RES24-276
Testimony

MISC. COMM. 570

COUNCIL

COUNCIL Meeting

Meeting Date: Dec 11, 2024 @ 10:00 AM

Support: 0

Oppose: 0

I wish to comment: 1

Name:	Email:	Zip:
Andreas Okolovitch	hawaiipsychology@gmail.com	96815
Representing:	Position:	Submitted:
Self	I wish to comment	Dec 10, 2024 @ 08:41 AM

T reated like a murderer by police officers over a $19.99 t-shirt.

Andreas Okolovitch
Behavioral Health Specialist
Department of Education
Phone: (808) 636-1028
Email: hawaiipsychology@gmail.com

November 17, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to formally address an incident that occurred on November 16, 2024, at Macy's Ala Moana, which has caused me significant distress, physical and emotional harm, and lasting trauma. What began as a simple mistake—forgetting a t-shirt in my shopping bag—was escalated to an extreme level of aggression and mistreatment by both Macy's loss prevention staff and the Honolulu Police Department. I feel I was unfairly treated, discriminated against, and subjected to unnecessary force, humiliation, and emotional distress.

Incident Overview:

On November 16, 2024, at approximately 4:30 p.m., I was shopping at Macy's Ala Moana Center, specifically looking for a t-shirt from the brand Columbia™. I had shopped there the previous day (November 15, 2024), and can be seen on security footage purchasing three t-shirts and a pair of shoes at the same store. I returned on the 16th to purchase a brown t-shirt that I had seen the day before but did not buy. I placed the t-shirt in a blue-and-white reusable Trader Joe's™ shopping bag, which I typically use when shopping.

After placing the t-shirt in my bag, I continued browsing the store, interacting briefly with an employee at the fragrance counter about a particular fragrance I was interested in. Afterward, I took the escalator to another floor and continued shopping. Eventually, I decided to exit the store through the food court entrance. Outside, I paused to check my phone messages, at which point I was aggressively approached by three individuals from Macy's loss prevention team.

Confrontation and Escalation:

The loss prevention officers immediately accused me of stealing two items. I immediately realized I had forgotten the t-shirt in my shopping bag and explained to the officers that it was an honest mistake. However, they were not interested in listening to my explanation and began to aggressively maneuver me back toward the store, physically trapping me in what I can only describe as a "triangle cattle maneuver," with me at the center, as they forced me back inside the store.

Once inside, one of the loss prevention officers began to aggressively grip my body, putting his arm around my waist, and physically moving me toward the loss prevention office. I continued to repeat that I had made an honest mistake and asked them to review the security footage from the previous day, which would show that I had purchased three of the same shirts and a pair of shoes. Despite my calm and reasonable explanation, the officer continued to use force, causing significant distress.

At this point, I took out my phone and began recording the incident, shouting for others in the store to witness what was happening. A customer in the store spoke up, informing the officers that they had no right to physically touch me in that manner. Eventually, the officer released his grip on me, but the situation remained highly uncomfortable and distressing.

Handcuffs, Shackles, and Further Humiliation:

As I attempted to leave the store, a police officer arrived and immediately handcuffed me without asking any questions or allowing me to explain the situation. The officer applied the handcuffs so tightly that it caused significant pain. I was then forcibly escorted toward the loss prevention office. At this point, I was not resisting and was only trying to explain that this was a simple mistake, but my words were ignored.

Once inside the loss prevention office, my hands were cuffed, and I was further restrained with shackles around my legs. I continued to plead that this was an honest mistake and that I had purchased similar items the day before, and requested that they check the store's security footage. However, I was completely ignored, and the officers made no effort to verify my claim or offer me an opportunity to pay for the t-shirt.

At this stage, I repeatedly told the officers that I am a Behavioral Health Specialist for the Department of Education and that I was not some criminal or “thug.” Despite this, no one seemed willing to listen to my explanation, and I was subjected to degrading and unjust treatment.

Discriminatory Treatment and Further Aggression:

While in the loss prevention office, I was repeatedly told by officers that I was being detained over a $19.99 t-shirt. I remained calm and cooperative, trying to explain that this was a simple mistake. One of the officers, whom I believe was Officer Chang, responded by telling me to "shut my mouth and listen." He informed me that Macy’s was pressing charges, and I would be taken to central processing. I was completely overwhelmed by the situation.

I was then paraded through Macy’s in handcuffs and leg shackles as though I were a violent criminal. I felt completely humiliated, experiencing overwhelming anxiety and mental anguish. I repeatedly shouted for people to record the situation as I was forcibly pushed through the store. I also saw other customers entering through another entrance and begged them to start recording

the scene. They did take a video, and I shouted my email address for them to send it to me, although they unfortunately never did.

Once I was in the police cruiser, I attempted to activate the recording feature on my Apple Watch to capture the ongoing events. The officer, noticing this, approached me and attempted to remove the watch from my wrist while I was still shackled. I told him I would take it off myself, and when I did, I handed it to him. The officer commented on my watch, calling it "nice," but then said, "What watch?" implying that he intended to keep it for himself. I reminded him that I had activated the voice memo function on the watch to record the situation. He tossed my watch into the trunk of the vehicle, and I was transported to central booking.

Booking and Further Mistreatment:

Upon arriving at the booking station, I was subjected to further mistreatment. I was fingerprinted, photographed, and placed in a holding cell. The entire experience felt like I was being processed for a major crime, despite the fact that I was detained over a simple mistake. I was told that bail had been set at $500, which seemed completely disproportionate to the offense. I questioned why the bail was so high for a simple error, similar to receiving a fine for a minor traffic violation.

While in the holding cell, I experienced extreme emotional distress, anxiety, and physical discomfort due to the tight handcuffs and shackles. I was told that I could make two phone calls, but I was only able to contact one person before I was left in the cell for hours. I eventually learned that my friend had arrived with the bail money, but my release was delayed for several hours. The process was unnecessarily slow, and my mental health continued to deteriorate.

Final Treatment and Release:

When I was finally informed that I could be released, the officers involved continued their aggressive behavior. One officer ordered me to "get your stuff," referring to the blanket and mat I had been given in the cell. I complied, but the officer told me to "fix it," implying that I had to arrange the items to his satisfaction. When I didn't immediately comply to his liking, another officer threatened that I would be charged with disorderly conduct. I was further threatened with more charges if I didn't comply.

As I left the holding area, I overheard officers making degrading remarks about me, calling me a "thief" and suggesting that I would "see them again." This verbal abuse added to the immense emotional pain and humiliation I had already suffered. I could see my friends watching through the window, and I felt nothing but shame and anxiety as I was released.

Conclusion:

This entire incident has caused me significant mental anguish, emotional distress, and physical pain. What should have been a simple misunderstanding, related to a $19.99 t-shirt, was

escalated into an extreme, unnecessary, and humiliating ordeal. I was subjected to excessive force, degrading treatment, and discriminatory behavior by both store personnel and law enforcement officers.

I feel that I am owed a formal apology from all parties involved, including Macy's loss prevention team, the Honolulu Police Department, and the officers involved in the handling of this situation. I also request that the officers responsible for this unjust and excessive treatment be reviewed, held accountable, and appropriately reprimanded. The handling of this situation was not only unwarranted but also inhumane, and I hope that steps are taken to prevent such an event from happening again.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I trust that you will investigate this matter thoroughly and respond accordingly.

Sincerely,
Andreas Okolovitch
Behavioral Health Specialist, Department of Education
Phone: (808) 636-1028
Email: hawaiipsychology@gmail.com

Top of Form

Bottom of Form