

BEFORE THE WASHINGTON STATE
EXECUTIVE ETHICS BOARD

In the Matter of:

CONNIE SAKAMOTO,

Respondent.

No. 10-012

STIPULATED FACTS,
CONCLUSIONS AND ORDER

I. STIPULATION

THIS STIPULATION is entered into under WAC 292-100-090(1) between the Respondent, CONNIE SAKAMOTO, and Board Staff of the WASHINGTON STATE EXECUTIVE ETHICS BOARD (Board) through MELANIE DeLEON, Executive Director. The following stipulated facts, conclusions, and agreed order will be binding upon the parties if fully executed, and if accepted by the Board without modification(s), and will not be binding if rejected by the Board, or if the Respondent does not accept the Board's proposed modification(s), if any, to the stipulation.

Section 1: PROCEDURAL FACTS

1.1. On October 14, 2009, the Executive Ethics Board received a referral from the State Auditor's Office (SAO) alleging that Connie Sakamoto, an Administrative Manager at the Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine, may have violated state law when she used her state computer for personal benefit, including taking her state laptop home in the evenings to use it for purely personal Internet access and to support her outside business. The Board reviewed this referral and issued a complaint on May 14, 2010.

1.2. The Board is authorized under RCW 34.05.060 to establish procedures for attempting and executing informal settlement of matters in lieu of more formal proceedings

under the Administrative Procedures Act, including adjudicative hearings. The Board has established such procedures under WAC 292-100-090.

1.1. Connie Sakamoto understands that if Board staff proves any or all of the alleged violations at a hearing, the Board may impose sanctions, including a civil penalty under RCW 42.52.480(1)(b) of up to \$5,000, or the greater of three times the economic value of anything received or sought in violation of chapter 42.52 RCW, for each violation found. The Board may also order the payment of costs, including reasonable investigative costs, under RCW 42.52.480(1)(c).

1.2. Connie Sakamoto recognizes that the evidence available to the Board staff is such that the Board may conclude she violated the Ethics in Public Service Act. Therefore, in the interest of seeking an informal and expeditious resolution of this matter, the parties agree to entry of the stipulated findings of fact, conclusions of law and agreed order set forth below.

1.3. Connie Sakamoto waives the opportunity for a hearing, contingent upon acceptance of this stipulation by the Board, or her acceptance of any modification(s) proposed by the Board, pursuant to the provisions of WAC 292-100-090(2) which provides in part:

The board has the option of accepting, rejecting, or modifying the proposed stipulation or asking for additional facts to be presented. If the board accepts the stipulation or modifies the stipulation with the agreement of the respondent, the board shall enter an order in conformity with the terms of the stipulation. If the board rejects the stipulation or the respondent does not agree to the board's proposed modifications to the stipulation, the normal process will continue. The proposed stipulation and information obtained during formal settlement discussions shall not be admitted into evidence at a subsequent public hearing.

1.4. If the Board accepts this stipulation, the Board will release and discharge Connie Sakamoto from all further ethics proceedings under chapter 42.52 RCW for matters arising out of the facts contained in the complaint in this matter, subject to payment of the full amount of the civil penalty due and owing, any other costs imposed, and compliance with all other terms and conditions of the agreed order. Connie Sakamoto in turn agrees to release and discharge the

Board, its officers, agents and employees from all claims, damages, and causes of action arising out of this complaint and this stipulation and agreed order.

1.5. If this Stipulation is accepted, this Stipulation and Order does not purport to settle any other claims between Connie Sakamoto and the Washington State Executive Ethics Board, the State of Washington, or other third party, which may be filed in the future.

1.6. If this Stipulation is accepted, this Stipulation and Order is enforceable under RCW 34.05.578 and any other applicable statutes or rules.

