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Hawaii News

Absentee walk-in votes drop, absentee mail-in ballots rise

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Walk-in voting began Aug. 1 at Honolulu Hale, above, and Kapolei Hale.

The number of Oahu voters choosing to enter ballot booths at the city's two absentee voting walk-in locations appears to be dropping this primary election year compared with the 2014 and 2012 primaries, although the number of absentee mail-in ballots apparently is on the upswing.

Today is the last day for walk-in voting to take place on Oahu. Voters have until 4 p.m. to visit either Honolulu Hale or Kapolei Hale to cast their ballots. For the first time, people who are not registered can do so at absentee walk-in sites. (People won't be able to register at precincts on Election Day until 2018.)

Saturday is primary election day.

As of Wednesday, there were 483,076 Oahu residents registered to vote in the primary, up about 3.5 percent from the 466,533 registered in 2014, City Clerk Glen Takahashi said. There were 461,896 registered in the 2012 primary, the last time there was a Honolulu mayoral election.



With only one business day to go, only 7,700 people had voted at either Honolulu Hale or Kapolei Hale, Takahashi said. That's significantly fewer than the 14,859 absentee walk-in votes cast in 2014, and the 12,941 cast in 2012.

Some 5,200 people would have to show up at the two sites today to match the 2012 absentee walk-in total, Takahashi said. "That would be extraordinary, I think," he said.

Meanwhile, the number of absentee mail-in votes cast appears to be rising. There were 129,166 mail-in ballots requested, of which about 71,695 had been returned as of Wednesday, Takahashi said. In 2014 there were 117,821 mail-in ballots requested, 97,231 — or about 82.5 percent — of which were returned.

"We're creeping up there," he said. "We'll see what the final number is."

The 2014 primary election on Oahu was the first one in which more people voted absentee instead of on election day. Of 202,728 total votes cast, 112,009 votes, or 55.2 percent, were absentee, Takahashi said. Of the 206,034 votes cast in the 2012 primary, 98,965 votes, or 48 percent, were absentee.

Takahashi said he can only guess why walk-ins appear to be declining while mail-in ballots seem to be on the rise.

"The fact that the number of absentee mail requests are up ... it could be that people are getting more and more comfortable with voting by mail, that could be one reason," Takahashi said. "As we've encouraged absentee mail, we've seen the absentee walk-in voting numbers drop."

Meanwhile, the number of walk-in sites has declined to two from three in 2012 and five in 2010, he said.