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## Lawmakers push plans for voting by mail

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By CATHY BUSSEWITZ  
Associated Press

HONOLULU — The Senate Judiciary Committee approved a bill on Tuesday that could make voting by mail the norm in Hawaii.

The panel passed HB 124, which aims to boost Hawaii's low voter turnout and increase participation in elections. It would start with smaller counties and gradually build so all voters get ballots in the mail.

The current system allows people to sign up to vote by mail or they can vote in person during the two weeks before Election Day.

"It's a very complicated operation," said Janet Mason of the League of Women Voters. "This would smooth out the operation."

Even if HR 124 becomes law, there would still be polling stations for people to vote in person. But with more people voting by mail, the proposal could save money, since fewer walk-in voting stations would be needed, Mason and other advocates said.

After initial investments, the new system could save the state at least \$874,000 per election cycle, according to Common Cause Hawaii.

The bill was amended by the committee to allow for same-day voting registration, adopting language from a companion bill that died in the Senate.

The committee also amended another bill, HB 15 to allow the elections commission to remove its chairman by a two-thirds vote.

That bill initially just set statewide standards for the distribution of absentee ballots, but it was amended in the committee to clarify the term limits for elections commissioners and to state that the chairman can be removed by the commissioners at any time.

The amendment to HB 15 was opposed by the League of Women Voters because it was a substantial change added by the Senate after the bill already cleared the House, a legislative maneuver the group refers to as "Frankenstein Bills."

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