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LATE TESTIMONY

TESTIMONY OF GLEN TAKAHASHI
CITY CLERK, CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU
TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND LABOR
ON SENATE BILL NO. 2296
RELATING TO ELECTIONS

February 2, 2016

Chair Keith-Agaran and Committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 2296. The purpose of this bill is to provide a framework for vote by mail elections in Hawaii. The Office of the City Clerk generally supports voting by mail and is willing to work with the Committee to craft legislation that ensures a fair and tidy administrative election scheme.

We reiterate our comments made earlier on Senate Bill 2116 regarding establishing ballot mailing dates and a post-election signature error correction process as similarly relevant to this measure.

Although we appreciate the intent to provide additional voting opportunities under a vote by mail system, the requirement to establish and fund twenty-five (25) sites as voter service centers, raises considerable resource concerns.

Public facilities such as schools, parks and recreation centers (envisioned as voter service centers) that serve as traditional polling places are used for one Saturday and one Tuesday, the latter of which is a State holiday. These same facilities would not likely be available for 10 continuous days as proposed by this measure. Election offices would also face considerable challenges with leasing private locations for a short time, establishing communications connectivity, employing workers, and storing sensitive materials (ballots, voting machines, etc.) at these locations.

Our experience with absentee walk in voting during vote-by-mail special elections confirms that a minimal number of physical locations is sufficient to provide the needed services. When administering absentee walk polling sites in conjunction with the City's all-mail special vacancy elections, we have found that utilization is low since virtually all registered voters are mailed a ballot.

The absentee voting sites in the City Council vacancy elections saw voter totals of 146, 64, and 35 in council districts III, V and I, respectively.

During a recent visit to the state of Washington to observe its vote-by-mail system, we found that King County, whose registered voter count is over 1.1 million, has only one established vote center that operates out of roughly 1000 square feet. Similarly, Pierce and Snohomish Counties (that have similar registered voter numbers as Honolulu) also hosted a single voter service center within their county. Election officials there also report light traffic. However, the state of Washington's low use of in person voter service centers is likely attributed to a fairly well developed online presence that allows voters to register, update addresses, request replacement ballots, and receive other services.

If a vote-by-mail bill is forwarded, we recommend that it be amended to allow county officials establish a voter service center (a.k.a. absentee polling site) and determine other sites as deemed necessary. We also ask that the Counties be allowed to equitably share costs with the State for the various election services that would have otherwise have been paid for by the State under the election day voting scheme.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 2296.

"A man without a vote is a man without protection."

Lyndon Baines Johnson

LATE TESTIMONY

Aloha and Mahalo for having this hearing today as we discuss SB 2296 repealing election day voter registration at polling stations to be implemented in 2018; of which I stand in opposition to. I repeat, "A man without a vote is a man without protection".

As we speak Hawaii is only one of three states in the union that are moving toward limiting the rights of Americans to exercise their US Constitutional right to vote. Same day or Election Day voter registration is a concept that promotes inclusion particularly to the poor, impoverished and disenfranchised. Who may have limited access to transportation, time and or money to travel to a distant voter registration site? We need only to remember the incidents that surrounded Katrina as case in point on the need to provide additional sensitivity to providing services to the poor. This may be one of many measures to protect the rights of people of color for whatever reason tend to most often utilize this method.

If our concern regards security we could place safety gap measures with a "provisional ballot" that could be accepted however not officially counted until it was able to be verified and authenticated by filtering thru the Department of Motor Vehicles, the Social Security Department, the Department of Corrections and the Department of Public Safety. Therefore we stand in opposition to this bill until such time as amendments can be made.

Mahalo.

Respectfully Submitted

PM Azinga

Tuesday, February 2, 2016 11:00am

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P.M. Azinga