

HB-1976-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2024 3:32:49 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2024 12:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
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| james gashel | Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee | Support | In Person |

Comments:

Testimony of James Gashel
Committee on Finance (FIN)
Hawaii State House of Representatives
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2024
February 27, 2024, 12:00 PM, hearing on HB1976 H.D. 1

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am James Gashel, Vice Chair of the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee, proudly supporting HB1976 H.D. 1. Thank you for scheduling this hearing.

The purposes of HB1976, as amended in H.D. 1, are to:

- (1) Require the Office of Elections to annually request funding for the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee; and
- (2) Appropriate funds to the Office of Elections for the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee to carry out its mandate.

The legislature created the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee and comparable county committees as enacted in sections 11-10.5 and 11-10.6, Hawaii Revised Statutes, passed in 2021. The five members on the Statewide Committee are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Senate. The point being, we are an official body of the state.

Our charge is to advise the Office of Elections on barriers to access for persons with disabilities and ways to remove them. The goal is to promote greater participation in voting by persons with access needs who may otherwise be overlooked.

Hawaii is a vote by mail state, so printed ballots are sent out to all registered voters. However, the federal Help America Vote Act, says voters with disabilities, such as blindness, have the right to vote privately and independently. Being blind, I can't vote under the federal "private and independent" standard if all I get is an ordinary printed ballot, which I can't see to read. It's questions like this that our Statewide Committee helps the Office of Elections to understand and resolve in favor of accessibility.

Our Committee has the challenge of being in touch with voters with disabilities in all parts of the state, including on the neighbor islands, where voter service centers, what used to be called

polling places, are few and far between. This lack of polling places presents unique challenges to some voters with access needs.

The Committee is really the voice of voters with disabilities, expected to play a crucial role in ensuring that persons with accessibility needs have equal access to participate fully in the voting process. HB1976, H.D. 1, seeks a modest appropriation for information gathering, outreach, and voter education activities to further the Committee's work.

The Committee recommends \$10,000 to be appropriated in fiscal year 2024-2025 for this purpose. This appropriation will serve as a critical step towards achieving greater inclusivity for citizens with voting accessibility needs in the electoral process, aligning with the principles of equal representation and access to the democratic rights of all citizens.

If approved, the appropriation made in HB1976, H.D. 1, will be dedicated for exclusive use by the accessibility needs advisory committee, not intended to be a general increase in the Office of Elections baseline budget. Information gathering, outreach, and voter education activities, focusing on accessibility needs will have particular importance as we prepare for the 2024 fall election and find better ways to meet accessibility needs in the future.

Please move this bill forward to affirm the value of this statewide committee's work. Mahalo for your consideration.



STATE OF HAWAII
STATE COUNCIL
ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
1010 RICHARDS STREET, Room 122
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
TELEPHONE: (808) 586-8100 FAX: (808) 586-7543

February 27, 2024

The Honorable Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
House Committee on Finance
The Thirty-Second Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawai'i
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Kyle Yamashita and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: HB1976 HD1 RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF ELECTIONS

The Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities **SUPPORTS HB1976 HD1**, which requires the Office of Elections to annually request funding for the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee. Appropriates funds to the Office of Elections Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee to gather information and provide outreach and voter education services for individuals with accessibility needs. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

The committee is under the State Office of Elections however, there was no funding designated for the committee's use or control. Without funding, they cannot be proactive in increasing the accessibility for voters with disabilities through the entire voting process, from registration through casting ballots.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires state and local governments and their election officials to ensure that people with disabilities have a full and equal opportunity to vote in all elections. This includes federal, state, and local elections. And it includes all parts of voting, like voter registration, selecting a location for polling places, and voting, whether on election day or during an early or absentee voting process. We appreciate the creation of the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee, to meet this ADA requirement. By funding the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee, will help our state toward compliance of this ADA requirement.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support of HB1976 HD1**.

Sincerely,

Daintry Bartoldus
Executive Administrator

HB-1976-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2024 4:24:44 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2024 12:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
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| Patricia A. Morrissey | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

February 26, 2024

Testimony on HB1976, H.D.1:

Related to a targeted appropriation for

The Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee

Submitted by: Patricia Morrissey, PhD

Chair of the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee

On Behalf of the Committee

To: The Hawaii House Finance Committee

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitakawa, and Committee Members:

I am writing as Chair of the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee. I greatly appreciate your holding this hearing on HB1976, H.D.1.

The purpose of the bill is to appropriate funds to the Office of Elections to be used exclusively by the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee in carrying out its duties. Legislation created the Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee and comparable county committees in 2021. The Governor signed it into law.

The Statewide Committee, the voice of voters with disabilities, is expected to play a crucial role in ensuring that persons with accessibility needs have equal access to participate fully in the voting process. To support this work, call the legislation on your consideration by your committee right now seeks a modest but needed appropriation for information gathering, outreach, and education activities to further the Committee's work.

Especially important to the Committee is facilitating participation by people with disabilities — assisting and supporting registration and voting, including the online options; educating poll workers on how to assist people with disabilities voting in person, including easy and quick access to accessible voting equipment; educating people with disabilities about ballots, including the purpose of charter amendments; preparing materials in accessible formats; and helping the mayors' offices on Maui and the Big Island establish parallel committees to our Committee. There are functioning county level committees on Oahu and Kauai. Arranging for and conducting these various activities require time, travel, access to expertise, and other resources that come with costs. These costs are beyond what the Office of Elections can absorb with ease in a timely manner. Committee members, at no charge to the state for time, are willing to facilitate and coordinate these activities. Committee members could travel to all island counties to advise and support county committees; oversee drafting of relevant educational materials; work with appropriate organizations to coordinate training, organize volunteers, survey voters with disabilities on their voting experiences this year, and provide feedback to the Legislature and Governor.

We all value informed, invested voters. People with disabilities are a key constituency in the State. Their informed vote and perspectives provide benefits to the state economically and socially in tourism, employment, education, health care, transportation, and more.

In 2021-2022 the Statewide Committee created and conducted a survey of voters with disabilities. I personally financed that. The survey gave a sense of the scope of accessibility needs people with disabilities had experienced and wanted addressed. A modest \$10,000 budget dedicated to the Committee's work would allow us to tackle these identified needs. Hawaii is at the forefront of states that have formed structures to address election accessibility issues.

Through a partial search on the web, other than Hawaii, California may be the only state, with state and county level committees to directly address voting accessibility for persons with disabilities. We are aware of and support amendments to the measure made by the authorizing committee. Please pass HB 1976, H.D.1 as it now stands.

Voters with disabilities will value your being a champion on this modest request.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Patricia Morrissey, Chair

Statewide Elections Accessibility Needs Advisory Committee

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HB-1976-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/26/2024 8:24:33 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/27/2024 12:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
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| Katie Keim | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments: