



## Election officials back all-mail process despite rise in uncounted ballots



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Published: November 30, 2016, 7:29 pm



More than a thousand absentee ballots mailed in for the general election were not counted.

Despite lingering questions about the process, elections officials will once again push for an all mail-in election.

When Always Investigating looked into ballot irregularities for the primary election, we found out several hundred ballots were invalidated over missing or mismatched signatures.

For the general election, that more than doubled.

Despite that rate, all-mail-in voting is a real possibility.

This week, the Hawaii Elections Commission prepares for its first meeting since the election to go over what went right and wrong. The agenda includes an all-mail initiative they're backing at the Legislature again this year.

"The problems at the polls are the problems at the polls. If we had all mail-in voting, we wouldn't have had the problems that we had," said commission chairman Scotty Anderson.

Anderson says all-mail would be better than the voting-day glitches and inconvenience at the polls. He says all-mail would improve participation and save \$300,000 per election cycle.

But in the general election, 4,399 blank absentee mail ballots bounced back as undeliverable. One-hundred-fourteen people who had wanted to vote by mail hiked into a polling place instead, and 1,241 votes were invalidated — the main reason being signature verification issues on absentee mail-ins.

One-thousand-sixteen absentee mail ballots came back without a signature or with one that didn't match the voter's original signature on file. Neighbor island county clerks try to reach each voter to fix it before invalidating, except Oahu. Hawaii's largest county does not contact the mismatched ones, and instead just cancels the vote, which is allowed by law.

"Do you think Oahu needs to change something in their procedure?" Always Investigating asked Anderson.

"I am going to look," he replied. "I did not know that, frankly, until very recently and we are going to have to have a conversation on that, because I think it's very important that we do everything we can do identify that problem, contact those people and let them know."

While there was a vast improvement from the 1,889 primary election votes by mail invalidated due to missing the mail cutoff, still 158 general election ballots arrived a day more too late to be counted.

"If we go to all-mail though, there are some problems that are endemic to a mailed ballot. How are you going to fix some of those key problems?" Always Investigating asked.

"We have to study the whole thing. We are going to absolutely study what Oregon and Washington do," Anderson said. "We will always have available a walk-in service, where and how long to be determined by county clerks."

The chairman says the all-mail system would include a way to check if your ballot got received. It would start on Kauai and roll out to the other counties, with Oahu last, over three election periods.

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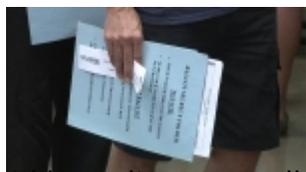
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