



## Bill removes \$1,000 cap on contributions

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A \$1,000 cap on political contributions by corporations would be eliminated under a proposal advancing in the state House.

Critics say the measure would be a step backward in campaign finance reform, while supporters say it clarifies the law to allow corporations to donate the same amounts allowed by individuals.

Candidates still would be limited in the amounts they could accept from donors during a campaign cycle.

House Bill 2455 stems from a recent case involving Maui Mayor Charmaine Tavares.

The Campaign Spending Commission had ruled Tavares' 2006 campaign had accepted contributions of more than \$1,000 from three corporations.

Tavares' campaign sued, arguing that the commission had misinterpreted amendments to the campaign spending law that took effect that year. Maui Circuit Judge Joseph Cardoza ruled in Tavares' favor in May, and that decision is being appealed by the commission.

The commission ruled that corporations were limited to giving just \$1,000 during a two-year campaign period. Meanwhile, individuals could contribute from \$2,000 to \$6,000 in a two- or four-year campaign period.

House Judiciary Vice Chairman Blake Oshiro said it was not the Legislature's intent to place tighter restrictions on corporations. The proposal that advanced out of his committee yesterday makes that clarification.

"It puts a corporation on equal standing with a regular individual," said Oshiro (D, Aiea-Halawa). "Everybody is subject to the same contribution limitation and that should be the overriding restriction."

Good government groups, including Common Cause Hawaii, the League of Women Voters and Kokua Council, remained unconvinced.

"As money becomes more important in campaigns, citizen participation matters less," said Nikki Love of Common Cause. "By increasing the amount of corporate money in campaigns, this bill further diminishes the value of participation by ordinary citizens."

The Judiciary Committee vote was 12-1, with the lone "no" cast by Rep. Cynthia Thielen (R, Kaneohe-Kailua) who urged colleagues to defer the measure until the Tavares case can be decided by the courts.

Oshiro said there is no set timetable for the courts to decide, adding, "for the sake of clarity, we felt it was better to just go back to what our understanding of what the law was, which I think the Campaign Spending Commission misinterpreted."

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