

# The Maui News

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## **Letter: County Liquor officials did not prohibit children at event**

The county Department of Liquor Control defended its “*limited role*” in an October fundraiser by the Boys & Girls Clubs of Maui, writing in a letter last week to the club that no liquor laws or rules prevented youths from receiving awards at the event that served alcohol.

The letter, dated Friday, signed by Liquor Control Director Glenn Mukai and addressed to the nonprofit group’s Chief Executive Officer Kelly Pearson, concerned the third annual Little Chef Big Chef gala at the Grand Wailea. At the event, Boys & Girls Club youths worked with professional chefs to prepare special pupu for guests to review.

Don Couch, a board member and former Maui County Council member, told the county Liquor Control Commission last month that the youths — for the first time — were not allowed in the dining room and could not receive their awards on stage in front of the guests.

The club resorted to videotaping the youths receiving their awards in another venue to show to guests later.

Couch believed the department was to blame and claimed that liquor control officer Karilee Yoshizawa and the rest of the department saw nothing wrong with keeping the youths out of the dining room.

In the letter, Mukai defended Yoshizawa, who is his daughter, and the department, saying that “*our employees are held to a standard that does not include the disregard to the children of any organization.*”

No new policy changes by the department prevented the “*little chefs*” from receiving their awards in the dining room, he said.

The liquor department and commission have come under fire recently for policy and rule changes made without proper notice and review by the public.

Mukai said that the club utilized the resort’s liquor license for the event, and there was no discussion or request by the Grand Wailea for an awards ceremony. Catering officials confirmed that the ceremony was never brought up or discussed with the club during the planning of the event, he said.

Mukai cited Emily French, catering and conference services manager for the Grand Wailea, in the letter. She told the department that “*it was always discussed that inside the ballroom would be a 21-and-over event as there was an auction and liquor consumption.*” Only on the day of the event was the resort informed of the awards ceremony, the letter said.

French; Gale Fujiwara, director of catering and conference services; and other resort officials did not respond to calls for comment Tuesday.

Couch said Wednesday that he read Mukai’s letter and felt some of its findings were “*disingenuous.*” He said that the Boys & Girls Club board never discussed the ballroom being only 21-and-over and had no idea if that discussion took place with club officials. Pearson could not be reached Wednesday.

“*The board and event coordinator haven’t talked in that great of detail that I know of,*” Couch said. “*I’ve never heard of it because, if I did, I would’ve jumped on it sooner.*”

Couch said that the club was given a hand-drawn map detailing where the children and adults were allowed during the event and the dining room was off-limits to children. He did not know who drew the map and handed it to the club.

*“I was just telling them what we were required to do,”* he said of his comments to the commission. *“Who required it? I don’t know, but the implication is”* that it came from the liquor department.

The club held its first gala on a lawn area at the resort, Couch said. The second gala was held at the Yokouchi Family Estate in Wailuku.

Couch clarified that he made his comments at the commission meeting in the context of a discussion about an application submitted by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Department officials told the commission that children did not need to be in a separate place away from areas where liquor was being served. He wanted to point out that that comment contradicted what occurred at the Boys & Girls Club event.

*“I stood up because it was just disheartening to see (our) kids separated,”* he said.

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