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Lawmakers to again consider vote-by-mail system, automatic voter registration

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By Jim Mendoza, Reporter [CONNECT](#)

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - Last legislative session, two bills aimed at addressing Hawaii's low voter turnout failed to clear a final hurdle. Not even lawmakers can explain why.

"We may not have felt we had the money to do that at this point," state Sen. Karl Rhoads said. "Then there are people who just don't think it's the right move."

The proposed measures would have set up automatic voter registration and transition the state to mostly mail-in ballots. They'll be introduced again this year.

And Common Cause Hawaii is already gathering support for both bills.

"People are even more concerned about making sure that their voices are heard and their votes are counted," executive director Corie Tanida said.

Both bills are aimed at addressing Hawaii's chronically low voter turnout.

Hawaii's turnout in November was 58 percent, down from 62 percent four years earlier.

Rhoads plans to introduce the automatic voter registration bill. If it becomes law, people who apply for or renew their driver's license or state ID would automatically be registered to vote unless they opt out.

"They'll be forced to make a decision about whether they want to register," Rhoads said. "More people will register as a result."

Registration information would be electronically transferred to the county clerk, eliminating paper forms and manual data entry.

"Because the information is transferred in real time, then our voter rolls would be much more accurate," Tanida said.

Meanwhile, the conversion to a mail-in ballot system is aimed at making voting more convenient.

In the last election, more than half of votes cast were on mail-in ballots. The state Office of Elections estimates the state could save \$800,000 each election cycle by converting to a vote-by-mail system.

"Essentially, right now, we're running three separate systems. If we just roll it all into one of the three that we're using it will save us money," Rhoads said.

Voters appeared to support the proposed changes.

"If it's easier to do, then people will be more likely to vote," voter Erica Osterkamp said.

Kailua resident Stacy Ma agreed, "It makes it easier for citizens to vote and get their voice out. They don't have to stand in line. It's very convenient,".

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