



49 South Hotel Street, Room 314 | Honolulu, HI 96813
www.lwv-hawaii.com | 808.531.7448 | voters@lwv-hawaii.com

COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Tuesday, February 5, 2019, 9:00 a.m., Room2016

SB 1058 RELATING TO PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

TESTIMONY

Janet Mason, Legislative Committee, League of Women Voters of Hawaii

Chair Rhoads, Vice-Chair Wakai and Committee Members:

The League of Women Voters of Hawaii strongly supports SB 1058 that provides that the Attorney General prepare a statement in plain English for each proposed constitutional amendment that indicates the purpose, limitations, and effects of the proposed amendment. The bill also requires the office of elections and county clerks to make the statement available to the public. We suggest an amendment of this bill.

For too long, voters have struggled with trying to understand the legal vocabulary used in the wording of our ballot amendments. We do appreciate the necessity of wording the ballot using this vocabulary, but a translation is required for we common folks! This is especially important knowing that blank votes count as “no” votes; in fact, blank votes often mean “I don’t understand.” In addition to the specifics of the plain English statement described in this bill, “pro/con” analyses of the proposals may help voters understand the question.

We do not underestimate the difficulty of providing this service for voters, but we think the Attorney General’s office is most likely to prepare an accurate statement. We also agree that elections officials such as the Office of Elections and County Clerks are the only practical avenues for statewide distribution of such information and the only sponsors likely to be accepted by voters as objective and nonpartisan. The League calls for collaboration between these state and county agencies.

Ballot education is only one part of what Hawaii voters deserve from our election officials. More comprehensive education would also include candidate statements in a common template form and a program that continues to provide practical information such as sample ballots and arrangements for voting.



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Other voter education bills have been introduced this session. SB 958 is suggesting candidate information in a pamphlet and SB1481 is suggesting something much closer to comprehensive education than is suggested in SB1058. The League hopes the best of these measures can be combined into a more comprehensive approach. We recommend SB1058 be amended toward this goal as described in this testimony.

For many years, the Hawaii League of Women Voters has pursued voting modernization such as online voter registration, same-day voter registration and automatic voter registration – all in hope of making voting convenient for voters. We will be the first to admit such efforts are important but insufficient. Once registered, how can we encourage people to vote? Surely voter education is important, just as fielding a competitive group of good candidates is important. But here we are emphasizing as strongly as we can - **Hawaii needs comprehensive voter education.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

SB-1058

Submitted on: 2/4/2019 8:44:35 AM

Testimony for JDC on 2/5/2019 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Melodie Aduja	Testifying for O`ahu County Committee on Legislative Priorities of the Democratic Party of Hawai`i	Support	No

Comments:

SB-1058

Submitted on: 1/31/2019 6:34:25 PM

Testimony for JDC on 2/5/2019 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Leimomi Khan	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Please support. This is a good solution to prevent the problem that occurred on one of the proposed constitutional amendments offered last year.

LATE

SB-1058

Submitted on: 2/4/2019 5:49:59 PM
Testimony for JDC on 2/5/2019 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Kevin J. Cole	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Write everything in plain English.