

Hawaii Voter Registration Could Be Online By 2016

Bill before governor requiring online voter registration system.

MAY 5, 2012 • By Nanea Kalani

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speedy in Hawaiian.

But anyone who has registered has found the process doesn't live up to its motto.

Now, Hawaii might finally be able to make it easier to register — and tackle its dismal [voter turnout](#) numbers at the same time.

The [Office of Elections](#) is set to get a major upgrade to its voter registration process under a bill just passed by state lawmakers.

The [measure](#), which still requires final approval from Gov. [Neil Abercrombie](#), calls for \$500,000 for the elections office to design an online voter registration system. The system would need to be in place for the 2016 elections.

Currently, residents have to either go down to a county office and fill out registration forms in person or print them out from the elections website and mail them in. The forms are [available online](#), but still have to be sent in along with copies of proof of residency such as a photo ID or utility bill.

“Hawaii has been consistently at or near the bottom of all 50 states in voter turnout, and every effort should be made to encourage eligible citizens to participate,” Common Cause Hawaii testified in support of [House Bill 1755](#). “The numbers from the 2010 General Election show that there are an estimated 961,213 eligible voters in Hawaii, but only

690,748 registered voters. ... Online voter registration can make participation in our democratic process more accessible and convenient.”

A [similar push](#) last legislative session was vetoed by Abercrombie.

The governor’s spokeswoman has said the governor supports the concept of the measure, noting that he vetoed the bill last year because it was an unfunded mandate.

In his veto message to lawmakers, Abercrombie said “the estimated cost of implementation is \$2.5 million and no funding was provided in the bill. Electronic voter registration can be addressed as the state moves to assess and overhaul the state’s technology systems.”

The county clerks for Hawaii Island, Maui, Honolulu and Kauai — whose offices process voter registrations — supported this year’s bill.

Kauai’s deputy county clerk, Jade Fountain-Tanigawa, [testified](#) that “an online voter registration system will modernize registration methods and perhaps encourage younger eligible voters to register.”

Hawaii County Clerk Jamae Kawauchi also wrote in support: “The application to register to vote electronically brings forward the new electronic/youth generation to voting, in lieu of the traditional application by mail or in person.”

Common Cause Hawaii noted the potential for cost savings with an online voter registration system, which it estimates 10 to 12 other states already maintain.

The organization cited a [2010 study](#) by the Pew Center on the States showing that in Arizona, it costs an average 3 cents to process an online application compared to an average 83 cents per paper application.

The study found Washington state saves 25 cents for each application that comes through online instead of manually. The state also estimated that residents saved about \$200,000 in postage by not having to mail in voter registrations. (See the full study [here](#)).

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About the Author



Nanea Kalani

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Dan Zelikman · Director at Moostache Films

Yes please.

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Peter Kay · Home schooled

I'm totally in favor of anything that makes it easier for people to vote. Period. That being said, what I really would love us all to dig in and answer this: why aren't people voting to begin with? It's not because voting or registration is too difficult. Neighborhood Board elections went online (i.e. easier) and voter turnout plummeted. Civil Beat's recent polls covering voters vs. non-voters is the first time the light is beginning to shine on underlying fundamentals contributing to our lackluster turnout.

Why are our citizens dropping out of the electoral process? THAT is the question.

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Kai Holland · University of Hawaii at Manoa

Lots of reasons why people don't vote. I've ALWAYS voted. I figured I didn't have a right to complain about the government or politicians if I didn't vote. But even I am feeling the "why should I vote... it doesn't really matter" mentality so many already feel. Politicians are useless, unless you have the money to pay for their attention. And the choice between who you get to vote for is an illusion. Two sides of the same coin. So, it doesn't matter how easy it is to vote. People are voting less and less because they just don't care. We have to be the change. We have to be the hope. No politician can do that for us.

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Travis Wright · Chief Marketing Technologist at CCP Global



It's because many are disenfranchised with the system. I believe that companies like Diebold and others have made the US voting system very suspect.

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Barbara Luksch

Some freedoms and rights are taken for granted until they are taken away. I worked in the Philippines when Marcos was in power and have plenty stories about life under a brutal dictator where people had no rights (speech, voting, land, etc.).

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Dave Kozuki · Honolulu, Hawaii

Note to elections office: Ensure the system has open APIs and hooks to social media. You will see an enormous increase in voter registration. There is plenty of *free*, qualified help available to you in this area.

Neil Abercrombie, please do not veto this. We need it, now.

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