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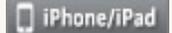
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Honolulu Won't Help State With New Online Voter Registration System

By Nathan Eagle [CONNECT](#) | 08/20/2013

Honolulu has declined to collaborate with the state on its new online voter registration system.

Since the city is already managing the state ID system and processing state driver's licenses — key databases for verifying voter identification — state officials were hoping the city might be inclined to help implement the new registration system, too.

No luck.

The state [Office of Elections](#) is going to have to find a way to get the new system up and running on its own. The office has until the 2016 primary election to do so, as mandated by [a law Gov. Neil Abercrombie signed](#) in 2012.

Scott Nago, Hawaii elections chief, told lawmakers in April that he asked the city to enter into a memorandum of agreement to work with his office to ensure that the new online system is ready in time.

The city, he lamented, has “other commitments” that prevent it from helping.

Mayor [Kirk Caldwell](#)'s spokesman, Jesse Broder Van Dyke, said Monday that it is a question of limited resources; the city simply can't afford the cost of taking on the online voter registration system.



Brian Tseng for Civil Beat

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As such, the Office of Elections is looking into developing a separate system that would be networked in with the city's databases, Nago said.

The Legislature appropriated \$500,000 last year for the Office of Elections to use in the planning and design of the new voter registration system. With that phase done, Nago said the next step involves putting the system into place.

Nago said his office will be seeking bids from companies to do so, but he wasn't sure when those would go out. There is, he added, no estimate of how much the next phase will cost.

Common Cause Hawaii, a nonprofit focused on promoting public participation in the political process, researched the cost of implementation in 2011. It found that [startup costs ranged](#) from \$120,000 to \$245,000 in Oregon, Colorado, and Maryland.

The group's executive director, Carmille Lim, said an online voter registration system is a step toward modernizing Hawaii's voting systems to increase voter turnout and reduce costs.

"If we streamline efforts, in terms of how people are registering at the city and state levels, it just makes business sense," she told [Civil Beat](#).

Hawaii elections have been beset by problems in recent years, ranging from [ballot shortages](#) to historically [low voter turnout](#). But getting people to the polls is only half the battle; the other half is getting them signed up to vote in the first place.

Only 72 percent of Hawaii's voting-eligible population was registered in the 2012 general election last November. This means more than one out of every four residents who could vote isn't even signed up to do so.

Common Cause [pointed to a study](#) by the Pew Center on the States that shows it costs an average of just 3 cents to process an online application in Arizona compared to an average of 83 cents per paper application. Washington saves a quarter per online application and counties elsewhere have saved upwards of \$2 per application, the study says.

The National Conference of State Legislatures says 17 states have laws allowing voters to register online and 15 others are considering it.

Hawaii is one of six states that has passed legislation facilitating online voter registration, but the islands haven't begun to register voters electronically, [according to NCSL](#).

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Hawaii's new online voter registration system is expected to make it easier for some of the state's 275,000-plus unregistered voters to become registered.

It won't be ready in time for the 2014 election — featuring the already-heated Senate race between [Brian Schatz](#) and [Colleen Hanabusa](#) to fill the remaining two years of the late Sen. [Daniel Inouye](#)'s term.

But with that same Senate seat up for grabs again in 2016 and a post-Obama presidential election, there should be [more than enough reason](#) for residents to register to vote.

DISCUSSION: *What do you think of the state having to go it alone with the new online voter registration system?*

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Discussion



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Janet Fox Mason · [★](#) Top Commenter · Honolulu, Haw aii

The City and County of Honolulu already has an extensive database for the State's online STATEWIDE driver's license popl most cost-effective way for Haw aii to launch this effort is to "outsource" the job to the City and County, covering the City's have duplicate databases?

What "other commitments" on the part of the City are we referring to, here? Especially if the costs to the City are covered. Voters of Haw aii supports the Office of Elections efforts to get this going by 2016 in the most cost-effective way.

[Reply](#) · [Like](#) · August 21 at 4:58pm



Joe Toro · Surf Instructor at Haw aiiian Fire Inc.

I agree we should register & vote, but the city cannot afford added expenses right now . I'm a city & county employee barel to survive. I haven't had a raise (COLA or any other) in 4 years. We're all sacrificing at our level just to keep our jobs, perh: Mayor & the city a break. Better yet, maybe Civil Beat can pay for the online upgrades you're discussing here.

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