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David Malo Day Ho'olaule'a p...>

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Do Hawaii lawmakers want low voter turnout?

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The Maui County charter amendment on the farming of genetically modified organisms in 2014, as well as the shakeup in the Maui County Council last year, show what can happen when Maui residents take an interest in the elections and vote.

For citizens, change in government is empowering. For entrenched politicians propped up by special interests, it is threatening.

This could be the reason why a state bill proposing voting by mail uniformly across all counties for all elections beginning in 2020 died in a conference committee at the Hawaii State Legislature.

"Our legislature missed another opportunity to improve voter turnout, ignored the advice of election officials and, most importantly, ignored the wishes of the voters - the majority of whom are already voting this way," said Janet Mason, Legislative Committee co-chair of the League of Women Voters of Hawaii.

This is the third straight year that a vote by mail measure made it to conference and did not become law.

This occurred despite studies confirming an increase in voter turnout in states already using a universal vote by mail system. States like Colorado, Oregon and Washington, which currently use a mail-in system, report a recurring cost savings and almost no instances of voter fraud.

In Hawaii's 2014 and 2016 general elections, more than half of all registered voters chose to vote by mail instead of lining up at the polls.

"We should be reducing barriers to voting by seeking proven solutions like vote by mail in order to make voting more convenient and accessible," said Corie Tanida, executive director of Common Cause Hawaii. "When Hawaii has the lowest voter turnout in the nation, we have to wonder why this reform continues to fail."

Hawaii has been dead last in voter turnout among all 50 states for the last five presidential elections. Lawmakers here must want that trend to continue.

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