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# Proposal calling for elected judges in Hawaii faces criticism

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By Keoki Kerr, Reporter [CONNECT](#)

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - A coalition of lawyers, judges and civil rights advocates came out in force Wednesday to try to shoot down a proposal to join 22 other states and allow Hawaii voters to elect judges.

State lawmakers are considering a bill that clears the way for a constitutional amendment that would no longer require judges to be vetted by a Judicial Selection Commission, nominated by the governor and then approved by the State Senate.

Instead state judges would be allowed to raise campaign funds and run for election like other politicians, if Hawaii voters approve of the change.

Jodi Yi, president of the Hawaii Bar Association, told the Senate Judiciary Committee the lawyers' group strongly opposes the idea.

"There has been shown to have greater influence by special interest groups, as well as impacts on prison sentencing and a less-diverse judiciary in jurisdictions which have elected judges," Yi said.

Janet Mason, of the League of Women Voters of Hawaii, agreed, saying, "A criminal defendant or a litigant in a civil case needs to know that his or her case will be decided by a judge whose loyalty is to the law, and whose integrity will not be compromised by campaign finance or political pressures."

State Public Defender Jack Tonaki also said he's strongly against the measure.

"The potential to attack a judge's record based on one or two cases or even fewer cases, as opposed to a judge's entire record of criminal as well as civil matters would result in gross unfairness and the severe loss of impartiality in our judicial system," Tonaki told state senators.

Longtime criminal defense lawyer John Edmunds, a former member of the Judicial Selection Commission, said he's concerned about the ethics of judges asking lawyers who appear before them to contribute to their campaigns.

"It's not a very seemly thing, and we don't need it," Edmunds said.

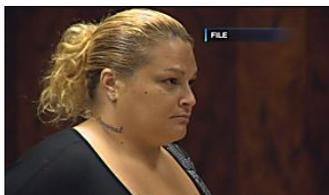
The proposal before state lawmakers would clear the way for the public to vote on a constitutional amendment. If legislators approve the bill, it would also require state judiciary, election and Campaign Spending Commission officials to submit reports outlining how they would set up judicial elections.

Another bill before lawmakers would repeal the Judicial Selection Commission, reduce the length of judges' terms to six years and require judges to appear before the state Senate to be reconfirmed. Judges currently have ten-year terms. Under current law, once judges are approved by the State Senate, senators never vote on them again but the Judicial Selection Commission must re-appoint them every 10 years.

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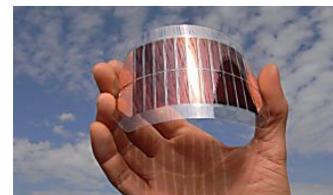


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