

**Testimony of the Office of the Public Defender,  
State of Hawaii to the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor**

Hrg: Friday, Feb. 22, 2008, 10:00 a.m.  
1 copy required

**S.B. NO. 2458: RELATING TO CRIMINAL IMPERSONATION**

Chair Taniguchi and Members of the Committee:

We oppose S.B. No. 2458 creates a new felony offense of criminal impersonation. The bill seeks to prevent online impersonation of someone with the intent to cause or in reckless disregard of the risk of causing any bodily injury to the person who is impersonated. We do not see that this type of conduct is widespread and that there is a particular need for this type of legislation.

The concern is that an innocent online prank which results in a fight taking place could be punished as a felony offense. We feel this is excessive. If the fight would normally result in an Assault 3<sup>o</sup> charge, this is sufficient to punish the conduct.

A question is also presented with regard to what an "indirect" transmission of information would be. How can one indirectly transmit information by oral or written statement or by electronic means? Such a term is so broad that it could encompass otherwise innocent conduct.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.



DECISION MAKING: February 22, 2008 at 10:00a.m.

RE: Senate Bills 2456, 2458 and 2745

TO: COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND LABOR

Senator Taniguchi, Chair

Senator Hee, Vice Chair

FROM: Ana Maring, Hawaii State Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Aloha, my name is Ana Maring and I represent the Hawaii State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (HSCADV). HSCADV is a private non-profit agency which serves as a touchstone agency for the majority of domestic violence programs throughout the state. For many years HSCADV has worked with the Hawaii Legislature by serving as an educational resource and representing the many voices of domestic violence programs and survivors of domestic violence.

HSCADV supports Senate Bills 2456, 2458 and 2745.

The Internet has opened worlds of information and communication to our communities. It has helped victims reach out to shelters and hotlines to get information about intimate partner abuse and the safety tools available to them. Unfortunately when placed in the hands of a batterer this same technology can become dangerous and potentially lethal.

Our laws must reflect the growing technology that impacts the safety of victims.

For further information please access the following links:

<http://www.endabuse.org/health/ejournal/archive/1-3/Tucker.pdf>

[http://www.nnedv.org/docs/SafetyNet/NNEDV\\_SpywareAndSafety.pdf](http://www.nnedv.org/docs/SafetyNet/NNEDV_SpywareAndSafety.pdf)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

LAW OFFICES  
OF  
**MARVIN S. C. DANG**  
A Limited Liability Law Company

MAILING ADDRESS:

P.O. BOX 4109  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96812-4109

TELEPHONE: (808) 521-8521  
FAX: (808) 521-8522

February 22, 2008

Senator Brian T. Taniguchi, Chair,  
and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary & Labor  
State Capitol  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Re: **Senate Bill 2458, Senate Draft 1 (Criminal Impersonation)**  
**Hearing Date/Time: Friday, February 22, 2008, 10:00 A.M.**

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of my law firm the **Law Offices of Marvin S.C. Dang, LLC**.

We **support** this Bill.

The purpose of this Bill is to establish the offense of criminal impersonation, making it a class C felony to impersonate another person and place the person at risk of bodily injury.

My law practice emphasizes, among other things, collections law, foreclosures, and creditors rights. Since April, 2007, a number of my Hawaii attorney colleagues and I have received thousands of scam e-mails from an anonymous sender. These e-mails are also being sent to people outside the legal community. The messages in these e-mails are false, derogatory, and defamatory about me, about specific attorneys in my law office, about other Hawaii attorneys, about politicians, and about others. The sender (perpetrator) has actually pretended that the messages in the e-mails are written by me, by certain Hawaii attorneys, and by others. This type of identity theft is ironic because I was the Vice Chair of the Hawaii Identity Theft Task Force. It has been suggested that the perpetrator is a disgruntled debtor who might be the subject of a pending collection or foreclosure action by my law firm.

Attached is a Honolulu Advertiser article dated August 27, 2007 and entitled "Hawaii attorney target of online harassment." The article describes the harassing, defamatory e-mails in which the perpetrator is impersonating me.

We support the change made in the Senate Draft 1 of this Bill to classify this offense as a class C felony as opposed to a petty misdemeanor because the class C felony classification is appropriate where the actions of a perpetrator are so disruptive.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

LAW OFFICES OF MARVIN S.C. DANG, LLC

By: Marvin S. C. Dang  
MARVIN S.C. DANG  
Member Manager

Enclosure



Posted on: Monday, August 27, 2007

## Hawaii attorney target of online harassment

By Greg Wiles  
Advertiser Staff Writer

As vice chairman of the state Identity Theft Task Force, attorney Marvin Dang is well aware of ways to fend off cyber thieves.

But for the past four months Dang's encountered an unusual offshoot of identity theft: use of his name in offensive e-mails in an attempt to harass him and sully his reputation.

Dang has been unable to stop or find out who is sending the messages, which now total more than 1,000 and have been sent to him, attorneys he knows, prominent lawmakers, family members and others.

The messages range from crude attempts to paint Dang as a racist, to others that try to link him to drug use and pornography.

