



SB334 SD1
SB1066 SD1
RELATING TO ELECTIONS
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

February 22, 2017

9:30 a.m.

Room 211

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS** SB334 SD1 and SB1066 SD1, both of which would reduce barriers to voting and increase voter participation opportunities, by allowing future elections to be held by mail.

For many years, Hawai‘i has had one of the lowest voter participation rates in the nation.¹ In response to historical data reflecting the underrepresentation of Native Hawaiians in particular in the polls, during the past three election seasons OHA has implemented a “Hawaiian Voice, Hawaiian Vote: I Mana Ka Leo” campaign to increase Native Hawaiian voter registration, education, and turnout.

During the course of these campaigns, many potential Native Hawaiian voters expressed ambivalence toward taking time off of work to visit polls, or taking the necessary steps to complete the absentee voter registration process. These measures would reduce such hurdles for voter participation by automatically giving citizens the opportunity to vote at their own convenience, from the comfort of their own homes. This will ultimately result in a more accessible election process and potentially higher Native Hawaiian voter turnout.

Evidence indicates that the people of Hawai‘i generally would also likely benefit from the modernized voting process envisioned by these bills. For example, Washington, Oregon, and Colorado—the three states that already conduct elections-by-mail—saw marked increases in voter turnout after implementing mail-in voting systems.² Notably, these states have not found that holding elections by mail complicates election

¹ Craig Gima, *Hawaii voter turnout dropped below 2012 presidential election*, THE HONOLULU STAR ADVERTISER, Nov. 9, 2016, available at <http://www.staradvertiser.com/2016/11/09/breaking-news/hawaii-voter-turnout-dropped-below-2012-presidential-election/>.

² New York Times, *Graphic: Voting by Mail* (Oct. 6, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/10/07/us/voting-by-mail.html?_r=0; Joey Bunch, *Despite criticism, few efforts to change Colorado’s mail ballot law*, THE DENVER POST, Feb 15, 2015, http://www.denverpost.com/politics/ci_27529935/despite-criticism-few-efforts-change-colorados-mail-ballot.

administration, or leads to increased voter fraud.³ Implementing such a system for Hawai‘i would not only mean that every eligible voter could vote at their own convenience, but also that voters would have a much longer time with ballots in their hands, giving them ample opportunity to consider issues and candidates and make more informed decisions.

Hawai‘i’s electorate may benefit greatly from the increased convenience offered by these measures, but we recognize that the logistics of implementation can be complex. Therefore, on these matters, we defer to the Office of Elections and County Clerks’ Offices.

Given the potential to greatly bolster Hawai‘i’s low voter turnout rate, including the turnout of Native Hawaiian voters, OHA urges the Committee to **PASS either SB334 SD1 or SB1066 SD1**. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify on these important measures.

³ Allison Terry, *Voter turnout: the 6 states that rank highest, and why*, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, November 6, 2012, available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Elections/2012/1106/Voter-turnout-the-6-states-that-rank-highest-and-why/Oregon>.