



**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF ELECTIONS**

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SCOTT T. NAGO
CHIEF ELECTION OFFICER

**TESTIMONY OF THE
CHIEF ELECTION OFFICER, OFFICE OF ELECTIONS
TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
ON HOUSE BILL NO. 2575
RELATING TO ELECTIONS**

February 3, 2020

Chair Lee and members of the House Committee on Judiciary, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on House Bill No. 2575. The purpose of this bill is to require the Office of Elections to establish a pilot program requiring candidates for county election to take the civics practice test published by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and publish whether each candidate passes or fails the practice test.

Since the Office of Elections does not file candidates for county office nor does it have contact with county candidates, we would not be able to effectively administer this pilot program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 2575.

Statement Before The
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY
Monday, February 3, 2020
2:05 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 325

in consideration of
HB 2575
RELATING TO ELECTIONS.

Chair LEE, Vice Chair SAN BUENAVENTURA, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

Common Cause Hawaii offers comments on HB 2575, which requires the Office of Elections to (1) establish a pilot program requiring candidates for county election to take the civics practice test published by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and (2) publish whether each candidate passes or fails the practice test.

Common Cause Hawaii is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots organization dedicated to reforming government and strengthening democracy.

HB 2575 is an innovative idea to ensure that candidates for public office have an understanding and appreciation of civics and how government works. However, to require people to have to take a test and post their pass / fail marks seems draconian and creates a barrier for those who wish to run for public office. There may be those who have test anxiety, have learning disabilities, or other issues that may affect test taking. Additionally, standardized tests are known to be biased against minorities, even though this test is for immigrants; there is a legitimate concern that non-minorities will test better.

While it is clear that the intent of HB 2575 is not to stigmatize but to educate, it may not actually accomplish its end goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 2575. If you have further questions of me, please contact me at sma@commoncause.org.

Very respectfully yours,

Sandy Ma
Executive Director, Common Cause Hawaii

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF
THE LIBERTARIAN PARTY OF HAWAII
c/o 1658 Liholiho St #205
Honolulu, HI 96822

February 2, 2020

RE: HB2575 to be heard Monday February 3, in Room 325, at 2:05 PM
To the members of the House Committee on Judiciary

OPPOSE

Dear Members:

This is just another “requirement” added to the list of things aimed at bothering and annoying people who wish to run for office. It should be up to the voters to decide what questions they’d like candidates to answer and make their own decisions. I could devise a test on basic economics, which I believe folks in government should know, which most folks running would fail. Then it would be said the test is “biased and wrong”, since it was created by a libertarian. Let’s keep political tests out of our election systems.

Aloha



Tracy Ryan
Chair, The Libertarian Party of Hawaii



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COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Monday, February 3, 2020, 2:05. p.m., Room 325
HB 2575, RELATING TO ELECTIONS

TESTIMONY

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

Chair Lee, Vice-Chair San Buenaventura, and Committee Members:

The League of Women Voters of Hawaii offers comments only about this bill, which proposes a novel pilot program whereby the Office of Elections would administer the civics practice test used by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to candidates for public office in Hawaii's counties.

In 1920 the League of Women Voters was established expressly for voter education purposes, to provide the education and experience the public needed to assure the success of democracy. Since our inception, we have continued to promote nonpartisan civics education, including civic education through agencies like the Office of Elections and our own League voter education services.

While there is ample evidence that civic knowledge is low, a logical solution to this would be to provide more and better voter education. Our understanding is that Hawaii is already one of only a few states requiring a year of civic education in high school but passing the U.S. citizenship exam is not required for high school graduation. We support high school education and testing.

We are not aware of any state which has a program to administer the U.S. citizenship exam to candidates for public office. Would civics proficiency guarantee good public policy? That seems to be the presumption of this measure, and should there be reliable evidence of this, we'll strongly support such an approach. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

HB-2575

Submitted on: 1/31/2020 6:35:45 PM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Dara Carlin, M.A.	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Basic competency tests such as this should be administered to those in positions requiring public confidence on a routine basis for subject matter expertise with sanctions imposed for failing to reach or pass by acceptable standards; ie: family court-related officers who proclaim knowledge about domestic violence should be mandated to take and pass such a competency exam because their overt ignorance on the subject matter (and subsequent arrogance to cover it up) is actually costing and ruining lives - but HB2575 is a very promising start towards that end...

HB-2575

Submitted on: 2/2/2020 4:30:26 AM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Barbara Best	Individual	Comments	No

Comments:

I agree & refer you to testimony submitted by Common Cause Hawaii

HB-2575

Submitted on: 2/2/2020 12:32:33 PM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Susan Dursin	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I strongly support HB2575, which would require candidates for county election to take the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services civics practice test. As a former history and civics teacher, it seems only good sense to me that candidates for office should demonstrate a basic understanding of the system under which we operate. Knowing the first three words of the Constitution (We the People) and that voting is both a right and a responsibility of U.S. citizens ought to go without saying. The very least we should ask of candidates is to demonstrate the same knowledge required of those wanting to become citizens.

Please support HB2575.

LATE

HB-2575

Submitted on: 2/3/2020 12:07:02 AM

Testimony for JUD on 2/3/2020 2:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Caroline Kunitake	Individual	Comments	No

Comments:

Dear Chair Lee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to provide comments for HB2575.

HB 2575, which requires the Office of Elections to (1) establish a pilot program requiring candidates for county election to take the civics practice test published by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and (2) publish whether each candidate passes or fails the practice test.

HB 2575 is an innovative idea to ensure that candidates for public office have an understanding and appreciation of civics and how government works. However, to require people to have to take a test and post their pass / fail marks seems draconian and creates a barrier for those who wish to run for public office. There may be those who have test anxiety, have learning disabilities, or other issues that may affect test taking. Additionally, standardized tests are known to be biased against minorities, even though this test is for immigrants; there is a legitimate concern that non-minorities will test better.

Perhaps there are other creative and more inclusive means to educate public officials running for office. Maybe coordinated mentoring programs (connecting seasoned public officials with candidates running for office) and internships could foster a working understanding of government. Government and Civics board and card games could be developed by the Public Access office. These safe teaching tools could be utilized by candidates running for office (perhaps retired government officials could play these teaching games with the candidates running for office, this would be an opportunity for the retired government official to share lessons learned while serving in public office with the candidate who may or may not have any experience with government).

Thank you for taking the time to read through these comments.

Mahalo,

Caroline Kunitake