

Hawaii

Hawaii Inches Closer To Becoming A Vote-By-Mail State

Advocates for improving election turnout tell lawmakers they hope the bill won't once again die behind closed doors.

11

By Chad Blair    / March 30, 2017

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Worried about the state's anemic voter turnout, two Senate committees unanimously approved legislation Thursday to implement voting by mail for all Hawaii counties by 2020.

That pleased two major proponents of [House Bill 1401](#), Common Cause and the League of Women Voters, which believe more people will vote if the process is made more convenient and accessible.

But representatives for both nonprofits told members of the Senate committees on Judiciary and Labor and Ways and Means that they feared the legislation would be killed during the conference committee period that runs during the last two weeks of April.

After all, that's what happened last year.



Chief Election Officer Scott Nago, left at table, and Honolulu City Clerk Glen Takahashi answer lawmakers' questions about vote-by-mail legislation.

Janet Mason of the League of Women Voters and Corie Tanida of Common Cause asked legislators to make sure HB 1401 isn't one of the myriad measures that invariably falls through the cracks as lawmakers scramble to strike final deals.

Mason assured senators that there was no risk to incumbency in passing vote-by-mail.

That comment elicited knowing chuckles in Committee Room 211 at the Capitol. After all, what lawmaker would vote to make it easier to remove him or her from office?

HB 1401 is not a done deal, and Judiciary and Labor Chairman Gil Keith-Agaran amended the bill in several ways Thursday.

First, it will now include the contents of the latest draft of [Senate Bill 334](#), which Keith-Agaran described as similar to HB 1401 but said is also "more

complete in addressing additional statutes that need to be repealed or modified to reflect implementing elections by mail.”

The Senate bill, which was authored by Keith-Agaran, also includes language clarifying how same-day voter registration would work. The suggestions came from Glen Takahashi, the clerk for the City and County of Honolulu.

The revised House draft will also heed the advice of Peter Fritz, a disabled person, to allow people with disabilities or special needs to use a ballot that is electronically transmitted to the voter.

“Because this bill replaces the current voting system with what is essentially an absentee ballot system, it may discriminate against individuals with disabilities who cannot complete a paper ballot without assistance,” Fritz testified.

Fritz pointed to lawsuits filed in Maryland, Ohio and California regarding vote-by-mail and paper absentee ballots that are “inaccessible for individuals with disabilities. A court ordered Maryland to adopt a system for remote marking of ballots for the 2014 election.”

And, at the request of Chief Election Officer Scott Nago, the state and county clerks could opt to implement the mail voting system by the next election year, 2018.

Price Tag Still Unstated

One sticking point, however, may be the cost of the implementation.

HB 1401 calls for providing “places of deposit” — drop-off boxes — for personal delivery of the ballots during the final weeks before an election.

That’s because there is likely to be a postal “service gap” during that period, meaning ballots mailed by traditional post may not make it to the county

clerks before the votes are counted.

The legislation also calls for setting up “a limited number of voter service centers” that would remain open on Election Day to process the mail-in ballots. The centers would also help voters with special needs and offer same-day registration and voting.

And there will be costs for voter education and software related to mail-in balloting.

Nago estimated his office would need \$200,000 while Takahashi said his office would need nearly twice that amount. Costs for other counties would also have to be factored in.

Currently, the dollar figure in the bill is blank.

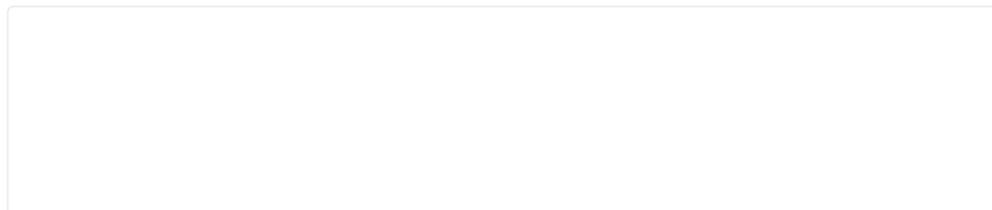
Keith-Agaran, at the urging of Ways and Means Chairwoman Jill Tokuda, wants the amended legislation to include a breakdown of the costs and timeline for implementing the mail-in system.

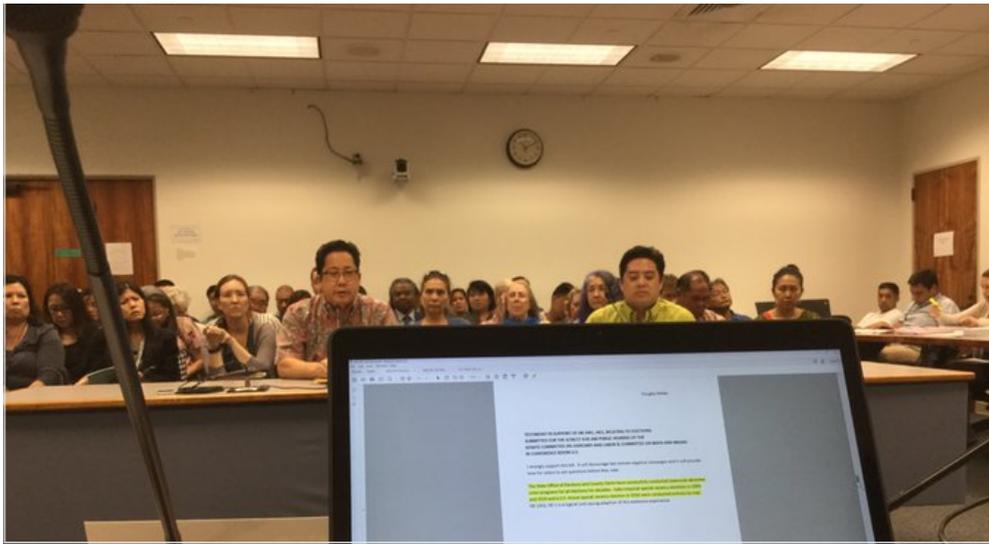
A major attraction of mail-in balloting is that it is expected to ultimately cost the state and counties less even as it improves turnout.

