawai'i History (ISBN 978-1-948011-63-1), priced at \$19.95 in softcover, will be available at bookstores, other retail outlets and online booksellers in late December, with early shipment copies now available exclusively from the publisher at www.bookshawaii.net. Contact Watermark Publishing, 1000 Bishop St., Suite 806, Honolulu, HI 96813; telephone (808) 587-7766; toll-free (866) 900-BOOK; fax (808) 521-3461; e-mail sales@bookshawaii.net.

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