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Bill calling for election for judges dies in committee

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By Jim Mendoza, Reporter [CONNECT](#)

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - The state Senate Judiciary Committee killed a bill Wednesday that called for judges to be elected rather than appointed.

Former city prosecutor Peter Carlisle favors judicial elections but wasn't surprised by the committee's action. "There's no likelihood of this passing in Hawaii come hell or high water," he said.

To be elected, judges would have had to campaign and raise funds.

Defense attorney William Harrison said that would have opened the door to special interest groups who could then lean on a judge for favorable rulings in matters concerning them.'

"This is not a popularity contest. This is a position that requires the individual sitting there to make determinations based solely on the law," he said.

In Hawaii, the Judicial Selection Commission selects finalists for the bench. The governor or chief justice's choice then goes to the Bar Association and the state Senate makes the final confirmation.

Carlisle believes an election would test a candidate's qualifications. "If they are so well qualified, if they know what they're doing and they're so good, then why are they so afraid of running for office?"

But Harrison said electing judges could cut out some qualified candidates.

"It's been shown to exclude a number of candidates and specifically it excludes women. A lot of women don't want to go through that process of being elected," he said.

Campaign funds were also a major area of concern.

Carlisle thinks that limiting campaign contributions would have removed the concern that a judge could be influenced. He added an election could result in better judges.

"Why not put that to the same scrutiny where a community decision has to be made rather than a decision made by a few?" he asked.

Harrison is confident the present process works, and the Judicial Selection Commission plays a crucial role.

"They go through that person's background with a fine-tooth comb and then determine if that person's qualified," he said.

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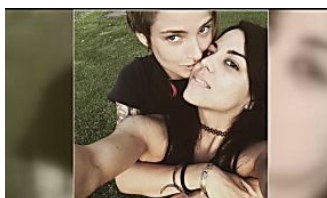
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