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# Gov. Abercrombie signs 16 bills into law

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Gov. Neil Abercrombie Monday signed 16 bills into law including House Bill 2590, a measure that will allow voter registration at absentee polling places beginning in 2016 and late voter registration, including on Election Day, beginning in 2018.

“Our system of government depends on individuals exercising their right to vote, one of our most cherished duties as citizens,” Gov. Abercrombie said. “I applaud members of the Legislature for advancing HB2590 in the interest of removing barriers to voting, and I support the measure as long as it can be achieved from a sound technical standpoint.”

Act 166 appropriates \$100,000 to the Office of Elections for county implementation, which may include upgrading the registration process through the purchase of electronic poll books.

The Governor also signed Acts 151 to 165, enacting measures relating to kupuna, health, housing, the State Building Code, and fire protection:

Senate Bill 2346 (Relating to Aging) appropriates \$6.58 million to the Department of Health (DOH) for community-based services and programs for older persons, in addition to \$500,000 to the Executive Office on Aging, administratively attached to the DOH, to conduct a public education and awareness campaign on long-term care.

Senate Bill 2345 (Relating to the Investor Education Program) appropriates \$50,000 for educational outreach targeted at kupuna, based on the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs’ existing investor education programs.

House Bill 2053 (Relating to Aging) appropriates \$81,985 to establish a fall prevention and early detection coordinator position within the DOH’s Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention System Branch.

House Bill 2052 (Relating to Provider Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment) increases access to Provider Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) by updating references from “physicians orders for life-sustaining treatment” to “provider orders for life-sustaining treatment.” The measure also expands health care provider signatory authority to include advance practice registered nurses and corrects inconsistencies of terms describing who may sign a POLST form on behalf of a patient.

House Bill 1616 (Relating to Health Planning) adds to the Hawaii State Planning Act’s objectives and policies for health, the identification of social determinants of health and prioritization of programs, services, interventions, and activities that address identified social determinants of health to improve Native Hawaiian health in accordance with federal law and reduce health disparities of disproportionately affected demographics.

House Bill 1723 (Relating to Psychiatric Facilities) amends the notice requirements for the discharge of an involuntary patient committed pursuant to legal proceeding involving fitness to proceed and requires the family court to conduct a timely hearing prior to the termination of a standing commitment order.

House Bill 2320 (Relating to Health) establishes health equity as a goal for the DOH and requires the DOH to consider social determinants of health in assessing health needs in the state. The measure is known as “Loretta’s Law” for the late DOH Director Loretta Fuddy, who was passionate proponent.

House Bill 2581 (Relating to Insurance) establishes the State Innovation Waiver Task Force and requires the task force to submit two interim reports and a final report to the legislature.

Senate Bill 2469 (Relating to Telehealth) requires equivalent reimbursement for services, including behavioral health services, provided through telehealth as for the same services provided via face-to-face contact between a health care provider and a patient. The measure also clarifies that health care providers for purposes of telehealth include primary care providers, mental health providers, oral health providers, physicians and osteopathic physicians, advanced practice registered nurses, psychologists, and dentists. For consistency purposes, the bill changes statutory references of “telemedicine” to “telehealth.”

House Bill 2400 (Relating to Temporary Disability Benefits) provides temporary disability benefits to employees who suffer disabilities as a result of donating organs.

Senate Bill 1233 (Relating to Leaves of Absence) requires certain private employers to allow employees to take leaves of absence for organ, bone marrow, or peripheral blood stem cell donation. Unused sick leave, vacation, or paid time off, or unpaid time off, may be used for these leaves of absence. The measure also requires employers to restore an employee returning from leave to the same or equivalent position and establishes a private right of action for employees seeking enforcement of provisions.

House Bill 2251 (Relating to Housing Loan and Mortgage Program) increases the Hula Mae Multifamily Revenue Bond authorization limit from \$750 million to \$1 billion.

Senate Bill 2542 (Relating to the Disposition of the Conveyance Tax Collections to the Rental Housing Trust Fund) restores the allocation of conveyance tax collections to the rental housing trust fund to 50 percent beginning July 1, 2014.

Senate Bill 2581 (Relating to the State Building Code) appropriates \$136,676 to modify the composition, quorum, and duties of the Hawaii State Building Code Council and revises the state building code, including clarifying terminology, the code adoption process, and the staggering of code adoptions. The measure also prohibits the adoption of code provisions that conflict with laws governing contractors.

Senate Bill 2300 (Relating to Fire Protection) authorizes the State Fire Council to establish statewide qualifications and procedures for testing, certifying, and credentialing individuals who conduct maintenance and testing of portable fire extinguishers, fire protection systems, and fire alarm systems.

Abercrombie also sent a letter to Senate President Donna Mercado Kim and House Speaker Joe Souki on Monday stating that he will let Senate Bill 2682 (Relating to Financial Disclosure Statements) become law without his signature. He placed the bill on his intent-to-veto notice to legislators last week to allow for more review time.

In the letter, Gov. Abercrombie stated:

"When it comes to the role of volunteer participation in the policy and decision-making process of governing in a democracy, the power of government to intrude in people's lives becomes far more than a technical issue. It goes beyond labels of left and right. The whole rationale of democratic governance, after all, is to ensure the protection of individual rights, particularly in matters of personal information and dignity.

"There are tough issues to be considered in this bill with competing values: Legitimate inquiry into possible conflicts regarding the public interest versus legitimate concerns about personal information on family, finances, credit history and medical records becoming cannon fodder in political battles.

"It seems reasonable in these circumstances then, to allow this bill to become law with the object of reviewing the disclosure documents to determine what information serves the public interest, what limitations are relevant and most importantly, what constitutes conflict. The issue then, is not about disclosure, but to what end and by what means."

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