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Gov signs same-day voting registration measure

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By Rick Daysog, Reporter

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - A measure taking aim at Hawaii's worst-in-the-nation voter turnout is now law.

Gov. Neil Abercrombie today signed a bill making Hawaii the 12th state in the country where late registration could be done on the day voters head to the polls. But same-day voting registration won't begin until the 2018 elections to give state election officials time to phase in the program.

"Hopefully, this will improve voter turnout and as I say, the delayed implementation gives the county clerks and the Office of Elections time to make sure it's implemented accurately," Abercrombie said.

During the 2012 elections, just 42 percent of registered voters cast a ballot.

Some blame Hawaii's one-party dominance for turning off voters while others say voters are content with the status quo.

"No matter what the reason is, people aren't coming to the polls and government should make it as easy as possible for new voters to be able to do so," said state Rep. Kaniela Ing, D-Kihei, who helped introduce the measure.

Carmille Lim, executive director of Common Cause Hawaii, said more can be done to improve turnout but that the new law is a good first step.

"There's a lot of cynicism in politics -- a lot of money in politics -- and people think their votes don't count," she said.

But Lim pointed to recent races that were decided by razor-thin margins. In 2010, former state Rep. Marilyn Lee was re-elected by less than 20 votes. Lee later lost her re-election in 2012.

"So votes do count, votes do matter," she said.

State Sen. Sam Slom, R-Hawaii Kai, who voted against the measure, said Hawaii's low voter turnout isn't due to the registration process.

"It has to do with the lack of competition, the lack of issues, the one-party rule in this state and the fact that people feel disengaged," he said.

Slom said the new law will mean more election fraud. He also believes state and county election officials aren't equipped to handle the extra election-day registration duties, pointing to the 2012 campaign with saw widespread voting delays.

The deadline to register for this year's primary is July 10th.

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