There have been e-mails that smack of threats and intimidation, such as one noting Dang unknowingly walked by the sender four times in two weeks or that Dang should change where he eats lunch. He's been asked how he got such a good parking space or where he purchased a shirt he wore for a picture in a local publication.

"It's a situation where you're wondering how someone would do something like this," Dang said. Each time he comes across an e-mail, he makes a copy. They fill two 3 1/2-inch-thick black binders.

"I've never seen anything along these lines," Dang said.

Unfortunately for Dang and others, use of e-mail and Web postings to libel and create problems for people appears to be spreading.

Cases are cropping up in other states, and the California State Assembly is considering including the offenses under its identity-theft statutes, said Jay Foley, executive director of the Identity Theft Resource Center in San Diego.

"We're hearing about more and more of it," Foley said. "Every day we wake up and there's more and more you can do with a computer."

Foley's experienced the problem firsthand. Someone got hold of his personal e-mail account's password and posted an online personal want ad talking about his supposed sexual preferences. Foley has since closed that e-mail account.

He knows of cases where derogatory e-mails led to a Sacramento resident losing her car and having to install a home security system. Foley said in another case, someone manipulated a nude photo to place a teacher's face on it and began circulating the bogus picture around the Internet.

"It was detrimental to her career," he said.

Foley said one of the worst cases involved a stolen password and an online posting supposedly from the person listing their address and some of their unusual sexual fantasies.

### FACELESS SENDER



Attorney Marvin Dang looks over his collection of e-mails circulated anonymously to defame or threaten him. The vice chairman of the state Identity Theft Task Force has spent months dealing with the attacks.

JEFF WIDENER | The Honolulu Advertiser

### PROTECT YOURSELF

Here are some steps to take if you find yourself the subject of Internet harassment and scam e-mails.

- If someone is using your personal e-mail after stealing your password, consider closing down the e-mail account.
- Contact your Internet service provider to see if they can help find the offender.
- File a police report.
- Make copies of all the e-mails and document your time and expenses in dealing with problems. You can use this record to seek

Dang's problems began in April, when an attorney acquaintance queried him about a questionable e-mail that was circulating. The message read:

"Dear Voter,

"We don't need a (racist slur) from Hawaii to be the president so help my cause in stopping this injustice.

"Friend of Marvin Dang"

Dang recoiled and remembers thinking that someone was attempting to steal his name or perhaps ruin his reputation.

In weeks that followed, it became more apparent that both were the case.

He started to get odd e-mails himself while more friends reported receiving e-mails defaming him. Dang said it appears the sender has harvested information about him on the Internet, pulling down names of lawyers he volunteers with and researching his political relationships and business clients. Some of these people are now receiving the electronic messages.

After learning of about a dozen e-mails, Dang contacted the state attorney general's office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Honolulu Police Department. Dang said the origin of the e-mails has been difficult to trace because the sender uses Web services in other countries that guarantee the sender's identity will be protected.

The services allow the sender to be listed as "anonymous" or to use whatever name they want to be listed as sending the message.

Dang has been listed as the originator on some of the e-mails, while others have listed prominent local politicians, Dang's workers and family members as the sender.

In some cases, the names appear to have been grabbed from other sources. One supposedly was sent by George Orwell, perhaps an allusion to the deceased author whose novel "1984" included the line "Big Brother is watching you."

#### E-MAILS GET NASTIER

While the initial e-mails were subtle in libeling Dang, some of them have become more distasteful and ugly. One e-mail supposedly from Dang to another attorney noted, "got a new shipment of nose candy. Contact me."

Others have mentioned kiddie porn, gay Web sites or have made derogatory statements about people close to him. They've listed Dang, a former state legislator, as head of a dubious political committee. That message makes disagreeable references about certain Hawai'i ethnic groups and asking for money so he can help them.

Included in the messages are Dang's mailing address and telephone and fax numbers.

The state attorney general's office confirmed it is looking into the incidents but would not say more because the matter is under investigation.

Dang's work includes collecting debts for credit card companies and pursuing foreclosures for mortgage lenders. He suspects the culprit is an unhappy debtor whom he sued and now holds a grudge against him.

#### WARNING TO OTHERS

Meanwhile, Dang said he continues to receive up to a dozen of the e-mails a day, while other people he knows can receive multiple messages. He's taken steps to notify acquaintances about ignoring the derogatory missives.

"You always wonder who is getting these things," Dang said. "Credibility is very important and you want to make sure what is said about you is not scam lies like these."

restitution when the person is caught, said Jay Foley, executive director of the Identity Theft Resource Center.

- Consider reaching out to people you know to explain the situation, just in case they've received the e-mails.

- In the most serious of cases, take steps to ensure your personal safety.

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Dang said he decided to make his story public to help educate people.

"Anyone can be the victim of e-mail harassment," he said. "Unfortunately, it's just too easy for a nameless, faceless perpetrator to fake the name of a sender."

"Don't accept at face value every e-mail you receive."

Reach Greg Wiles at [gwiles@honoluluadvertiser.com](mailto:gwiles@honoluluadvertiser.com).

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