It is also the trend.

“In the City and County of Honolulu, absentee voting comprised 60 and 52 percent of votes cast in the 2016 primary and general elections, respectively,” Takahashi noted in his testimony.

State Sen. Gil Keith-Agaran tweeted a snapshot during his own committee hearing Thursday. Common Cause also voiced its view on the proceedings in social media:





Gil Keith-Agaran
@GiIKAOGG

Follow

Chief Elections Officer Scott Nago & City Clerk Glen Takahashi responding to questions on All Mail Elections (HB1401)

10:17 AM - 30 Mar 2017

1



Common Cause Hawaii
@CommonCauseHI

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Mahalo @jilltokuda and Sen Keith-Agaran for moving #votingbyemail forward! Hope scr108 automatic voter regis task force is next!

10:27 AM - 30 Mar 2017

1

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About the Author



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COMMENTS (11)

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Jonathan Starr
1 day ago

Civil Beat:- Mahalo for covering this!

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Chad Blair STAFF
1 day ago

Of course, Jonathan!

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Jonathan Starr
1 day ago

Very happy to see that tools for greater voter enfranchisement are moving forward. Hawaii would benefit from a greater percentage of eligible voters expressing their

preference. Mahalo, Senators and Representatives!

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David Rosen

1 day ago

Since secrecy would no longer be assured while filling out your ballot, is there any language in the bill to help prevent voter coercion?

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garydubral

1 day ago

we have computers. almost every person in the country has a ss number, even illegals. show your ss and any other id that has your name on it and vote at any time during working hours, at any government office catering to the public, for one week. computers can sort it out if you are of age, a legal resident, wanted by the police or ice, a felon, behind in your child support or have an expired license. i was arrested in 2008 for a jaywalking ticket i got in 1997 in hawaii and never settled- computers work, if you put the right stuff in. we cant depend only on addresses and phone numbers alone anymore. we move too many times and rely on prepaid too much.

Flag React Reply



Kenneth Conklin

1 day ago

For years our politicians and media have told us that voter turnout would be improved if we adopt automatic voter registration as part of getting a driver license or car registration. We did that. Then they told us to adopt early voting, permanent absentee voting, and touchscreen voting. We did that. All that was clearly baloney - - we have those things and turnout is still rock bottom. Now we're being told to adopt same-day registration, voting by mail, and by internet. Same baloney; no improvement in turnout. All these policies have made it easier for illegal immigrants, dead people, and residents of other states to vote in Hawaii. These policies make it easier for backroom shenanigans to steal votes, for union honchos and politicians to "help" members or frail elderly people to fill in their ballots. There's a reason why all federal and state legislatures require members to be physically present in the chamber to cast their votes, even if deathly ill. Think about it.



3 Reactions

Flag React Reply



diverdave

1 day ago

Yes Dr. Conklin, The party in control wants to stay forever in control.

Flag React Reply



Keala R. Kaanui

1 day ago

In reply to:

For years our politicians and media have told us that voter turnout would be improved if we adopt automatic voter registration as part of getting a driver license or car registration. We did that...

— Kenneth Conklin

If that was true, voter turnout would be higher (no point in illegally registering for an election and then not casting a ballot). Automatic registration probably did skewer the numbers as it registered people that had no interest in voting. Frankly if they have same day registration they should get rid of the process of automatically keeping someone registered who voted in the prior election. They might move, die, etc. Then your people registered vs people voted numbers would almost match up.

Flag React Reply



Jane Lee

24 hours ago

In reply to:

For years our politicians and media have told us that voter turnout would be improved if we adopt automatic voter registration as part of getting a driver license or car registration. We did that...

— Kenneth Conklin

Never thought I would ever agree with you, Conklin, but you are right...this time! Well, I thought the T- shirt/bumper sticker message was effective in getting people to put up or shut up! NO VOTE? NO GRUMBLE! It's a constitutional right worth protecting.

Flag React Reply



Jane Lee

23 hours ago

PS: How about going back to the days when we had rallies that were usually held in different neighborhoods on island. I remember music, song and dance; and sometimes some "short-winded" political speeches. Would rather have met and heard the candidate then get only his/her card in the mail. One step up...how about non-partisan community groups provide the venue, publicity,

and ono snacks/drinks...would be cheaper for all to fund one provider, than a TV spot. Just thinking out loud!

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Kimo808

2 days ago

No brainer - long overdue.

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