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Hawaii News

Voting Rights Act anniversary will be hailed at state Capitol

[Sophie Cocke /](#)

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Amid dismal voter turnout numbers, state leaders will speak in the courtyard of the state Capitol on Thursday to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the federal Voting Rights Act and kick off a local effort to encourage more residents to vote.

The 5 p.m. event, organized by the Honolulu chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, will include comments from state Rep. John Mizuno, local NAACP President Alphonso Braggs and possibly others, and will be followed by a silent march around the Capitol.

“So many people lost their lives fighting for the right to vote,” said Mizuno. “Now our state is one of the lowest participating states in elections. We have to ponder that and say after all of this, how far did we come?”

Hawaii often ranks at the bottom nationally for voter turnout. During the 2008 presidential election, Hawaii had the worst turnout of all 50 states, even though then-Sen. Barack Obama, who was born and raised on Oahu, was on the top of the Democratic ticket.

Last year Hawaii ranked No. 32 among states for voter turnout in local elections, according to an analysis from Nonprofit VOTE, which seeks to encourage voter participation.

The rally and march are part of a larger effort spearheaded by the Honolulu NAACP to increase voter turnout through a dozen community meetings planned throughout the state this election cycle and public infomercials focused on voter education, said

Braggs.

The NAACP initiative is targeting minorities, young people and senior citizens, in particular.

“There are so many issues facing us locally, and the local citizens are just forgoing the opportunity to have a voice in it,” said Braggs.

Meanwhile, Hawaii’s Office of Elections has been working to make it easier for residents to register to vote, which could boost turnout numbers.

This week residents should be able to register, update their voter registration and request an absentee ballot through the state’s new online system, said Rex Quidilla, who is in charge of the election office’s voter services. The system will not replace the mail-in, paper system.

Hawaii residents should also be able to register to vote at polling locations on the day of elections beginning in 2018. Beginning next year, voters will be able to register during early voting, which takes place during the 10 days prior to an election, said Quidilla.

In prior elections residents had to have registered 30 days before Election Day.