

## Same-day registration could boost voter turnout - Hawaii News - Honolulu Star-Advertiser

StarAdvertiser.com

### Same-day registration could boost voter turnout

By Beppie J. Shapiro, Carmille Lim and Laurie Temple

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Mar 12, 2013

-- ADVERTISEMENT --

-- ADVERTISEMENT --

The League of Women Voters of Hawaii and Common Cause Hawaii believe that government should make voter registration as simple and convenient as possible while assuring that the requirements of citizenship, age and residency are met.

Currently, Hawaii's voter registration requirements do not meet this standard. In the 2012 elections, for example, many people showed up to vote without knowing that they had to update their registration because they had moved; others were not aware of the registration process. Most of these potential voters at the polls couldn't vote because they had not met Hawaii's voter registration deadline of 30 days before election day. Those most affected were students, younger/new/infrequent voters, people who had moved recently, and busy working folk.

We should be encouraging participation in our democracy, not turning people away from the polls who would otherwise vote.

Lack of registration explains a large part of Hawaii's consistently low voter turnout. In the 2012 Hawaii general elections, voter turnout for all eligible persons was 44.5 percent (compared to 58.7 percent nationally), while 61.9 percent of people who were registered to vote did so.

In Hawaii, we can register to vote by mail, and elections officials are committed to registering voters. But approximately 270,000 Hawaii residents who are eligible to vote are not registered — almost 28 percent of eligible persons. A state law enacted last year to provide online voter registration by 2016 will make registration more convenient, but will not address the problems noted above.

Does Hawaii's 30-day registration deadline make sense, particularly with this online database?

The 2013 Legislature is considering House Bill 321, which would permit a person to register and vote on the same day. This would solve most of the registration problems at the polls.

Eight states and the District of Columbia presently offer same-day registration (SDR). California and Connecticut have enacted but not yet implemented it.

States that allow same-day registration consistently lead the nation in voter participation. In six states that had SDR before 2006, and North Dakota, which has no voter registration, voter turnout is 10 percent to 17 percent higher than the national average.

In a 2011 study, researchers estimated that if Hawaii adopted SDR, overall voter turnout would go up by 5.3 percent; among those age 18 to 25, by 9.2 percent; and for those who have moved in the last six months, 7.3 percent.

Elections officials reasonably worry that SDR would make their jobs more difficult or would be expensive to implement. However, about one-third of respondents to an elections official survey in states with SDR reported the workload impact as modest or marginal, and the incremental cost of SDR as minimal.

In a survey of elections officials in states with SDR, the majority of respondents rated election fraud protection measures sufficient to protect the integrity of elections. We are pleased to see safeguards to prevent fraud proposed in this measure:

- » A signed affidavit from the voter affirming they are qualified to vote, will not vote at any other polling place for that election, and will not cast an absentee ballot for that election;
- » Proof of residence showing current address, and to verify the address, a second document showing the individual's name and address.

Hawaii's democracy needs an upgrade, and there's no better place to start than with our voter registration processes and records.



*From left, Beppie J. Shapiro is president of the League of Women Voters of Hawaii; Carmille Lim is executive director of Common Cause Hawaii; and Laurie Temple is legislative program director of the ACLU of Hawaii.*