1.7. If the Board rejects this stipulation, or if Connie Sakamoto does not accept the Board's proposed modification(s), if any, Connie Sakamoto waives any objection to participation at any subsequent hearing by any Board member to whom this stipulation was presented for approval under WAC 292-100-090(2). Further, Connie Sakamoto understands and agrees that this proposed stipulation and information obtained during any formal settlement discussions held between the parties shall not be admitted into evidence at a subsequent public hearing, unless otherwise agreed by the parties.

Section 2: FINDINGS OF FACT

2.1. Connie Sakamoto is an Administrative Manager for Washington State University (WSU) Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences.

2.2. On October 12, 2009, the State Auditor's Office (SAO), issued Whistleblower Report No. 1002357, which contained a finding of reasonable cause to believe that an improper governmental action had occurred. Specifically, the SAO report cited 7,257 non-work-related records found on Ms. Sakamoto's desktop and two laptop computers, including visits to travel, real estate and shopping websites. Such use is far beyond the de minimis use allowed by RCW 42.52.160 and WAC 292-110-010.

2.3. In addition, 271 dictation files for her personal dictation business; 274 correspondence files for her outside business including emails to outside business clients

transmitting invoices; and 5,660 non work-related graphics were found on her state-issued laptop computers. Evidence showed Ms. Sakamoto accessed emails for her outside business almost daily and multiple times each day. Use of state resources to support an outside business is strictly prohibited and not subject to the de minimis rule.

2.4. Connie Sakamoto admitted shopping over the Internet while at work, including online auctions, and using her state provided computer equipment to support her outside business. She stated that she was told not to conduct her outside business while at work but was never told she could not use state equipment in her off time to run her business.

Section 3: CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

3.1. Pursuant to chapter 42.52 RCW, the Executive Ethics Board has jurisdiction over Connie Sakamoto and over the subject matter of this complaint.

3.2. Pursuant to WAC 292-100-090(1), the parties have the authority to resolve this matter under the terms contained herein, subject to Board approval.

3.4. A state officer or employee is prohibited under RCW 42.52.160 from using state resources for personal benefit.

3.5. Based on Findings of Fact 2.1 through 2.4, Connie Sakamoto used state resources in violation of RCW 42.52.160 and WAC 292-110-010.

3.7. The Board is authorized to impose sanctions for violations to the Ethics Act pursuant to RCW 42.52.360. The Board has set forth criteria in WAC 292-120-030 for imposing sanctions and consideration of any mitigating or aggravating factors.

Section 4: Aggravating and Mitigating Factors

4.1. Aggravating factors include that the violation was continuing in nature, occurring over more than two years; involved personal gain; and Ms. Sakamoto had significant management responsibilities.

4.2. Mitigating factors include that Connie Sakamoto was suspended without pay for five days; and has attended ethics training since these events came to light.

Section 5: AGREED ORDER

5.1. For the violation of RCW 42.52.160, Connie Sakamoto will pay a civil penalty in the amount of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000.00). The Board agrees to suspend two thousand dollars (\$2,000.00) on the condition that Connie Sakamoto complies with all terms and conditions of this Stipulation and Order and commits no further violations of chapter 42.52 RCW for a period of three years from the date this agreement is executed.

5.2. The civil penalty of \$8,000.00 is payable to the state Executive Ethics Board within forty-five (45) days of approval of this Stipulation and Order by the Board, or as otherwise agreed to by the parties.

CERTIFICATION

I, Connie Sakamoto, hereby certify that I have read this Stipulation and Agreed Order in its entirety; that my counsel of record, if any, has fully explained the legal significance and consequence of it; that I fully understand and agree to all of it; and that it may be presented to the Board without my appearance. I knowingly and voluntarily waive my right to a hearing in this matter; and if the Board accepts the Stipulation and Agreed Order, I understand that I will receive a signed copy.

Connie Sakamoto 8/17/10
Connie Sakamoto Date
Respondent

Stipulated to and presented by:

Melanie deLeon 8/23/10
Melanie deLeon Date
Executive Director

