

From: [G Hooser](#)
To: [Standards of Conduct](#)
Cc: [Gary Hooser](#)
Subject: Comments on Term Limits for June 15 meeting
Date: Tuesday, June 14, 2022 8:17:26 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Aloha Judge Foley and Commission Members,

Below are my thoughts and rationale behind supporting a Constitutional Amendments for legislative term limits.

Thank you in advance for giving this your positive consideration.

It's time to begin a statewide conversation about term limits, that concludes with putting the question on the ballot.

Few are pleased with the status quo. Though our current legislative leadership possesses decades of experience, clearly experience and longevity is not enough.

“We already have term limits, they're called elections is the stock response”, and until relatively recently, the position I subscribed to.

However, after over 20 years of working within the system, I've come to believe differently.

Term limits will put a stop to the do-nothing, take no risk, keep your head down, go along to get along, “long game” strategy that too often infects those who aspire to serve in elected office.

The problems and challenges facing us today are far too urgent to play the long game or any games at all. An 8-year term is plenty enough time for new elected leaders to make their mark, and to set and accomplish their goals.

The barriers to entry for new candidates are formidable. Money, name recognition and a conscious manipulation of the system by those already in power give incumbents an overwhelming advantage while keeping newcomers out.

The basic cost to run a campaign for the state Legislature can run between \$40,000 to \$100,000, sometimes more. Because there's no cap on the amount incumbents can raise, some sit on war chests approaching \$1 million, much of it raised during the legislative session from the very interests they are charged to regulate.

Legislators, by virtue of their position, are frequently in the public spotlight. They are constantly cutting ribbons or breaking-ground at some new school, highway or community center. They hold press conferences and issue press releases. In recent years, state legislators have taken to sending out glossy mailers under the guise of constituent surveys or a report to the district. These taxpayer-funded mailings conveniently become more frequent in the months preceding an election.

As if money and name recognition were not enough, incumbents are further protected via a deliberate manipulation of the law-making process itself. The rules and actions of the legislative body are designed to protect the members from negative political exposure that

comes with hard votes. Controversial issues rarely get voted on until they're severely diluted, endlessly delayed, or pushed off to a task force.

An especially egregious example of the system being manipulated to favor incumbent legislators is the recent process of district reapportionment. Legislators attempting to improve their electoral opportunities, actively lobbied the Reapportionment Commission. The commission was given the home address of sitting legislators. The physical office of the Reapportionment Commission was located directly next door to the Speaker of the House. Yet the State Constitution says explicitly that the drawing of the maps should avoid favoring anyone.

Yes, the cards are stacked high against new candidates, new voices, new ideas, and new leadership.

The governor, lieutenant governor, mayor and all Council members in all counties already serve with term limitations. These term limits have not caused the weakening of government operations, nor have they empowered the deep state, or created a dearth of expertise.

What term limits do is create an opportunity for change. Our elected leaders are given eight years to pursue their goals and then they move on, creating space for others to step up. Whether that number is eight, or ten or twelve is debatable, but there should be some limit.

There is no shortage of other opportunities to serve. Those "termed out" can work elsewhere in the public, private or nonprofit sectors, if indeed service is their primary focus and motivation.

Fifteen states including California and Colorado currently limit the terms of state legislators. It's time for Hawaii to join them.

To accomplish this goal requires a constitutional amendment. This means incumbent legislators must vote to place this question on the ballot and allow the people to vote it up or down.

I encourage this commission to make placing this question on the ballot, one of their top recommendations.

Gary Hooser
Former Hawaii State Senator