



Senate Ways and Means Committee
Chair Jill Tokuda, Vice Chair Ronald Kouchi

Friday 02/27/2015 at 9:00 AM in Room 211
SB243 Relating to Elections

TESTIMONY OF SUPPORT
Carmille Lim, Executive Director, Common Cause Hawaii

Dear Chair Tokuda, Vice Chair Kouchi and members of the Committee:

Common Cause Hawaii supports SB243, which we see as a “housekeeping” bill. SB243 clarifies and specifies the roles and authority the Chief Election Officer (CEO), county clerk, and governor has regarding postponing an election on Election Day in the event that there is a natural disaster.

In particular, SB243:

1. Clarifies that the chief election officer or county clerk has the authority to postpone an election that is affected by a natural disaster. This bill would also require voters in the affected precinct to cast their ballot by mail, thus providing clarity on how the CEO/County Clerk ought to conduct any “makeup” voting.
2. Gives the governor authority on Election Day to postpone an election affected by a natural disaster, and require voters of the affected precinct to cast their vote by mail (unless the governor is a candidate in that election – then the authority would be with the CEO or county clerk)

In this past election cycle*, weather reports predicted that two hurricanes (later reclassified as tropical storms) would hit Hawaii on August 9, 2014 – primary election day. On Election Day, it became clear that the windward side of Hawaii Island would face the brunt of the storm. Once the polling places open on Election Day, only the governor has the authority to postpone an election – something our governor did not do. As a result, many residents of Puna and Pahoa – the areas impacted by Tropical Storm Iselle – were unable to cast ballots on primary election day.

Following this, the CEO initially announced that voters living in the affected areas – who were not able to vote on August 9 – could cast their votes through absentee ballots. The CEO subsequently announced a change of plans and that in-person polling places would be established instead. This caused confusion and frustration among many Puna and Pahoa residents – particularly those who maintain that their roads were blocked, and those who did not have electricity or basic needs.

SB243 is important because it offers clarity on who has authority to postpone an election, and also prescribes a specific way to host any “make up” election. Doing so would avoid future confusions on how “make up votes” can be cast.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB243.

*Note: You may refer to the Office of Elections' official 2014 Primary Election Report here:
http://hawaii.gov/elections/ec/docs/2014/primary_ec-report_2014-08-21.pdf